

New Testament Survey—The Revelation to John

Summary of Hendriksen's Overview of Revelation

Hendriksen guides us through the book with a series of hermeneutical principles (principles of interpretation) which help us stay afloat on a sea of confusing symbols and details which threaten to drown us in our efforts to understand the book. Hendriksen, along with many others, takes the **idealist** approach to Revelation in which the symbolic language refers to spiritual truths transcending (going beyond) specific historical events. These truths are repeated in cycles throughout the prophecy. The symbols are general, allowing the interpreter to apply them to many different historical events throughout the history of the church until the return of Christ without pinpointing specific fulfillments. Hendriksen lists eight propositions which help us understand the framework of Revelation. I have provided brief explanations.

Proposition I. The Book of Revelation consists of seven sections. They are parallel: each spans the entire new dispensation, from the first to the second coming of Christ.

Each of the seven sections given below give us symbolic descriptions of things and events which take place from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of His second coming. In other words, the seven sections are not *sequential* (one coming directly after the other), but *parallel*. They repeat the same time frame in a different way so that we have, as it were, seven different pictures of the coming of Christ until His return. The seven sections of the book are as follows (Hendriksen, p.30).

I. The Struggle on Earth: The Church Persecuted by the World. The Church is Avenged, Protected, and Victorious, Chapters 1-11.

- (1) Christ in the midst of the Seven Golden Lampstands, 1-3.
- (2) The Book with Seven Seals, 4-7.
- (3) The Seven Trumpets of Judgment, 8-11.

II. The Deeper Spiritual Background: The Christ (and the Church) Persecuted By the Dragon (Satan) and His Helpers. Christ and His Church are Victorious, Chapters 12-22.

- (4) The Woman and the Man-Child persecuted by the Dragon and his Helpers (the Beast and the Harlot), 12-14.
- (5) The Seven Bowls of Wrath, 15-16.
- (6) The Fall of the Great Harlot and of the Beasts, 17-19.
- (7) The Judgment upon the Dragon (Satan) followed by the New Heaven and Earth, New Jerusalem, 20-22.

Notice that Hendriksen has divided the book into seven sections. The division is not contrived (forced) or arbitrary, but is in keeping with the logical flow of the book's narrative. The number seven occurs 54 times throughout the entire book. Notice the following usages of the number: seven churches, seven lampstands, seven stars, seven angels, seven Spirits (representing the totality of the work of the one Holy Spirit among the churches), seven lamps, seven seals, a Lamb with seven eyes and seven horns, seven angels who blow seven trumpets, seven other angels who pour out the contents of seven bowls full of the seven plagues, seven thunders, the beast out of the sea with seven heads, seven mountains, seven kings, etc. (Hendriksen, p. 55).

Hendriksen also divides the seven sections into two major groupings. The first group, chapters 1-11, is the struggle between believers and unbelievers in which the world attacks the church. In this struggle, “the church is avenged, protected, and victorious.” You will notice that this section consists of the first three divisions of the book: 1-3, 4-7, and 8-11.

The second major division is 12-22 which consists of the devil’s attack upon Christ. When this attack is repulsed (driven back), the devil directs his attack upon the church which is the offspring of the woman. During this attack, the devil employs the help of the two beasts and the great harlot. At the end of the story, all of these evil forces are defeated. Notice that this last major division consists of four of the sub-divisions of the book: 12-14, 15-16, 17-19, 20-22.

Thus, if we add the three sub-divisions of the first major section with the four sub-divisions of the second major section we have $3 + 4 = 7$. This is Hendriksen’s second proposition.

Proposition II. The seven sections may be grouped into two major divisions. The first major division, Chapters 1-11, consists of three sections. The second major division, Chapters 12-22, consists of four sections. These two major divisions reveal a progress in depth or intensity of spiritual conflict. The first major division, Chapters 1-11, reveals the church—indwelt by Christ—persecuted by the world. The church is avenged, protected, and victorious. The second major division, Chapters 12-22, reveals the deeper spiritual background of this struggle. It is a conflict between Christ and the dragon, in which the Christ—hence, his church—is victorious.

Hendriksen’s next emphasis is the unity of the book. He asks the question: “What is the meaning of the book, taken as a whole? How are its parts related to each other?” The unity of the book is described in Proposition III (p. 43).

Proposition III. The book is One. The principles of human conduct and of divine moral government are progressively revealed: the lampstands give rise to the seals; the seals to the trumpets, etc.

In his own words (pp. 42, 44-45),

The book...describes the principles of human conduct and of divine moral government which are always operative. Always operative not only, but always operative *in that very order*. The church always functions as a light-bearer, shining in the midst of the darkness of this world, chapters 1-3. Shining because Christ dwells in it. Result? The world always—again and again—persecutes the church, chapters 4-7. Result? Divine judgments, of every description, always fall upon the world, while the church is victorious, chapters 8-11. This struggle between the church and the world always reveals a deeper conflict between Christ and satan. Satan always employs just these allies mentioned in chapters 12-14. They always—and especially on the day of judgment—go down in defeat. The victory is always ours! There is, of course, nothing mechanical about these seven sections. They are not seven “blocks of thought.” They do not constitute seven water-tight compartments. The book is an organism, every part of which is vitally related to all the others....

Wherever there is a church, it is a lampstand or light-bearer so that we see the light of Christ shining in the midst of the darkness, chapters 1-3.

Wherever this happens, the world hates the church; the darkness refuses to be conquered by the light. Persecution follows; also trials of every description, chapters 4-7. These trials, however,

are overruled for the good of the church. The Throne is ever in heaven, not on earth. Believers are ever victorious. They come out of the great tribulation, the great one.

Wherever and whenever the church is persecuted, the Lord hears and answers the prayers of his persecuted children. He sees the blood of the martyred saints. Hence, trumpets of judgment warn the wicked, chapters 8-11.

This struggle on the surface—between church and world—ever indicates a deeper struggle between Christ and the Dragon, chapters 12-14.

For the impenitents Bowls of final Wrath ever follow Trumpets of Judgment, chapters 15, 16. That is true today; it was true yesterday; it will be true tomorrow whether you live in Africa, Europe, or America.

Satan and all his helpers ever seem to be victorious, but in reality are always defeated, chapters 17-19; also 20-22.

Thus interpreted...the Apocalypse...gives us the real philosophy of history! It shows us the principles of human and satanic conduct and of the divine moral government as they are constantly revealing themselves. It indicates how we should interpret the news contained in our newspapers and the events which we study in history-books!

Part of the explanation above is given by Hendriksen to develop his fourth proposition below.

Proposition IV. The seven sections of the apocalypse are arranged in an ascending, climactic order. There is progress in eschatological emphasis: The final judgment is first announced; then introduced; finally described. Similarly, the new heaven and earth are described more fully in the final section than in those which precede.

Christ's coming is announced in 1:7 without any explicit (clear) mention of judgment except that everyone will see him, even those who pierced him. All the tribes on earth will mourn over him. This is not mourning over His crucifixion but over His second coming. They will not be glad to see Him because of the coming judgment. The final judgment is introduced in 6:12-17 as an answer to the question of the martyrs who are already in heaven: When will you avenge our blood? (See 6:9-11)

We will get more into the details of the passages later, but Hendriksen says that we only have an announcement or introduction of the final judgment in chapters 1-11. But as we get into the second major section of the book, chapters 12-22, we will find a description of the final judgment. In Chapter 14 we see God harvesting the earth. In chapters 15-16 the judgment of God is symbolized as the pouring out of His wrath upon the earth. In chapters 17-19, the fall of Babylon is described which is symbolic of the fall of every worldly empire including the mighty Roman Empire which dominated the earth in John's day. Chapters 20-22 describe the final judgment in greater detail in which Satan is bound and the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven as a dwelling place for the people of God. In all of this we see a progression of thought and greater and greater detail about what is going to happen at the end of time.

But how do we interpret all the confusing details given to us in the book? This leads us to Hendriksen's fifth proposition given below.

Proposition V. The fabric of the book consists of moving-pictures. The details that pertain to the picture should be interpreted in harmony with its central thought. We should ask two questions: First, what is the entire picture? Secondly, what is the predominant idea?

At this point Hendriksen begins to be more specific about how this book should be approached. Too often, interpreters attempt to give us specific historical events which are symbolized in the book, which inevitably results in confusion. Two different kinds of symbols are given in the book.

1. First are the symbols which “**describe the beginning or the end of the course of the new dispensation** [that is, the time from the coming of Christ to His second return]. These symbols...generally refer to a specific event. Thus, for example, the radiant woman who is delivered of [delivers] a son, a man-child, refers to the church [the OT church, the Jewish nation] bringing forth the Christ, his human nature, 12:1-5. Again, the two-fold harvest, 14:15 ff., refers to the final judgment, to that one great event.” Such symbols are the easiest to interpret in the book.

2. Second are the **symbols between Christ’s first and second coming**. These are the lampstands, the seals, the trumpets, bowls, etc. Such symbols, in contrast to the first symbols, **cannot refer to “specific events, single happenings, dates, persons in history”**. If they did, *it would be impossible to interpret their meaning for the simple reason that it would be impossible to isolate single, specific events from the thousands of events, dates, and persons which bear a resemblance to the symbol in question*. In other words, who among all the human interpreters in the world, would have the knowledge and wisdom to give us the exact, “one and only” event, person, etc. that the Revelation is talking about? Hendriksen does not claim such wisdom for himself or for any other expositor of Scripture living in his day. Those living when his commentary on Revelation was being printed (1939) would come up with interpretations entirely different from expositors of the 21st century who must choose from more than 60 additional years of historical events. A sounder approach, he says, is to apply the symbols (seals, trumpets, bowls, etc.) to “*principles that are operating throughout the history of the world, especially throughout the new dispensation* [again, the period after the coming of Christ until His return].”

The nature of these principles will have to be explained later, but they are principles which are repeated over and over again in the history of the world in *different* ways by *different* people, events, happenings, etc. As we have mentioned before, the symbols come in groups of seven, a number which signifies completeness. Even some of the things happening right now in current events may be referred to *in principle* in the Revelation to John. After the return of Christ and the final judgment, we may be able to look back upon the events which happened in 2004 and say, “Yes, I remember when that happened, and it was in *partial* fulfillment of a symbol in the book of Revelation.” Notice we said a “partial”, not a “complete”, fulfillment of Revelation. There were hundreds or thousands of similar events which would equally qualify as partial fulfillments of a certain symbol given in the book. I would suspect that the organization of the European Union dominating the news today is a very important partial fulfillment of the book. Most likely, the United Nations and all of its consolidated world power would qualify as well. Only time will tell.

The only way for the book to be relevant to all Christians in every period of history is for the symbols to represent *principles of divine moral government and human conduct covering all of human history*. If the symbols only stood for events which took place hundreds or even two thousand years *after* the early Christians lived, the Revelation to John would not have provided the edification (building up), comfort, and encouragement which John's *immediate* audience needed. The purpose of the book is to help them (and us) to be wise unto salvation and morally perfect in the midst of a corrupt world which seeks to either conform us to its image (Romans 12:2) or destroy us.

The explanation above leads to the sixth proposition.

Proposition VI. The seals, trumpets, bowls of wrath and similar symbols refer not to specific events, particular happenings, details of history, but to **principles—of human conduct and of divine moral government**—that are operating throughout the history of the world; especially, throughout the new dispensation.

We should always be asking ourselves the question: **How did the first readers understand this book?** This means that we must interpret the book in the light of events which *were going on at the time it was written*. If we cannot understand what the book meant for believers of John's day, then we will not be able to determine what it means now for believers of the 21st century. When it was being written, believers in the Roman Empire were being severely persecuted. Notice references to this fact in 1:9; 6:10; 16:6; 17:6; and 19:2. Some were hungry and thirsty (7:16); some had been thrown to the wild beasts as entertainment for the Roman citizens (See my Church History notes); some had been beheaded (20:4). There is reference to a particular martyr, Antipas, in 2:13, and John himself had been banished to the island of Patmos as punishment for his faith (1:9). The Roman government encouraged emperor-worship and on some occasions put Christians to death for refusing to confess that Caesar was Lord (that is, *the only* Lord). As they were being persecuted, many Christians were remaining steadfast in their faith; and the light of Christ was shining among the churches (1:12-13).

These were the cold, hard realities facing the Christians of John's day—not the European Union, the United Nations, war in the Middle East, terrorism, or any such thing happening today. They were not faced with Adolph Hitler of the Third Reich, Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin and the threat of world-wide communism which threatened the world in the middle third of the 20th century. All of these threats are relevant to the "principles of human conduct" which are symbolized in the book of Revelation, but they are not specifically mentioned in a particular passage. The symbols of Revelation apply to any significant event of human history, which is why Hendriksen says that the book gives us an *inspired philosophy of human history*. The author of Revelation is not primarily John, but the all-wise, all-knowing God the Holy Spirit who spoke to John in such a way that everything recorded in the book was symbolic of the entire spectrum of human events from the first coming of Christ to His second coming. The discussion above is summed up in Hendriksen's seventh proposition below.

Proposition VII. The apocalypse is rooted in contemporaneous events and circumstances [that is, events and circumstances which were happening at the time John wrote]. Its symbols should be interpreted in the light of conditions which prevailed when the book was written.

He goes on to talk about the two kinds of soil in which the Revelation is rooted—*surface soil and subsoil*.

1. Surface soil. This is the soil of events and happenings which were taking place at the time John wrote. They are mentioned above such as the exile of John, the persecution of Christians by the Roman government during the reign of Domitian from 81-96AD. It is generally believed that John received his revelation toward the end of Domitian's persecution. To some extent, this surface soil determined the way John expressed the apocalypse of Revelation. As he beheld the visions he was given, he saw them through the "lens" of contemporaneous (current) events.

2. Subsoil. This is the soil of the sacred Scriptures themselves. There was another "lens" John was looking through as he beheld the visions given him by God. He was seeing them through the lens of all the inspired history and prophecy given in the OT. Hendriksen gives us the example of Daniel 7:2-8 which is very similar to Rev. 13: 1-10. In both passages, the same animals are mentioned although in Daniel they are single animals while in Revelation they comprise one beast. In Daniel the beasts represent four separate kingdoms which rise up in opposition to God's people—"the world power in four successive phases of manifestation." It is logical, says Hendriksen, that the composite beast of the Revelation has the "same meaning and refers to antichristian power, the antichristian persecution-movement, in successive phases and embodiment....the heads of this composite beast of the Apocalypse must indicate empires in which the world's persecuting power is successively embodied".

In his commentary on Daniel, E.J. Young identifies the four separate beasts, in order, as Babylon, Medo-Persia, the Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, and Rome. He identifies the little horn as the Antichrist of Revelation (E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel*, pp.141-150). Hendriksen identifies the composite (a combination) beast of Revelation 13 as Ancient Babylonia, Assyria, New Babylonia, Medo-Persia, Greco-Macedonia, and Rome, an interpretation roughly equivalent to Young's interpretation. Other interpreters "regard these heads as representing individual rulers, namely, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, all successive rulers of the Roman Empire. In other words, such interpreters depend solely on the events happening in John's day to guide their study of Revelation without taking sufficient consideration of the history of the OT, the *subsoil* of the Revelation to John. Scripture must be allowed to interpret Scripture (Hendriksen, pp. 57-60).

The reference to the "Son of Man" in Daniel 7:13 parallels the same reference in Revelation 1:13-14; 14:14 and also the reference to the Son of Man in Matthew 24:30 all of which occur within the context of Jesus' second coming in judgment. Many other OT expressions occur in Revelation including the following: the tree of life, the paradise of God, Balaam and Balak, Jezebel, rod of iron, the lion of Judah, plagues, the river of the water of life, and the tree of life. (See Hendriksen, p.61-62 for a more thorough listing). There are also many other parallels throughout the NT (Rev.1:16 with Matt.17:2; Rev. 2:10 with James 1:12; Rev. 3:3 with Matt.24:42; Rev. 3:5 with Matt.10:32; Rev. 6 with Matt.24; Rev. 12:9 with Luke 10:18, to mention only a few).

Notwithstanding the many references to the OT, John is not a copyist (simply copying the references to the OT) but sees original visions. He is recording what he sees and hears and many times the OT symbols receive new modifications in the book of Revelation. As we attempt to

understand the subsoil of Revelation in the OT, we must be careful to proceed in our interpretation from passages which are clearer and easier to understand to those passages which are unclear and more difficult to understand. Hendriksen gives the example of Revelation 20:2 which is the cornerstone of much modern interpretation of the binding of Satan and the literal reign of Christ on earth for one thousand years. This passage is generally given a literal meaning as if Christ will literally sit on the throne of David in Jerusalem for 1000 years and rule the earth with a rod of iron while non-believers occupy the earth. There are many didactic (straight-forward, instructional) portions of Scripture which could shed much light on Revelation 20, but which are either ignored or forced to agree with this more obscure (difficult to understand) passage. Such an approach is the reverse of good hermeneutical practice and rather attempts to interpret the clear passages with the unclear ones resulting in many “novelties” (Hendriksen, p.63).

The discussion above leads Hendriksen to his eighth proposition.

Proposition VIII. The apocalypse is rooted in the sacred scriptures. It should be interpreted in harmony with the teachings of the entire bible.

The origin of the Revelation is not in the mind of John but in the mind of God who prepared John to receive it. We should therefore expect the meaning of Revelation to be consistent with the whole body of Scripture already received from the mind of God. This brings us to the ninth and last proposition.

Proposition IX. The apocalypse is rooted in the mind and revelation of God. God in Christ is the real author. Hence, this book contains the purpose of God concerning the history of the church.

Revelation 1—3

The Revelation is addressed to the seven churches in the western part of Asia Minor (v.4). These seven churches represent **the entire Christian church from the ascension of Jesus Christ until today**. They do not represent, as some believe, the various churches of each historical era of the church. For example, Sardis does not represent the church of the Reformation era and the church of Laodicea does not represent the church of today. In every age of the church, from the ascension of Christ until today, one can find each type of church represented in *Revelation* in existence. Here in Africa, we can find churches which resemble the church in Philadelphia, the church in Ephesus, the church in Pergamum, etc. Each of these churches could find their counterpart in Africa, the USA, Britain, and so on.

In v. 8, we have a reminder of the kind of God we have, the God of the Covenant which we meet with in Exodus 3:14, Yahweh, “Who is and who was and who is to come.” This is very reminiscent (suggestive) of “I am who I am” or “I will be who I will be.” God is changeless which means that if He promised us salvation, He will definitely bring it to pass regardless of the difficulty of external circumstances.

Christ appears in the middle of the lampstands and the Holy Spirit is mentioned as the seven Spirits—the Holy Spirit in the “fullness of His operations and influences in the world and in the church.” Notice that Christ is mentioned in v.5 first in reference to His ministry on earth (“faithful witness”), then as the sacrifice for sin and the first to be resurrected from the dead, then

as the rightful ruler of the universe. Christ's second coming is announced in v. 7, a second coming which is far from secret but one which "every eye will see" (cf. 1 Thess. 4: 13—5: 3; Matt. 24: 37-42). Many will not be glad to see him and will mourn at his coming (cf. Rev. 6:16).

The alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet which means that Christ is the "complete and perfect and eternal revelation of God". This time around, Jesus will not be riding upon a donkey but a white war horse (6:2; 19:11) and the two-edged sword coming out of His mouth does not represent the use of the Bible for evangelism, but a real weapon to cut off the heads of His enemies (1:16; 2:16). The time for making peace with the Son (Ps.2) is past, and now His enemies and the enemies of His church will suffer the consequences of their rejection. The effect of seeing Christ in such a fashion was startling for John who was accustomed to seeing Jesus as the suffering servant and gentle savior. He "fell at His feet as a dead man," which is similar to the reaction Isaiah had when He saw the Lord in His temple (Isa.6:5) and Daniel who also saw a vision of Christ in the third year of King Cyrus (Daniel 10: 4-9). In all of these visions, the prophets needed a vision of Christ in majestic holiness and power. Christ is the Lord Almighty in power, able and willing to save His people from any threatening circumstance.

The seven stars are angels, a word which could be translated "messenger". The word then could mean the pastors of the seven churches in Asia Minor. The pastors of the churches are held in Christ's right hand which means that they are protected if they obey Him rather than man (See John 10:28). The churches are the light-bearers or lampstands as they serve as the light of Christ to the world. In the OT tabernacle, there was only one lampstand with seven lamps because the nation of Israel was one visible unity. Today the light of God is represented by many churches which are united in Christ who is present and active among the churches as the one moving in and about the lampstands (See Matt. 5:15-16).

The structure of the letters to the churches is as follows:¹

The Salutation—"To the angel of..."

Christ's self-designation—"He who holds the seven stars..."

Commendation—"I know your works..."

Condemnation—"But I have this against you..."

Warning and threat—"Remember therefore...or else..."

Exhortation—"He that has an ear, let him hear..."

Promise—"to him that overcomes..."

Christ finds something good to say about every church except Sardis and Laodicea. In five of the seven He finds something to condemn with the exception of Smyrna and Philadelphia.

Revelation 2

First Letter

[1. Salutation]

"To the angel of the church in **Ephesus** write:

¹ Hendriksen

[2. Christ's name and attributes from John's vision relevant to the individual church]

The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:

[3. Christ's knowledge and evaluation of the church: Commendation or Condemnation]

² **I know** your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them *to be* false;

³ and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary.

⁴ **But I have *this* against you**, that you have left your first love.

⁶ Yet this **you do have**, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

[4. Christ's promises or threats made to the church]

⁵ **Therefore remember** from where you have fallen, and **repent and do the deeds you did at first**; or else I am coming to you and will **remove** your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.

[5. An exhortation to hear]

⁷ He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

[6. Christ's promise to those who overcome]

To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of **the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.**'

Second Letter

[1. Salutation]

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

[2. Christ's name and attributes from John's vision relevant to the individual church]

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

[3. Christ's knowledge and evaluation of the church: Commendation or Condemnation]

⁹ **I know** your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

[4. Christ's promises or threats made to the church]

¹⁰ **Do not fear** what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

[5. An exhortation to hear]

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

[6. Christ's promise to those who overcome]

He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'

Third Letter

[1. *Salutation*]

¹² "And to the angel of the church in **Pergamum** write:

[2. *Christ's name and attributes from John's vision relevant to the individual church*]

The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:

[3. *Christ's knowledge and evaluation of the church: Commendation or Condemnation*]

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

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

¹⁵ 'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

[4. *Christ's promises or threats made to the church*]

¹⁶ 'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.

[5. *An exhortation to hear*]

¹⁷ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

[6. *Christ's promise to those who overcome*]

To him who overcomes, to him I will give *some* of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'

Fourth Letter

[1. *Salutation*]

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

[2. *Christ's name and attributes from John's vision relevant to the individual church*]

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

[3. *Christ's knowledge and evaluation of the church: Commendation or Condemnation*]

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

²⁰ **But I have this against you**, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit *acts of immorality* and eat things sacrificed to idols. ²¹ I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.

[4. Christ's promises or threats made to the church]

²² 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed *of sickness*, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.

²³ 'And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.

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

²⁵ 'Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.

[5. Christ's promise to those who overcome]

²⁶ 'He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;

²⁷ AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received *authority* from My Father;

²⁸ and I will give him the morning star.

[6. An exhortation to hear]

²⁹ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Revelation 3**Fifth Letter***[1. Salutation]*

¹ To the angel of the church in **Sardis** write:

[2. Christ's name and attributes from John's vision relevant to the individual church]

He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this:

[3. Christ's knowledge and evaluation of the church: Commendation or Condemnation]

'I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.

[4. Christ's promises or threats made to the church]

² 'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.

³ 'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep *it*, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.

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

[5. Christ's promise to those who overcome]

⁵ 'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

[6. An exhortation to hear]

⁶ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Sixth Letter

[1. Salutation]

⁷ "And to the angel of the church in **Philadelphia** write:

[2. Christ's name and attributes from John's vision relevant to the individual church]

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

[3. Christ's knowledge and evaluation of the church: Commendation or Condemnation]

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

[4. Christ's promises or threats made to the church]

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

¹⁰ 'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that *hour* which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.'

¹¹ 'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.'

[5. Christ's promise to those who overcome]

¹² 'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.'

[6. An exhortation to hear]

¹³ 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

Seventh Letter

[1. Salutation]

¹⁴ "To the angel of the church in **Laodicea** write:

[2. Christ's name and attributes from John's vision relevant to the individual church]

The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

[3. Christ's knowledge and evaluation of the church: Commendation or Condemnation]

¹⁵ 'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.'

[4. Christ's promises or threats made to the church]

¹⁶ 'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.'

¹⁷ 'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

¹⁸ I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

¹⁹ Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.

[5. Christ's promise to those who overcome]

²¹ He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

[6. An exhortation to hear]

²² 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'"

"The letters to the seven churches are structured as a chiasm.

A (Ephesus)
 B (Smyrna)
 C (Pergamum)
 C2 (Thyatira)
 C1 (Sardis)
 B1 (Philadelphia)
 A1 (Laodicea)

"The first and last church (A, A1) are both under the immediate threat that they will lose their lampstands. B and B1 represent the two faithful churches. C, C2, and C1, the churches at the center of the chiasm, are weak churches needing significant repentance. The overall picture is one of a weak church, struggling to maintain its witness to Christ in a hostile environment."²

Ephesus

The church of Ephesus receives the first message. To learn more about this church we should consult Acts 18 and Acts 20. Paul spent three years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). And of course, we should read Paul's letter to the Ephesians sent to them in 60-63 AD while he was in his first imprisonment in Rome. Paul's work there had been so effective that the sale of silver shrines had fallen off, and after the temple of Diana burned in 262 AD, it was never rebuilt. Later, Timothy was left in charge of the church (1 Tim.1:3), and very likely, John was in Ephesus in 66 AD. During the reign of Domitian from 81-96 AD, John had been exiled to the island of Patmos.

The letter is addressed "To the angel of the church in Ephesus". "Angel" means messenger, leading some expositors to interpret "angel" as the pastor of Ephesus or of each respective church. Alternatively, perhaps he was the messenger delivering the letter. However, the context of the book favors the interpretation that these were actual angels given the responsibility of

² Julian Zugg, citing Beale, 226

protecting the churches.³The author of Hebrews says, “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14 NASB) This interpretation corresponds to the angel “princes” in Daniel 10 who are sent out by God to answer Daniel’s prayers and to hinder the work of demonic spirits in Persia. God’s holy angels are involved in the struggles of individual Christians, and it seems from this passage that at least one angel represents the interest of God in each local church.

God’s heavenly presence is the power center for the entire universe. The heavenly and earthly realms therefore interlock, and situations and processes in heaven have correspondences in mysterious fashion to processes on earth. Thus, the same messages go both to heavenly angels and to corresponding churches on earth.⁴

Apparently after 40 years in existence, the congregation at Ephesus no longer had the zeal and love which had characterized their parents and grandparents, nor their devotion to the Lord. What they had done successfully was to guard the true doctrine of Christ and not allow themselves to be taken in by false teachers who called themselves apostles. Doctrinally, they were intolerant of error, and for this they were praised, not chastised—as they would be by many liberal congregations in the west. Christ’s fault with the church lay in the fact that they had truth without love. (By way of contrast, the church in Thyatira had love without truth. See below).

The Nicolaitans (see Pergamum) were possibly a sect which participated in the immoral banquets of the heathens on the basis of “Christian liberty” (cf. 1 Cor. 10). Alternatively, the error could have been the Gnostic heresy which taught a dualism (separation) between body and soul, but this heresy could have easily contributed to the Nicolaitan error. This was probably the same teaching as Jezebel in Thyatira.

God hates compromise with sin. The Ephesians had resisted this false teaching well, but correct doctrine is not the sum total of the Christian life. God is personal, and He loves to be loved—in all three of His persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are to love God not only with all our minds but all our hearts (Matt. 22: 37). Their lack of love was so serious that they were in danger of their lampstand being removed. This warning was peculiarly relevant for the ancient city of Ephesus which had been relocated due to the silting up (a mixture of sand and clay) of the Cayster River, thus blocking the entrance to its ports. To maintain its commerce, the city had to relocate to a better part of the river. Christ is giving the church a spiritual analogy. Just as the whole city of Ephesus had to be relocated, He now threatens to **dislocate** the church unless they repent. Today Ephesus is an uninhabited, archeological ruin—although we have no way of knowing how long the church was in decline before the city was abandoned. Yet, we may also say, “As goes the church, so goes society.” A society (like Rome) may be maintained for centuries by good commerce, but in the end its godlessness will get the better of it. God’s spiritual laws are like natural laws. One cannot violate the law of gravity without suffering harm or death; and although one may violate God’s spiritual laws with apparently no consequences for a time, in the end he will suffer ruin. Loving God with the whole heart is just as much a command as “you shall not commit adultery” (the sin of the Nicolaitans). If we do not love God with the whole heart, we must repent and pray that God would give us such a heart.

³ Poythress, p. 85

⁴ Poythress, p. 85

The phrase, “He who overcomes...”; v.7a) is found six times in Revelation (2: 7, 26; 3:5,12, 21; 21: 7). The last reference is to the privilege of participating in the New Jerusalem, a promise comprehending the other five references (Poythress, p. 86). The allusion to Genesis 3: 24 is pointed. The **tree of life** is forbidden anyone who attempts to partake of it on his own terms (Rom. 2: 1-11). Perfect obedience to God is essential, and since man cannot supply this perfect obedience, he must trust in the one who can supply it, the Lord Jesus Christ. In the New Jerusalem, the tree of life is no longer guarded, but grows on each side of “the river of the water of life” meandering through the middle of the garden city (Rev. 22: 1-2).

The exhortation to hear reminds us of the prophetic formula of the OT prophets, “Hear the word of the Lord” (2 Kings 20: 16; Isa. 28: 14; Jer. 7: 2) as well as the judicial hardening of Israel both in Isaiah’s day and during the ministry of Jesus (Isa. 6: 9-12; Matt. 13: 9-16).

Smyrna

The city of Smyrna was a rival to Ephesus and was known for its loyalty to the Roman Empire. Possibly, Polycarp (the ancient church “father”) was the bishop of the church during the time John was writing Revelation. Polycarp was a disciple of John who was burned at the stake in 155AD for refusing to say “Caesar is Lord”. When threatened with being burned at the stake, he answered, “You threaten me with fire which burns for an hour, and after a little is extinguished, but you are ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment, reserved for the ungodly. But why do you wait? Bring forth what you will.”⁵

Such were the conditions of persecution which burdened the church of Smyrna which made the words of Christ that much more comforting, “The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life.” In other words, death is not final for the one who trusts in Me, therefore, “Be faithful unto death”, the death of martyrdom, if necessary. The poverty of these Christians was caused by the fact that many had lost their employment because of their allegiance to Christ, seen by many Romans as an act of treason and political insurgency. The Christian tradesmen would not participate in the trade guilds which were openly idolatrous and immoral. Their poverty in goods must not be allowed to overcome them because they were actually rich in the thing that counted—their faith. An ironic contrast lies between the church of Smyrna which considered itself poor, but was rich, and the church of Laodicea which considered itself rich, but was poor.

Not only were they persecuted by the Gentile Romans, but by the Jews whom Jesus Himself calls a “synagogue of Satan”. There were, no doubt, Jews who had come to know Christ as their Savior, but others had rejected Christ outright. Moreover, they employed the Roman government in their persecution of Christians. While the Jews were protected as a distinct sect from the obligation of worshipping the Roman emperor, all Gentiles were excluded from this exemption. For some time after Christ’s death, Christian Jews attended the synagogues; but after a while their identity as just another Jewish sect was challenged by unbelieving Jews, thus connecting them to the Gentiles and exposing them to the obligation of emperor worship.⁶

The Jews were an elect nation, but they could not be counted among God’s people except through repentance and faith like the gentiles (cf. Romans 9—11). It is interesting how many

⁵ Hendriksen, p. 80

⁶ Poythress, p. 86

Dispensational theologians—who still consider ethnic Israel as God’s eschatological focus—ignore what Christ Himself says about the Jewish people who persecute His church. Jesus says that they are not true Jews (cf. Rom. 2: 28-29). He says they are a “synagogue of Satan.” This is fully in keeping with what Christ says about the Pharisees during His earthly sojourn. While claiming to be Abraham’s children, Jesus says to them, “You are of your father the devil” (Jn. 8: 44). Moreover, He warned them that the kingdom of God would be taken away from them and given to the Gentiles producing the fruit of the kingdom (Matt. 21: 43). When Jews are received into the kingdom of heaven, they will not come by worshipping in the restored temple in Jerusalem (as per their interpretation of Daniel 9: 26-27) or the reinstated sacrificial system. They will come by the same means as the Gentiles, through repentance and faith in Jesus Christ—like any other true sons of Abraham (cf. Gal. 3: 7).

The tribulation of ten days is symbolic of a brief period of time which is yet full and intense, as the story of Polycarp illustrates. The second death mentioned in Jesus’ promise can be referenced to 20:14. The Romans can kill the body but they cannot kill the soul. “Be faithful unto death” (v. 10) is a subtle rebuke to the Smyrnan reputation for being faithful to the Roman emperor. Christians have a much higher loyalty than obedience to the civil government. When loyalty to the government or the established religion requires the denial of Christ as the sole Lord, then Christians must obey God rather than man (Acts 5: 29). In the same verse, Jesus is predicting the tribulation and testing that the church in Smyrna is about to experience. “Ten days” may be literal or it could stand for a concentrated time of trial. Nevertheless, He who can predict the future also controls the future. Christ allows His church to be tested by fire for its purification—another strong parallel with the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 11: 35).

Pergamum

There were many pagan altars in the city of Pergamum including the altar of Zeus. It was the capital of the province and the center of emperor-worship. Moreover, Aesculapious, the “god of healing” was worshipped in the symbol of a serpent—a satanic image—which may be part of the reason Christ called it the place where “Satan’s throne is”.⁷ Christians were called upon to offer incense to the image of the emperors and to confess that “Caesar is Lord.” Even though a Christian named Antipas had been put to death there, the Christians had not denied Christ as the one true Lord, and for this Jesus commends them (v. 13).

However, the church was not flawless; it neglected the discipline of its members (vv. 14-15). Some of them had attended heathen festivals and probably participated in the immorality of those festivals under the pretense that “idols are nothing”.⁸ Refusal to participate would mean the possible loss of your job since each trade would worship its own deity at the feast. After the feast, gross immorality would be practiced—like the disobedient Israelites (Ex. 32: 6). Balaam encouraged compromise among the Israelites who later suffered the consequences (Num. 25:1, 2; 31:16). The Israelites were encouraged to intermarry with the Canaanite women who lured them into pagan worship. If the church refuses to discipline these erring members, Christ will discipline the whole church. He will come with a two-edged sword and make war with them. The sword mentioned is not the sword of the Spirit, but a steel sword. Here we see that Christ is the

⁷ Hendriksen, p. 82

⁸ Hendriksen, p. 83

God of war, and He will make war even with His own church if necessary if they persist in spiritual compromise.

However, if they would avoid such compromise and even risk having their incomes taken away from them, they will not go hungry, for Christ will feed them hidden manna—a specific reference to the manna preserved in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle (Ex. 16: 33-35)⁹, yet also referring to God’s provisions for the Israelites in the wilderness of testing. God will not let His faithful people starve. If he can send manna out of heaven, He can certainly provide in other ways.

The new name given is reminiscent of the new names given to many of God’s people in the OT and the NT—Abram who becomes Abraham, Jacob who becomes Israel, Cephas who becomes Peter, and Saul who becomes Paul. The new name signifies a new status, promise, and mission. In Revelation, the believer receives the name of God upon his forehead even as unbelievers receive the mark of the beast upon their foreheads (3: 12; 14: 1; 22: 4; 13: 17; 14: 9, 11). As the unbeliever belongs to Satan, the believer belongs to Christ. The name is placed upon the head since Christ governs not only our hearts but our minds (Rom. 12: 1-2). Our whole worldview is influenced by Christian teaching. This was the “rub” for the Roman persecutors who allowed conquered people to worship any deity they preferred as long as they would recognize Caesar as Lord (capital “L”) and participate in Roman culture. But Christianity is a system of thought, a worldview that refuses to categorize one’s life into separate “boxes” of “sacred” and “secular”. All of life is religious life, including one’s work.

According to Exodus 28: 36-38, the words “Holy to the Lord” were engraved on a gold plate that was

hung around Aaron’s forehead. Aaron the priest was set apart for the Lord’s priestly work. In the same way, every Christian is a priest who is “holy to the Lord” and set apart for His use. The Lord’s name—whom no one can really “know” but a Christian—is engraved, not on a gold plate, but a white stone to signify the purity of forgiveness.¹⁰ Although pink granite stones could be acquired locally in Pergamum, special white stones were imported to be used as engraving stones for buildings.

Over against the prestige attaching to earthly displays, Christ promises the only prestige that matters—to be known by God. He thus gives a fitting motive to people who are in danger of being seduced into illicit mixing with paganism and its pleasures.¹¹

Thyatira

The church of Thyatira was the opposite of the church of Ephesus. While Ephesus had doctrine but little love, Thyatira had love (v. 19) but little doctrine (vv. 20-23).¹² Many trade guilds were found in this city (See Acts 16:14), each one having its own guardian god. If a tradesman wanted to get ahead in business, he had to belong to one of the guilds, implying that he worshiped its god. The guild festivals included feasts with food offered to the gods, and the

⁹ Poythress, p. 87

¹⁰ Hendriksen, pp. 85-87

¹¹ Poythress, p. 88

¹² Poythress, p. 88

tradesman was to eat this food as a gift from the god. Afterwards, wild parties followed with various immoral practices. If a Christian resigned his guild, he lost his job as well as his standing in the community. The only other alternative was to stay with his job and deny his allegiance to Jesus Christ. The prophetess Jezebel (probably not her true name but a comparison with the wicked wife of King Ahab) counseled Christians to go ahead and participate in these feasts. She may have even taught that you have to know Satan in order to defeat him (v.24, the “deep things of Satan”).¹³ This may have been equivalent to teaching that God’s grace is experienced in greater measure by those who experience sin in the very depths of Satan’s stronghold.¹⁴ Those who followed her were unwilling to suffer persecution for Christ, just as the Israelites who followed Baal worship during the reign of Ahab in Elijah’s day. This was basically the same sin mentioned in the letter to the church in Pergamum.

Once more, we note that Christ’s self-description is appropriate to the situation. “The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this...” (v. 18). His eyes search the hearts of the church for error (v. 23), and his feet trample those who believe and practice false doctrine. Christ is described here in the same way as the theophany in Daniel 10: 6, “his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze...” Ironically, the burnished bronze refers to the tradesman’s guild of bronze workers, and the word for bronze may have been a trade name for the special kind of bronze used in Thyatira.¹⁵ All of this points to Christ’s claim in each letter that He **knows** the challenges and deeds of each church. “I know” is used seven times.

The phrase, “I place no further burden on you” reminds us of the letter to the Gentile Christians recorded in Acts 15: 28-29. “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us **to lay upon you no greater burden** than these essentials:²⁹ that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.” (Acts 15:28-29 NASB). Such words seem strange to the modern mind, but these were very important ethical issues facing the early church.

We can use our imagination to come up with a modern equivalent to this compromise. Perhaps a Christian’s boss is known to throw wild parties and expects everyone to come and participate. The male Christian knows there will be loose women and drunkenness everywhere; the female knows that some of the men will make sexual advances, especially after they’re drunk. It may be possible in this case to attend without “soiling one’s garments” since there is no idol worship per se. But there will be many temptations there which a true believer would best avoid. Better to lose your job on Christian principles than to put yourself in tempting or dangerous situations. We cannot honestly pray, “Lead us not into temptation” when we knowingly plunge ourselves into temptation. The modern church faces very similar challenges as the ancient church with sexual immorality and the willingness to compromise for the sake of economic gain.

The symbolism of v.27 would not have been missed by the potters of Thyatira. Those who practice immorality and idolatry will have their lives shattered. On the other hand, the Christian who will not compromise his moral principles will rule with Christ and rise up one day and condemn those who are godless. The “morning star” is Christ Himself and His kingdom.

¹³ Hendriksen, p. 88

¹⁴ *Revelation*, G.K. Beale, p. 266

¹⁵ Poythress, p. 88

Sardis

The pagans of Sardis were proud and over-confident, living in a well-fortified city situated on a nearly inaccessible hill. Yet, twice it had been sacked (conquered) in night attacks by skillful mountain climbers. It had also been destroyed a third time by an earthquake. Thus, the warning of destruction coming on the church as “a thief in the night” had special meaning for the Christians in Sardis. Once more, Jesus knows everything about the city and the church.

Though the church had a reputation among other churches for being alive, the reputation was not well deserved. It was really a dead church whose members had “soiled their garments” by compromising with the same kinds of temptations plaguing the other churches. Alternatively, Christ could mean that they had not fully testified to the truth of the gospel in a heathen culture, for He says, “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.” Such deeds could not be evil deeds but good deeds, perhaps the deed of positive witness in the midst of a pagan society. They had kept a “low profile” as Christians by not standing out forcefully for their faith and by not being distinctively different.¹⁶ Supporting this interpretation is the statement, “I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels” (v. 5). This is a direct reference to Matthew 10: 32, “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.” The implication is that those who *consistently* fail to confess Christ in word and deed before the world is not a true believer. He is ashamed of Christ and His words.

“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words **in this adulterous and sinful generation**, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.” (Mark 8:38 NASB)

Only a few people were persevering and maintaining a “high profile” as believers (v. 4). These receive the special promise of having their names written in the book of life permanently without fear of being erased. The implication of this promise is not that true Christians living in Sardis or today in Africa may be in danger of having their names removed from the book of life. The promise is positive. The names of true believers will most decidedly remain in the book (cf. Rev. 13: 8; 17: 8; 20: 12, 15; 21: 27). Nevertheless, many in Sardis **imagined** that their names were recorded in this book but would find later that Christ never **knew** their names because they were lawless (Matt. 7: 23). (See commentary on Revelation 20: 12 for more discussion.)

The mention of the seven Spirits is a reference to the Holy Spirit in the full and complete operations of His work. The church was dead, and only the Holy Spirit could breathe new life back into it. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.” (John 6:63 NASB)

As is often the case, things are not as they appear. The church of Sardis appeared to be alive. Perhaps it was like so many churches with big buildings, multiple programs, and wealth, but the majority of its members had fallen into wicked practices unbecoming of the name of Christ or they had failed to provide a positive witness of Christ at personal expense. It is genuine character, not reputation, that makes the difference between a faithful church and an unfaithful

¹⁶ Beale, pp. 274, 276

one. A church is only what Christ “knows” it to be. Only a few people in Sardis had character. It should be noted, however, that Christ still calls it “the church in Sardis.”

Philadelphia

As in Smyrna, the church here was being persecuted by the Jewish citizens who were supported politically by the Roman government. The phrase, “synagogue of Satan” comes up once again in v. 9. Christian Jews had been shunned and excommunicated from the Jewish synagogues by so-called Jews (cf. Rom. 9; 6-9); therefore, John writes that even though the doors of the synagogues were shut to them, Jesus would open up for them other doors which no man could shut. Moreover, Christ would shut the door to everyone who was persecuting His people (v. 7b). One day they would come to rule over the Jews who shut them out of their synagogues and would enjoy a permanent place as “pillars” in the true temple of God, the New Jerusalem where He dwelled with His people (cf. Rev. 21—22).

Unbelieving Jews had mistaken the type for the antitype, the shadow for the fulfillment. They had made the physical temple their confidence of God’s acceptance while rejecting the very thing the temple represented, God living among His people **in fellowship**. The “door” of fellowship mentioned to the church of Laodicea (3: 20) applies here as well. Christ is opening this door of fellowship to the faithful church at Philadelphia, a door which no one could shut; but He was shutting this door to unbelieving Jews and Gentiles. The church of Philadelphia had not denied the name of Christ (v. 8), corresponding to the denial of His name among the church at Sardis (see comments above).

But what does it mean that “I will make them [*false Jews*] come and bow down at your feet, and *make them* know that I have loved you”? It is clear that Christ is not speaking of something that would occur in the present age, an evil age bringing persecution and tribulation (Jn. 16: 33). The reference could be to the consummation and final judgment in which the saints participate in the judgment of unbelievers. In 1 Corinthians 6: 2-3, Paul says that believers will judge the world and fallen angels.

Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? If the world is judged by you, are you not competent *to constitute* the smallest law courts?³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more matters of this life? (1 Corinthians 6:2-3 NASB)

Because of their faithfulness, Christ will spare them from the “hour of testing” coming upon those “who dwell on the earth”, that is, unbelieving humanity. This is most likely a reference to the trials and punishments which are later recorded in Revelation (Rev. 6—11; 16—18; 19: 11-21),¹⁷ but we have no specific historical reference to the manner in which the church of Philadelphia was spared.

Again we encounter the promise of having the name of God written upon the believer as a sign of ownership and protection.¹⁸

¹⁷ Poythress, p. 92

¹⁸ Poythress, p. 92

Laodicea

This church describes many churches in the US, the church which is endowed with much wealth but is spiritually bankrupt. It is the church which is more interested in the New York Stock Exchange and the financial markets than missions and evangelism—lukewarm about seeing the Kingdom of God advanced throughout the world.

Laodicea was a wealthy city, and the church apparently had wealthy church members. The real problem was not the wealth, which is not sinful in itself, but the spiritual deadness which wealth had apparently produced. Hendriksen’s comment is to the point: “Who is more to be pitied than an individual who imagines that he is a fine Christian, whereas in reality Christ himself is utterly disgusted with him?”¹⁹ Christ alone is “the faithful and true witness” (v. 14), and He alone will decide the spiritual state of a church. Although the church’s self-evaluation may be good, the only evaluation that counts is Christ’s.²⁰

Since they did not see themselves as needy there was no humility before God in seeking His blessing and favor. There was little or no repentance. Laodicea was located near the city of Hierapolis possessing hot springs and also near Colossae supplied with cold mountain streams. Laodicea, by contrast, had its water piped in from a distance. The distance from hot springs or cold streams resulted in a water supply which was lukewarm, neither cold nor hot—just like the church of Laodicea. (Jesus “knows”). Hot water one can use to make hot tea, and cold water is good to quench the thirst, but lukewarm water tastes terrible, as anyone in Laodicea already knew. Christ will spew the church out of His mouth like lukewarm water. Similarly, we can talk to people who are definitely not believers and some may even show an interest. Hot Christians burning in their zeal for Christ are a delight to be around. But lukewarm Christians are difficult to fellowship with and end up discouraging everyone. As Hendriksen says, “You cannot do anything with such people.”²¹

Christ says that the Laodiceans, in spite of their wealth, are blind, naked, and poor, as well as miserable and wretched. Not very kind words for Christians who think they have it all together. The arrogance of the church resembled that of the city itself. Having suffered devastation from an earthquake, and being offered help from the Roman government to rebuild, the city had boasted that it did not need any help, but had sufficient resources.²² The church had become equally arrogant. Yet, Christ does not write them off but offers the opportunity to repent. He disciplines and reproves those whom He loves, and He loves even the church at Laodicea, about whom He can say nothing good. Humbly He stands before the door of this church and keeps on knocking (present participle), waiting for someone to open the door and let Him have fellowship with him. Note well that **Jesus is not talking to sinners who had never professed Christ, but to the Christian church.** This is a verse for church renewal, not evangelism. The choice is ours to open the door, but Jesus will not kick the door down. Yet, if we do not repent and let Him into our churches, then “Ichabod” is written over the door, “The glory has departed”.

¹⁹ Hendriksen, p. 95

²⁰ Cf. Poythress, p. 93

²¹ Hendriksen, p. 94

²² Poythress, p. 94

Christ will not keep knocking forever, as the demise and disappearance of the church in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) testifies. There is simply no vibrant church in Turkey today. Europe has become a spiritual wasteland, leaving a void for Islam to fill. How many churches are going through the motions of religious ritual every Sunday, but the Holy Spirit has long departed from the church because no one ever opened the door to the presence of Christ through humble repentance and prayer? No one ever asked Him for white robes (v.18) to clothe his nakedness, because he never imagined he was naked. So Christ appealed to the church until their hardness of hearts had sealed their own fate. It happened in Asia Minor, and it can happen in the US, Uganda, or anywhere else.

Three basic temptations faced these seven churches: (1) antichristian persecution which sometimes ended in death (2) Roman religion and emperor-worship (3) the temptation of the flesh from a godless culture which recognized few limitations to their lusts.

Revelation 4—5

Immediately after Christ' message to the churches, which certainly could have been somewhat discouraging to John, God gives him a vision into heaven. It is a vision into the throne room of God. In chapters 4 and 5, the word "throne" occurs 17 times. The intent of this vision for John is clear: God reigns over all. It does not matter how sinful the world of man becomes or how persecuted the church, God is still in sovereign control. He is not moved by anxiety or emergency to do something to regain control of the universe. He never lost control, and everything is going along just as He planned it from the very beginning.

John is about to receive a vision of the persecutions and trials of the church taking place during and after his life; but before Christ shows John "what must take place" (4: 1), John must see the bigger picture of God's sovereign rule. Without the bigger picture, believers will sink into despair and lose hope, but if we see the bigger picture of God's plan for the universe and His elect, we will be able to endure the trials and tragedies of this life (Rom. 8: 18-25). We know from secular history that while the persecution of the church was severe even in the first century, it became even more severe in the two centuries that followed.²³Therefore, chapters 4 and 5 give us John's vision of the throne of God as He rules the affairs of men, all men, even sinful men. The vision provides John and his readers a visual philosophy of history (as does the OT prophecy of Daniel). We must not interpret history and current events from a **man-centered** perspective but from a **theo-centric** (God-centered) perspective. The Apostle Paul alludes to this perspective.

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison,¹⁸ while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for

²³ The persecution of Christians has been more severe in the 20th century than all the centuries since the death of Christ combined. The more the church grows and spreads around the world, the greater the hostility of the world. Moreover, this continuing persecution calls into question the postmillennial theory of the "Christianization" of the world before the coming of Christ. Personally, I am not committed to any theory of the millennium at the present time. I am only making this observation for my readers to think about. It may very well be that by the time Christ returns, the Christian church may have been mostly successful in evangelism and cultural transformation throughout the world. Since we don't know when He is returning, a period of ten thousand more years may be enough time to see this world transformation take place. However, a careful reading of Revelation calls into question whether the return of Christ in the clouds with terrible judgments (cf. 1 Thess. 4: 13—5: 3) will be only a footnote in history discovered only by reading the front pages of newspapers the next day.

the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NASB)

...for we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7 NASB)

While we cannot see the throne of God in heaven with physical eyes, we may see it through spiritual eyes through the revelation of John. Hendriksen insists that the main focus of the vision is not the throne seen from the perspective of John on earth, but rather **the universe seen from the perspective of heaven**. The throne of God (is in the center of the vision while everything else is “around the throne” [Rev. 4:3, 4, 6; 5:11; 7:11]). The throne of God is at the center of all created beings—angelic beings, human beings, and all animate beings (animals).

The throne is particularly the throne of God the Father. Notice the lightning and thunder proceeding from the throne. This reminds us of the scene from Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Law to Moses (Ex. 19:16). The **lightning and thunder** represent God in His holy judgments against sin. It was a terrible and awesome sight to the Israelites and so it is here to John. The Law of God is representative of the very nature of God, unchangeable in His holiness. We are reminded of how Jesus instructed His disciples to pray. "Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. ¹⁰'Your kingdom come. Your **will be done**, On earth as it is in heaven'" (Matthew 6:9-10 NASB). God is zealous to have a people for His own possession who live according to His will. This is the goal of creation and redemption.

But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR *God's* OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; (1 Peter 2:9 NASB)

God will never become tired of hearing His people worship and praise Him in spirit and truth (Jn. 4: 23), nor will He become tired of seeing His people exercise dominion over the earth by using their God-given abilities for the glory of God. Every good and creative event will reflect His image and glory. In this sense the **temple scene is symbolic of the new heavens and earth** with all creation involved in continual worship in both word and deed.

The throne is surrounded by concentric circles (circles within circles). Around the throne are 24 thrones with **24 elders** sitting on those thrones in royal dress and crowns upon their heads. These represent the leadership of the OT and NT churches (12 patriarchs of the 12 tribes of Israel, and 12 apostles of the NT church. See 21:12-14). Once more the Bible represents the people of God in the OT and the people of God in the NT as one people, not two—the elect people of God of all ages.

There are also **four creatures** arranged in a circle around the throne each “having six wings and full of eyes around and within.” We find such creatures elsewhere in Ezekiel 1 and 10 and Isaiah 6 although there are slight differences in the description. Notice the similarities: four living ones, the appearance of their faces, their association with the throne of God, the fire moving among them, their multiple eyes. The following comparison between Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4 is taken from Hendriksen.²⁴ Moreover, there are striking similarities between the throne room

²⁴ Reproduced from Hendriksen, p. 104

scene in Revelation 4—5 and the throne scene in Daniel 7. The fourteen elements are in the same basic order.²⁵

Revelation 4		Ezekiel 1
<p>⁶and before the throne <i>there was something</i> like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.</p> <p>⁷The first creature <i>was</i> like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature <i>was</i> like a flying eagle.</p> <p>⁸And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY <i>is</i> THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."</p>		<p>⁵Within it there were figures resembling four living beings. And this was their appearance: they had human form.</p> <p>¹⁰As for the form of their faces, <i>each</i> had the face of a man; all four had the face of a lion on the right and the face of a bull on the left, and all four had the face of an eagle.</p> <p>¹¹Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; each had two touching another <i>being</i>, and two covering their bodies.</p> <p>¹⁸As for their rims they were lofty and awesome, and the rims of all four of them were full of eyes round about.</p>
<p>⁵Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And <i>there were</i> seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God</p> <p>⁵Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And <i>there were</i> seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God</p>		<p>¹³In the midst of the living beings there was something that looked like burning coals of fire, like torches darting back and forth among the living beings. The fire was bright, and lightning was flashing from the fire.</p>
<p>Rev. 4: 1</p> <p>Rev. 4: 2a; cf. 4: 4a</p> <p>Rev. 4: 2b</p> <p>Rev. 4: 3a</p> <p>Rev. 4: 5</p> <p>Rev. 4: 4b, 6b-10; 5: 8, 11, 14</p> <p>Rev. 5: 1ff</p> <p>Rev. 5: 2-5, 9</p> <p>Rev. 5: 5b-7, 9a, 12-13</p> <p>Rev. 5: 9b</p> <p>Rev. 5: 4</p> <p>Rev. 5: 5a</p> <p>Rev. 5: 10</p> <p>Rev. 5: 13-14</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introductory vision phraseology 2. A throne(s) set in heaven 3. God sitting on a throne 4. God's appearance on the throne 5. Fire before the throne 6. Heavenly servants surrounding throne 7. Book(s) before the throne 8. The book(s) opened 9. A divine (messianic) figure approaching God's throne to receive authority to reign forever over a kingdom 10. The kingdom's scope: "all peoples, nations, and tongues" 11. The seer's emotional distress on account of the vision 12. The seer's reception of heavenly counsel concerning the vision from one of the heavenly throne servants 13. The saints given divine authority to reign over a kingdom 14. Concluding mention of God's eternal reign 	<p>Dan. 7: 9 ; cf.7: 2,6-7</p> <p>Dan. 7: 9a</p> <p>Dan. 7: 9b</p> <p>Dan. 7: 9c</p> <p>Dan. 7:9d-10a</p> <p>Dan. 7: 10b</p> <p>Dan. 7: 10c</p> <p>Dan. 7: 10d</p> <p>Dan. 7: 13-14a</p> <p>Dan. 7: 14a [MT]</p> <p>Dan. 7: 15</p> <p>Dan. 7: 16</p> <p>Dan. 7: 18, 22, 27a</p> <p>Dan. 7: 27b</p>

²⁵ Reproduced from Beale, pp. 314-315

In Isaiah, we read,

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.² Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." (Isaiah 6:1-3 NASB)

Regardless of the similarities, we must remember that John is not copying from the prophets; he is receiving an **original vision** from God. Yet, it is not surprising that these three visions have much in common because of the similarity of the subject, the glory of God and the worship of His creation in honor of His sovereignty and majesty. Especially notice that the creatures are doing the same thing here as they did in Isaiah 6; they are crying out, "Holy, Holy, Holy..." to the Lord. God is thrice holy as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The four living creatures stand before the throne ready to serve the Lord in any of the four directions from the throne. These are the cherubim, a very high order of angels guarding the throne and "the holy things of God" (cf. Gen. 3:24; Ex. 25:20). As the 24 elders are angelic representatives of the special creation, man, the four creatures are heavenly representatives of all the animate creation other than man.²⁶ Most likely, the eyes of the creatures represent the omniscience of God who is able to see and know everything that is going on in the world simultaneously.

As in chs. 1—3, the church is pictured in angelic guise to remind its members that already a dimension of their existence is heavenly, that their real home is not with the unbelieving "earth-dwellers," and they have heavenly help and protection in their struggle to obtain their reward and not be conformed to their pagan environment. One of the purposes of the church meeting on earth in its weekly gatherings (as in 1: 3, 9) is to be reminded of its heavenly existence and identity by modeling its worship and liturgy on the angel' and the heavenly church's worship of the exalted lamb, as vividly portrayed in chs. 4—5. This is why scenes of heavenly liturgy are woven throughout the Apocalypse (see further on 1: 20).²⁷

The Holy Spirit is represented in the seven lamps burning before the throne of the Father (v. 5). The word "Spirits" should be in capital letters because **the seven Spirits represent the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His activity (See 1:4).**

The book with the seven seals is the eternal plan of God, His divine decrees for the entire universe throughout history. The closed book means that the plan is **unrevealed and unexecuted**, which means that God's purposes appear **unrealized**. There is "no protection for God's children in the hours of bitter trial; no judgments upon a persecuting world; no ultimate triumph for believers; no new heaven and earth; no future inheritance."²⁸ The prospect of the book not being opened causes John to weep bitterly. We must understand that the revelation is **looking backward** hypothetically as if Christ had not yet accomplished redemption at the cross. The book of Revelation is not written chronologically or linearly as if forward progression in time is occurring. As we look forward in the chapter, only the Lamb is worthy of breaking the seals and opening the book. When the book is opened, God's judgments against sin and unbelief are released.

²⁶ Beale, p. 322

²⁷ Beale, p. 323

²⁸ Hendriksen, p. 109

No one in heaven or earth was worthy of opening the book and executing the plan of the Father—no one, that is, who was *created*. But now “The Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” enters the scene, even Jesus Christ who is also called “the Lamb...slain”. Jesus Christ is able and worthy to take the book and open it. We may ask why God the Father does not open the book. He chooses to give that task to a **Mediator** between Him and man, but not just any mediator, but one who was and is both God and man. At the appearance of Christ, the whole of heaven begins to rejoice with praise and song (including thousands and thousands of angels; see 5:11). Christ alone is worthy to open the book and execute God’s plan because of His work in redemption (5:9). Obviously, all of this is symbolic. Salvation for God’s people has already been accomplished and the plan of God for mankind has been taking place throughout human history. Yet the beginning and end of this plan is here represented as potential, not accomplished unless Christ goes to the Cross.

The Cross of Christ is truly **THE climactic event of history** which is essential for every other event of history. The world of men and the whole earth is a stage upon which the drama of salvation for God’s people is played. Yet, the ultimate importance of our salvation is found in the fact that the people of God will worship and serve God in His kingdom forever and ever. The center piece in the vision is the throne of God and everything and everyone else surrounding the throne. Salvation history is the history of the whole world. The history of redemption is primary, and the history of world civilization is secondary to this history and coordinated to accomplish it. Jesus’ rule and authority is given to Him as a reward for His accomplished work, His suffering and death. The result is that we, those whom He has purchased from every tribe, tongue, people and nation, are a kingdom of priests (See Ex. 19:6). And even now before the consummation of the age when Jesus returns in glory, our prayers are instrumental in accomplishing the plan of God throughout human history.

When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are **the prayers of the saints**. (Revelation 5:8 NASB)

So now, in the heavenly vision, we have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit all present. In chapter 4 our attention is concentrated on God the Father and creation; in chapter 5 on God the Son and redemption. The Holy Spirit never draws attention to Himself but subordinates Himself to the Father and the Son in the work of creation and redemption even though He is eternally equal to the Father and the Son and the Person who applies redemption to the hearts of all of God’s people.

All created beings in the outer circle symbolizes that the Triune God is ruler over all creation, which is why this throne-room scene depicts the universe from the perspective of heaven.

The “sea of glass like crystal” could also represent the Red Sea and the multiple dangers facing the people of God in the OT and church age. Israel’s deliverance through the Red Sea is mentioned in Revelation 15.

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.² And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.³ And they sang the song of Moses, the

bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!"⁴ "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED." (Revelation 15:1-4 NASB)

Notice the reference to the song of Moses from Exodus 15. Revelation 15 presents a new exodus for the people of God, a final exodus from the oppression of those who hate them. The salvation of God's people and the destruction of His enemies is a theme running throughout Biblical history; so it is fitting that we would find the consummation of this theme in Revelation and its symbol in the opening vision. The sea in the ancient world was seen as a mysterious and evil place, and this is the significance of John saying that in the new heaven and earth there was "no sea" (Rev. 21: 1). Therefore, the sea in the throne room is like glass, calm and beautiful.

...[John] means that all evil on the earth will be not only defeated but also eradicated when Christ's kingdom is established consummately on earth. In fact, the "sea of glass **like crystal** before the throne" in 4: 6 may be an intentional contrast with "a river of the water of life, **clear as crystal**, coming from the throne" in 22: 1. The sea as the source of satanic evil opposing God's throne has been eliminated and replaced by the river of redemption, which has its source in the throne.²⁹

The following diagram of the throne room scene in Revelation 4—5 is adapted from Hendriksen.³⁰

F. The throne in the center is the throne of God the **Father**.

1-2. The first and second circles represent the appearance of the Father as jasper stone (white) and sardius (red) (v. 3). Together with the emerald rainbow, they may represent the multi-colored splendor of God's majesty.

3. The third circle represents the emerald rainbow "around the throne" (4: 3).

4. The fourth circle represents the "four living creatures" who were "around the throne" (probably cherubim, cf. Ezek. 1 and 10) each with a different face—lion, calf (or bull), man, eagle.

5. The fifth circle represents the twenty-four elders sitting on thrones "around the throne" of God the Father (4: 4).

6. The sixth circle represents the many angels "around the throne" (5: 11).

7. The seventh circle represents all created things (5: 13).

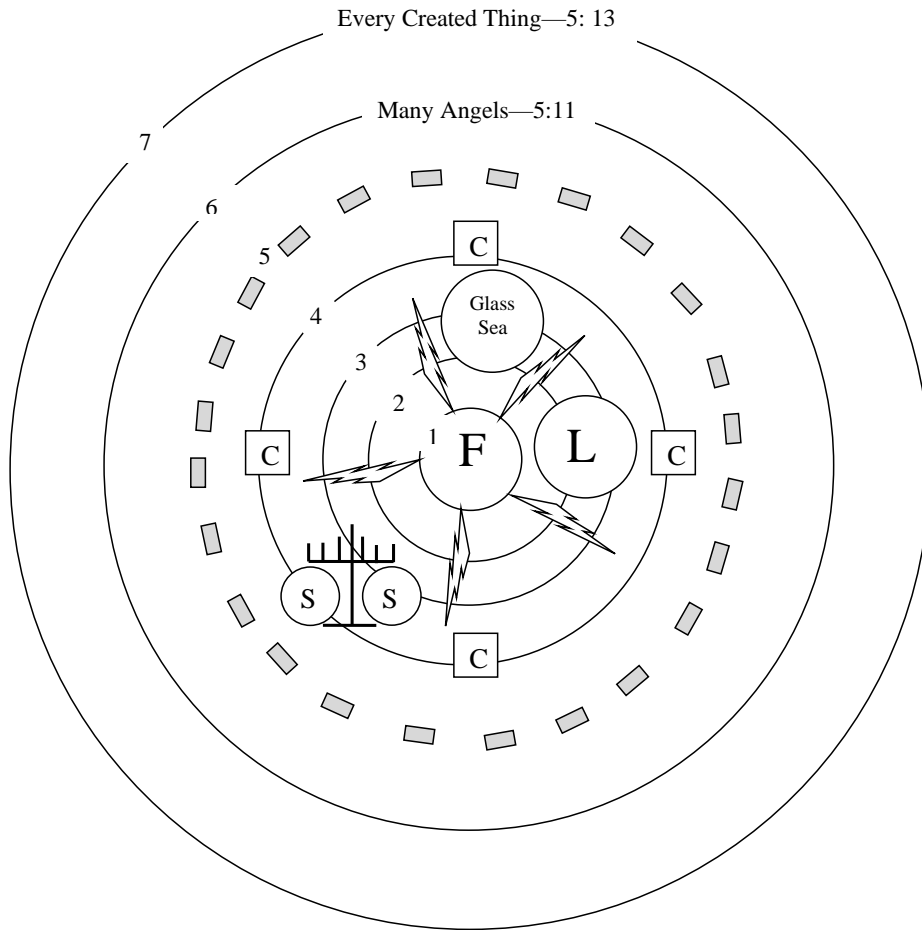
8. The symbols of lightning represent the "flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder" coming "out from the throne" in v. 5.

9. The candle stick and the two circles labeled SS represent the Seven Spirits of God—the Holy Spirit in the fullness of His operation in creation and redemption (cf. Gen. 1: 2).

10. The "sea" could represent the laver of the tabernacle (Ex. 30: 18), the sea with seven oxen (1 Kings 7: 44), or the Red Sea.

²⁹ Beale, p. 328

³⁰ Hendriksen, p. 102



Revelation 6

Then I saw **when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals,**
 and I heard one of the four living creatures
 saying as with a voice of thunder, "Come."

²I looked, and behold, **a white horse,**
 and he who sat on it had a bow;
 and a crown was given to him,
 and he went out conquering
 and to conquer.

³**When He broke the second seal,**
I heard the second living creature
 saying, "Come."

⁴And another, **a red horse,** went out;

A
 B
 C
 D
 E
 F
 G
 A
 B
 C
 D

Commented [D1]: I saw at night, and behold, a man was riding on a red horse, and he was standing among the myrtle trees which were in the ravine, with red, sorrel and white horses behind him. ⁹ Then I said, "My lord, what are these?" And the angel who was speaking with me said to me, "I will show you what these are."¹⁰ And the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered and said, "These are those whom the LORD has sent to patrol the earth."¹¹ So they answered the angel of the LORD who was standing among the myrtle trees and said, "We have patrolled the earth, and behold, all the earth is peaceful and quiet." (Zechariah 1:8-11 NAU) Now I lifted up my eyes again and looked, and behold, four chariots were coming forth from between the two mountains; and the mountains were bronze mountains. ² With the first chariot were red horses, with the second chariot black horses, ³ with the third chariot white horses, and with the fourth chariot strong dappled horses. (Zechariah 6:1-3 NAU)

and to him who sat on it, E
 it was granted to take peace from the earth,
 and that *men* would slay one another; F
 and a great sword was given to him. G

⁵ **When He broke the third seal,** A
I heard the third living creature B
 saying, "Come." C
 I looked, and behold, a **black horse**; D
 and he who sat on it E
 had a pair of scales in his hand. F

⁶ And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures B
 saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; C
 and do not damage the oil and the wine."

⁷ **When the Lamb broke the fourth seal,** A
I heard the voice of the fourth living creature B
 saying, "Come." C
⁸ I looked, and behold, an **ashen horse**; D
 and he who sat on it E
 had the name Death; F
 and Hades was following with him.

Authority was given to them G
over a fourth of the earth,
 to kill with sword
 and with famine
 and with pestilence
 and by the wild beasts of the

earth.

⁹ **When the Lamb broke the fifth seal,**
 I saw underneath the altar
 the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God,
 and because of the testimony which they had maintained;
¹⁰ and they cried out with a loud voice, saying,
 "How long, O Lord, holy and true,
 will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood
 on those who dwell on the earth?"

¹¹ And there was given to each of them a white robe;
 and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer,
 until *the number of*
 their fellow servants
 and their brethren
 who were to be killed even as they had been,
 would be completed also.

Commented [D2]: "When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be frightened; *those things* must take place; but *that is* not yet the end."⁸ "For nation will rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will *also* be famines. These things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs. (Mark 13:7-8 NAU) (Verse noted in Thomas)

Commented [D3]: cf. 7: 9

In Chapter 6, the book with its **seven seals** begins to be opened. The rider of the **white horse** could be Christ Himself (See 19:11 and 14:14). Notice the word "conquer" (6:2) which is usually associated either with Christ or His people. Christ has conquered at the cross, He is conquering now with the gospel, and He is going to conquer completely at the end of the age.

The conquest of Christ is written throughout the book (17:14 to mention only one of the many references; See also Matt.10:34). Other commentators believe this is not a reference to Christ since the other horsemen represent war, bloodshed, scarcity and death throughout the world, and even upon the people of God through persecution.³¹ However, as Hendriksen points out, all the evil in the world is for the ultimate purpose of strengthening and purifying the people of God. The Babylonians, an evil people, were used by God to purify the people of Israel (See Habakkuk). The evil in this world, and even the devil himself, are only instruments of the One who has taken the scroll of God's plan in order to execute this plan (Matt. 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13).³²

Hendriksen believes that the slaughter of men in 6:4 refers only to the persecution of the church and not to warfare in general. I prefer the position of Mounce who says that the **red horse** (the color of blood) refers to **warfare in general over the whole face of the earth**.³³ Besides, the text says that men will "slay one another." Genuine Christians do not slay one another. It is true that the apostate church has slain Christians like John Hus, but such historical events are too exceptional to be generalized in this text. Certainly this bloodshed would include the persecution of the saints, a fact which is mentioned in 6:9-11. Equally certain is the fact that whenever wars break out, Christians are not exempt from the devastation that follows. Whatever interpretation is correct, the ruin and bloodshed which takes place have as their ultimate purpose the salvation and purification of believers (Rom. 8:28-30). God on His throne is governing the universe and the execution of this plan is by the Son and the Seven Spirits (The Holy Spirit). Notice too that the sword of slaughter is **given** to the rider by God.

The **black horse** represents economic hardship and famine. The cost of the wheat which will feed only one man is a whole day's wages, and the less nutritious barley will feed only three people. This price is about ten to twelve times what it should have been. The command not to harm the oil and the wine is a check to the effects of the famine so as not to starve the entire earth.³⁴

The **ashen horse** is the color of a corpse, and its rider had the name of Death. Hades was not far behind. He was given power over a fourth of the earth to kill with the sword, famine, disease, and wild beasts. With this horse and rider, the destruction to the earth seems to be intensified in comparison to the other horses and riders since he has the power of multiple forms of death. From this point, there is further intensification when the trumpets destroy a third of mankind (8:7, 8, 10, 12), and the bowls of wrath bring complete destruction (16:1ff.)³⁵

The **fifth seal** (6: 9) represents a change of scene from the four horsemen. In this scene, the souls of those who have been killed for their faith in Jesus are seen under the altar. Their cry for vengeance is not selfish; it is for the honor and glory of God who must avenge their blood to execute His justice upon the wicked. We should notice that there is not a single hint of condemnation toward the martyred saints who are calling for justice upon "those who dwell on

³¹Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, p. 153

³²Hendriksen, p. 118

³³Mounce, pp.154-155

³⁴Mounce, pp.155-156

³⁵Mounce, pp.155-156

the earth.” Rather, they are given a white robe symbolizing purity. They are not told to repent of their bloodthirsty vengeance but to rest until the number of martyrs is complete. Because the people of God share His nature through the Holy Spirit, they also desire justice to be done. They were not killed for crimes committed, but for their belief in Jesus and their commitment to Him. Their desire for recompense is in full accord with Jesus’ promise to repay every man according to his deeds (cf. Matt. 16: 27).

After God delivered Israel through the Red Sea, Israel sang the following song,

- 1 "I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.
- 2 "The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; This is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will extol Him.
- 3 "The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name.
- 4 "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; And the choicest of his officers are drowned in the Red Sea.
- 5 "The deeps cover them; They went down into the depths like a stone.
- 6 "Your right hand, O LORD, is majestic in power, Your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy. (Exo 15:1-6 NASB)

The song continues for 18 verses. Even the women take part in celebrating the deliverance of Israel and the destruction of the Egyptians. There is no lust for blood in this story, only legitimate, God-honoring celebration of the Lord as a warrior in behalf of His people (v. 3). The same is true in Revelation 6. The people of God recognize Him as a warrior who avenges the wrongs done to His people. He will not turn a blind eye, but like a father protecting his children, will run to their rescue. Commenting on the exodus event, Waltke, concurring with Portman, says “that justice is a virtue and so is the feeling of pleasure when we see lawbreakers brought low: ‘And it’s all to the good that we do, because this pleasure reflects our reverence for the law....*Schadenfreude* [“damage joy”] is a corollary of justice.”³⁶

- 12 **I looked when He broke the sixth seal,**
and there was a great earthquake;
and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair,
and the whole moon became like blood;
13 and the stars of the sky fell to the earth,
as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.
- 14 The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up,
and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

- 15 **Then the kings of the earth**
and the great men
and the commanders
and the rich
and the strong
and every slave
and free man
hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;
16 and they said to the mountains

Commented [D4]: cf. 9: 1

Commented [D5]: Why are the nations in an uproar And the peoples devising a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, 3 "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!" 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs, The Lord scoffs at them. 5 Then He will speak to them in His anger And terrify them in His fury, saying, 6 "But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain." 7 "I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.' 8 'Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, And the very ends of the earth as Your possession. 9 'You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like earthenware.'" 10 Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. 11 Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling. 12 Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him! (Psalm 2:1-12 NAU)

³⁶ Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 395

and to the rocks,
 "Fall on us and hide us
 from the presence of Him who sits on the throne,
 and from the wrath of the Lamb;
¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to **stand?**"

Commented [D6]: cf. 1: 7 "mourn"

The earthquake caused by the breaking of the sixth seal is a picture of **the terror of the final judgment which is formally introduced in 6:12-17**. You will notice that it follows the seal revealing the martyrdom of those who have been put to death for Christ's sake. The scene calls to mind the earthquake in Acts 16:22-30 when Paul and Silas were put in jail for preaching the gospel. When His saints are in trouble, God sometimes shows up with an earthquake (See Heb. 12:26-29; Haggai 2:6).

Hendriksen believes the seals which have been mentioned so far are all directed against the church except the fourth seal which affects all mankind. I prefer Mounce's interpretation which **applies the effects of all the seals to mankind in general**. Notice that whatever the interpretation, the horses and their riders are summoned (called) by the four living creatures standing around the throne of God (6:1, 3, 5, 7—the command "come" is followed by each of the horses in succession). This means that God is in control of everything done to the world of men by the four horsemen. Obviously some of the bloodshed is directed toward God's people because of their faith since the fifth seal talks about those who have been slain "because of the word of God."

Revelation 7

¹After this I saw **four angels**
 standing at the **four corners** of the earth,
 holding back the **four winds** of the earth,
 so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.

²And I saw **another angel**
 ascending from the rising of the sun,
 having the seal of the living God;
 and he cried out with a loud voice
 to the **four angels to whom it was granted** to harm the earth and the sea,
³saying, "Do not harm
 the earth
 or the sea
 or the trees
 until we have **sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.**"

Commented [D7]: The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, *even* through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst." ⁵But to the others He said in my hearing, "Go through the city after him and strike; do not let your eye have pity and do not spare." ⁶"Utterly slay old men, young men, maidens, little children, and women, but do not touch any man on whom is the mark; and you shall start from My sanctuary." So they started with the elders who *were* before the temple. (Ezekiel 9:4-6 NAU)

⁴And I heard the number of those who were sealed,
 one hundred and forty-four thousand
 sealed **from every tribe of the sons of Israel:**
⁵ from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand *were* sealed,
 from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand,
 from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,
⁶ from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand,
 from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand,
 from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,

⁷ from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand,
 from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand,
 from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,
⁸ from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand,
 from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand,
 from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand *were* sealed.

⁹ After these things I looked, and behold,
 a great multitude which **no one could count,**
from every nation
and all tribes and peoples and tongues,
 standing before the throne and before the Lamb,
 clothed in **white robes,** and palm branches *were* in their hands;
¹⁰ and they cry out with a loud voice, saying,
 "Salvation
 to our God who sits on **the throne,**
 and to the Lamb."

Commented [D8]: cf. 6: 11

¹¹ And all the angels were standing
 around the throne
 and *around* the elders and the four living creatures;
 and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,
¹² saying, "Amen,
 blessing
 and glory
 and wisdom
 and thanksgiving
 and honor
 and power
 and might,
be to our God forever and ever. Amen."

Commented [D9]: On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, ¹³ took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and *began* to shout, "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD, even the King of Israel." ¹⁴ Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, ¹⁵ "FEAR NOT, DAUGHTER OF ZION; BEHOLD, YOUR KING IS COMING, SEATED ON A DONKEY'S COLT." ¹⁶ These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him. (John 12:12-16 NAU)

¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me,
 "These who are clothed in the **white robes,**
 who are they,
 and where have they come from?"

¹⁴ I said to him, "My lord, you know."
 And he said to me,
 "These are the ones who come out of the **great tribulation,**
 and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

Commented [D10]: "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. (Matthew 24:21 NAU)
 "Behold, I will throw her on a *bed of sickness,* and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. (Revelation 2:22 NAU)

¹⁵ "For this reason, they are before the throne of God;
 and they **serve Him day and night in His temple;**
 and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over **them,**

Commented [D11]: Ezekiel 37: 26-28 cf. Beale p. 440; cf. Rev. 21: 3

¹⁶ "They will
 hunger no longer,
 nor thirst anymore;
 nor will the sun beat down on them,
 nor any heat;

Commented [D12]: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4 NAU)

¹⁷ for the Lamb in the center of the throne
will be their shepherd,
 and **will guide** them to springs of the **water of life;**

and **God will wipe every tear from their eyes.**"

Commented [D13]: Rev. 21: 1-4

When we come to chapter 7, the elect of God are being prepared for the future destruction coming upon the earth. One might ask how conditions could get any worse since destruction has already come in abundance. Yet, the destruction seems to escalate as the revelation proceeds. Before the devastating effects of the seven trumpets, the elect are prepared with the seal of God upon their foreheads (14:1) which corresponds to the mark of the beast upon those who worship the beast (13:16). The number of 144,000 represents completeness ($12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 = 144,000$). Twelve represents the number of the twelve tribes of Israel, and another twelve represents the apostles. Ten represents completeness. Notice that in 6:11 the believers who had already been martyred for their faith are told to rest until their other brethren who were going to be killed for their faith was **complete**. The believers in 7:1-8 are the ones who will be on earth when the remainder of the judgments come upon the earth from the seven angels and the seven trumpets (8-11). The second vision of the chapter, 7:9-17, looks ahead to a future day when all the redeemed who have come out of the great persecution are standing before the throne of God. Notice that this vision is in heaven and the number of the redeemed cannot be numbered—a multitude from “every nation and all the tribes and peoples and tongues”. It is a different picture from 7:1-8 in which only the tribes of Israel are represented in distinct numbers. However, the distinct number, 144,000, is itself symbolical for the complete number of the redeemed. The church is represented in the NT as the “Israel of God” and those who are Jews “inwardly” (Rom. 9: 6; Gal. 6: 16).

The entire multitude is represented as coming out of the “great tribulation” which implies that they consist of martyrs, those who have died for their faith. But this conclusion does not follow since nothing is said here about dying for one’s faith. The text (v. 14) simply says that they come out of the great tribulation.

Not all are martyrs. There is no mention here of being slain (as in 6: 9) or beheaded (as in 20: 4) for the testimony they bore. Their robes are white by virtue of the redemptive death of the Lamb. Their rewards are those of all the faithful. Persecution has always been the lot of those who follow the Lamb (Jn. 16: 33; 2 Tim. 3: 12). The intensity of the final conflict of righteousness and evil will rise to such a pitch [level] as to become *the great tribulation* (emphasis his).³⁷

Whatever sorrow or suffering the saints have endured on earth, God “shall wipe every tear from their eyes” (v. 17). The enslaved people of Israel endured the bitter afflictions of the Egyptians for 430 years (Ex. 12: 40). The Passover included bitter herbs (Ex. 12: 8) to symbolize the afflictions of Egypt. Likewise, many Christians have endured great suffering and affliction at the hands of their persecutors. Many have lost loved ones to death or imprisonment, bringing tears to their eyes. God will wipe away those tears as He reunites martyred loved ones to their families and restores lost properties and possessions.

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or farms for My name's sake, will receive many times as much, and will inherit eternal life. (Matthew 19:29 NASB).

³⁷ Mounce, p. 173

Revelation 8

The trumpets are warning signs to all people of the final judgment coming upon the earth. They are only warnings since they destroy only a fraction of the earth (one-third of the land and one-third of the sea—vv. 7-8). Notice that the destruction reminds us of the plagues upon Egypt during the exodus event. The terrors from the sky (v. 5) correspond to the thunder, hail, and fire of Ex. 9: 23-24. The sea turning into blood (v. 8) corresponds to the Nile River being turned into blood Ex. 7: 20. In v. 12, the third of the sun, moon, and stars being blotted out corresponds to the ninth Egyptian plague with darkness over the land for three days Ex. 10: 21-23.³⁸ The point is that the Egyptian bondage is a foreshadowing of the persecution of God's people throughout the ages; and like the Israelites, God will accomplish our exodus from the persecution of this world.

¹When the Lamb broke the **seventh seal**, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

The silence represents the hushed expectancy of the final events inaugurating eternity. Or it could be symbolic of the silence of the angels so that the prayers of the saints can be heard. Jewish tradition held that the angels sang at night but were silent during the day so that the prayers of God's people could be heard.³⁹

² And I saw the **seven angels** who stand before God,
and **seven trumpets** were given to them.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Christ comes with the sound of the trumpet. Moreover, the giving of the law in Exodus 20 was preceded by the sound of the trumpet in Exodus 19.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven **with a shout**, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16 NASB)

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a **very loud trumpet sound**, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. (Exodus 19:16 NASB)

Therefore, there is more than a slight suggestion here that the coming of Christ is the fulfillment of God's intention of bringing the whole world under His righteous and holy law—as Christ told His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come; **your will be done**, on earth as it is in heaven.”

The seven trumpets also recall the blowing of the trumpets in the **destruction of Jericho** in Joshua 6. As the OT Israelites conquered the land of Canaan, symbolizing the kingdom of man, the new covenant people will conquer the kingdom of man through the power of Christ.

Now Jericho was tightly shut because of the sons of Israel; no one went out and no one came in. ²The LORD said to Joshua, “See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king *and* the valiant warriors. ³“You shall march around the city, all the men of war circling the city once. You shall do so for six days. ⁴“Also **seven priests shall carry seven trumpets** of rams' horns before the ark; then on the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. ⁵

³⁸ See Mounce, pp. 184-188, for more details of this correspondence

³⁹ Osborne, pp. 336, 338

"It shall be that when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and the people will go up every man straight ahead." (Joshua 6:1-5 NASB)

So the people shouted, and *priests* blew the trumpets; and when the people heard the sound of the trumpet, the people **shouted with a great shout** and the wall fell down flat, so that the people went up into the city, every man straight ahead, and they took the city. (Joshua 6:20 NASB)

Notice that there were **seven priests** who carried seven trumpets, and that when these trumpets were blown, the walls of Jericho fell down. In Revelation, **seven angels are given seven trumpets**, thus emphasizing the priestly role of angels in the book of Revelation.⁴⁰

³ Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden **censer**;
and much **incense** was given to him,
so that he might add it to the **prayers of all the saints** on the golden altar
which was before the throne.

⁴ And the smoke of the **incense**,
with the **prayers of the saints**,
went up before God out of the angel's hand.

The prayers of the saints are the imprecatory prayers of 5: 8 and 6: 9-10.

⁵ Then the angel took the **censer**
and filled it with **the fire of the altar**,
and threw it to the earth;
and there followed
peals of thunder
and sounds and flashes of lightning
and an earthquake.

Note once again the similarity of language with Exodus 19. The only thing missing in Exodus is the earthquake.

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled. (Exodus 19:16 NASB)

Now the angel takes the same censer (a firepan, Num. 16: 17) and fills it with fire from the altar. He throws the fire to the earth, and this act is followed by judgment. Symbolically, the judgment upon the earth is in response to the prayers of God's people. Prayers go up, and judgment comes down.

⁶ And the seven angels
who had the seven trumpets
prepared themselves to sound them.

⁷ The **first sounded**,
and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood,

Commented [D14]: And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm. (Revelation 11:19 NAU)

Commented [D15]: Ex. 9: 20-26

⁴⁰ Osborne, 344

and they were **thrown to the earth;**
 and a **third** of the earth was **burned up,**
 and a **third** of the trees were **burned up,**
 and **all** the green grass was **burned up.**

Commented [D16]: 7: 1-2 in which the land and sea were not harmed

The **first trumpet** corresponds to the first and seventh plague upon Egypt (Ex. 7:14-25; 9:22-25). Contrary to much common thinking, “catastrophes are not signs of God’s absence....they are signs of his coming in judgment and salvation”.⁴¹ Just as the Israelites were crying for deliverance, the martyred saints are crying for God’s justice.

The judgments upon Egypt symbolized God’s judgment upon their gods. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile River as the source of life. It became a symbol of death, instead, when it was turned to blood and all the fish died. The water of life from the Nile became undrinkable. The last judgment upon the firstborn was a judgment particularly upon the belief that the pharaoh represented the god Ra. He was literally god walking on earth. Likewise, the Roman emperors often likened themselves to one or other of the Greek gods, and modern heads of state think of themselves as god-like figures. In every sense, God attacks idolatrous thinking through **trumpets** that defy false gods and establish His supremacy as the only God.

All four trumpets have in common that they affect three parts of the created order. The parts that are struck suggest that the basic content of creation is being systematically undone. Though not in the same order as in Genesis 1, the elements affected are light, air, vegetation, sun, moon, stars, sea creatures, and humans. The notion of a “de-creation” is supported by the fact that the Apocalypse climaxes in new creation (21: 1ff.)....

The first four trumpet woes could also represent a wide range of sufferings brought on people because of their idolatrous trust in the temporary world system instead of the eternal God. The sufferings are continual reminders of the impermanence of the idolatrous object of the earthdwellers trust. The sufferings are deficiencies in the earth’s resources which the ungodly depend on to meet their needs. These trials, coupled with actual death, remind them that they are ultimately insecure. The reason for their predicament is their trust in what is unstable.⁴²

“Hailstorms are a common element in the judgment theme of the OT.”⁴³

As they fled from before Israel, *while* they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; *there were* more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword. (Joshua 10:11 NASB)

As the NT people of God, we have laid down the sword and taken up the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. Christians living in antichristian nations like Pakistan where there is no rule of law and very little protection against Islam are defenseless other than the hand of God. God will come in fierce anger against godless nations. Those nations that treat his people well will be judged less severely. We should not fail to see the hand of God in catastrophic occurrences around the globe, like the tsunami in Indonesia in 2004 or earthquakes happening around the globe. God is warning the nations of the coming wrath. When Christians disassociate “natural

⁴¹ Osborne, p.340, quoting Krodel

⁴² Beale, pp. 486, 488

⁴³ Osborne, 350

disasters” from God’s wrath, they strip such events of their meaning and their value for warning unbelieving nations.

Beale has pointed out that the similarity of the trumpets in Revelation and the plagues in Egypt suggest that they are primarily given for judgment and not for warning.⁴⁴ It is clear in the Exodus event that God hardens Pharaoh’s heart before Pharaoh hardens his own heart.

The LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders which I have put in your power; **but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.** (Exodus 4:21 NASB)

God’s purpose in hardening Pharaoh’s heart was to demonstrate His glory before all the people. Had Pharaoh repented after the first plague, God would not been afforded the opportunity to multiply signs and wonders before Israel and before Egypt in contempt of the gods of Egypt.

"You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall speak to Pharaoh that he let the sons of Israel go out of his land.³ "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart **that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt.** (Exodus 7:2-3 NASB)

Only after God hardened Pharaoh’s heart did Pharaoh harden his own heart against allowing the Israelites to go. Of course, it could also be argued that Pharaoh’s heart was hardened long before God hardened it, and that the further hardening of his heart was merely judicial judgment for previously mistreating the Israelites.

But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Exodus 8:15 NASB)

Further reflection upon the passage also suggests that God was not hardening Pharaoh’s heart generally speaking, but specifically against letting Israel go. It would also appear that the Apostle Paul’s interpretation of the exodus event was that God **initiated** the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, otherwise, the objection, “Then why does God find fault?” would not apply.

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."¹⁸ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?"²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? (Romans 9:17-20 NAU)

The question, “For who resists His will?” would be incoherent if God was punishing Pharaoh for the general hard-heartedness toward Israel he had shown in the past. The point was that Pharaoh could not resist the will of God in hardening his heart—the sovereign and free activity of God. For this reason, Beale believes the trumpets function primarily as judgments and only secondarily as warnings. Judgment is a foregone conclusion.

All of these temporal judgments climax in the great Last Judgment, which is described in the seventh trumpet (11: 15-19). The exodus plagues are probably understood by John as typological

⁴⁴ Beale, pp. 465-467

foreshadowings of punishments on the ungodly during the eschatological church age, which precedes the final exodus of God’s people from this world to the new creation....These plagues are judicial punishments of the persecutors of God’s people because they have already refused to repent. The indictment assumes continued failure to repent because of a hardened attitude.⁴⁵

⁸ The **second angel sounded**,
 and *something* like a great mountain burning with fire
 was **thrown into the sea;**
 and a **third of the sea** became blood,
⁹ and a **third of the creatures** which were in the sea and had life, died;
 and a **third of the ships** were destroyed.

Mountains are used to describe kingdoms. Thomas takes the verse as a metaphor for God’s triumph over all the kingdoms of the world (Isa. 41: 14-15; 42: 13-15; Ezek. 35: 2-7).⁴⁶ (For other mountain references, see also Daniel 2: 44-45).

Thus, the mountains of man—earthly kingdoms—are contrasted with the **mountain of God** out of which a stone will be cut to destroy all earthly kingdoms. “The rich man’s wealth is his fortress, The ruin of the poor is their poverty” (Proverbs 10:15 NASB). God will strike the nations where it hurts the most—in their back pockets.

The sea lanes were the life-blood of Rome (cf. v. 8b). Its military power depended on its wealth and its wealth on world trade and commerce. Likewise, today, everything depends on trade. Destroy a nations’ ability to trade and their economic vitality is destroyed. The economic turmoil that has taken place in Greece, Spain, Portugal, Japan, and in the US is only a foreshadowing of what can happen when the economies of the world fail. Rome itself did not fail because military weakness, but through economic failure.

This is one way God will send judgment upon the earth, through economic destruction. The vision given to John may have some allusion to the words of Jesus when He says, “Truly I say to you, **whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,'** and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it will be *granted* him. (Mark 11:23 NASB). In other words, the faith of God’s people will overcome all worldly powers.

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (1 John 5:4 NASB)

Osborne believes the “great mountain burning with fire” could be a reference to a literal meteorite striking the earth (cf. Acts 19: 35 which could have been a myth based partly on truth.)⁴⁷ That is, a meteor could have struck the earth with the resulting myth of Artemis of the Ephesians. In one of the preliminary judgments upon the earth, God could send destructive meteor showers.⁴⁸

Commented [D17]:

Commented [D18]: And Jesus answered and said to them, "Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' it will happen. (Matthew 21:21 NAU)

Commented [D19]: Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD: behold, I will strike the water that is in the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned to blood.¹⁸ The fish that are in the Nile will die, and the Nile will become foul, and the Egyptians will find difficulty in drinking water from the Nile."¹⁹ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, "Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt, over their rivers, over their streams, and over their pools, and over all their reservoirs of water, that they may become blood; and there will be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone."²⁰ So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that was in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood.²¹ The fish that were in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. (Exodus 7:17-21 NAU)

⁴⁵ Beale, page unknown

⁴⁶ Derek Thomas, p. 75

⁴⁷ Osborne, p.353

⁴⁸ See also Derek Thomas, 75, who says these events could be either literal or symbolic

¹⁰The **third angel sounded**,
and a great star fell
from heaven, burning like a torch,
and it fell on a **third of the rivers and on the springs of waters**.

¹¹The name of the star is called **Wormwood**;
and a **third of the waters** became wormwood,
and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.

Wormwood was a bitter shrub which became symbolic of bitter sorrow (Prov. 5: 4; Deut. 29: 18) Even one ounce can be detected in 524 gallons of water or 2100 liters. Much of Judah's water came from natural springs, so the picture is one of the source of life becoming undrinkable. It is the **reversal of Marah** (Ex. 15: 23) in which God made bitter waters sweet. He now makes sweet water bitter.⁴⁹ Just imagine one-third of the oceanic waters, rivers and lakes of the earth becoming poisoned. God could wipe out mankind easily through the global pollution of man's water supply.⁵⁰

Osborne, unlike Beale, thinks the **thirds of partial judgment** are primarily to give people the opportunity of repentance.⁵¹ Yet, even after one-third of mankind is killed, the rest of the human population—two-thirds—does not repent. It is a curious fact that the same suffering and afflictions that cause some to repent and turn to Christ cause others to become more hardened and obstinate in their rebellion against God. The rebellion in Revelation 9: 20-21 appears to be wholesale and complete. One-third of the earth-dwellers are killed while the other two-thirds remain rebellious.

The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk;²¹ and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts. (Revelation 9:20-21 NASB)

The **second and third trumpets** also correspond with the first and seventh plagues upon Egypt (see verses above). Once again, man's presumed source of life is partially destroyed.

¹²The **fourth angel sounded**,
and a **third of the sun**
and a **third of the moon**
and a **third of the stars** were struck,
so that a **third of them** would be darkened
and the day would not shine for a **third** of it,
and the night in the same way.

Darkness often characterizes the world of evil.⁵² In John's gospel, we read,

"He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."¹⁹ "This is the judgment, that the Light

⁴⁹ Osborne, 339

⁵⁰ Osborne, 355

⁵¹ So also Mounce, 197

⁵² Osborne, 356

Commented [D20]: so that there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood. (Deuteronomy 29:18 NAU)

has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil.

²⁰ "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. (John 3:18-20 NASB)

Thus, in the fourth trumpet we see men getting what they wanted—**darkness**. The language of Revelation 8: 12 is reminiscent of Jesus' description of the final judgment at His return.

"But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matthew 24:29 NASB)

The **created order is shaken on its foundations by the return of Christ**, of which His death was only a foreshadowing. Although the spiritual symbolism is primary in the text, Jesus is most likely describing **literal** events at His second coming. The stars falling from the sky may possibly refer to an unusual meteor shower.

It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, (Luke 23:44 NASB)

The fourth trumpet also corresponds to the first plague against Egypt (Ex. 10:12-15). Throughout the exodus event, the repetitive command from the Lord emerges, "**Let my people go, that they may serve Me**" (cf. Exod. 7:16; Exod. 8:1, 20; Exod. 9:1, 13; Exod. 10:3). The people of Israel inherit the Promised Land by means of God's judgment upon Egypt and the conquest of Canaan. Considering the allusions to the exodus event in Revelation, it is appropriate to interpret **the new exodus event in Revelation as the means by which God's people inherit the new heavens and earth**. There can be no enjoyment of the new heavens and earth while God's people are being persecuted by those in alliance with Satan. Like Egypt, Satan and his alliances attempt to prevent the people of God from realizing their true purpose in life—to serve their Creator and Redeemer with their whole being. When evil is finally vanquished from the earth, Christians will be able to serve the Lord with full vigor and single-mindedness, not being distracted by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (1Jo 2:16 NASB).

Waltke points out that while liberal liberation theologians have overemphasized the political and economic salvation of oppressed peoples—based upon the exodus event—conservative theologians have not emphasized these two forms of salvation enough. "Israel was delivered to live as a free people in their own land."⁵³ He goes on to say that Israel's exodus from Egypt, and later from Babylon, typifies the spiritual exodus of the church from a world of sin and death dominated by the power of Satan. While not being delivered from Rome's tyranny, Christians in the first century were delivered from sin's tyranny and from the "satanic world system". Likewise, in the 21st century, Christians suffer oppression from cruel regimes that are economically and politically opposed to them. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah about "His departure which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem" (Luke 9:30-31 NASB). The word, "departure" is the Greek word, "exodus". As Moses led Israel to freedom through the Red Sea, Jesus leads His church through the ordeal of His vicarious death on the cross. We are crucified, buried, and risen with Him (Rom. 6: 1-11). The purpose or goal of our vicarious death with Christ is that we rise with Him to a newness of life. "Even so

⁵³ Waltke, p. 391

consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts” (Romans 6:11-12 NASB).

Continuing with this paradigm, the present exodus of the church from the tyranny of the world system is but a foreshadowing of the consummation of salvation at which we shall have spiritual, political, and economic deliverance from worldly oppression. Christ will appear to vanquish all His, and all our, enemies; and His people will experience their “final exodus” from this world to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4: 13-18).⁵⁴

¹³ Then I looked,
and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven,
saying with a loud voice,
"Woe, woe, woe **to those who dwell on the earth,**
because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet
of the three angels who are about to sound!"

While the first four trumpets are aimed primarily at the **earth**, the last three are aimed at **“those who dwell on the earth”**, that is, unbelievers. So deadly are they that they are no longer called trumpets but “woes”. This bird of prey could either be an eagle or a vulture, but most likely this is the fourth creature encircling the throne of God in heaven.

The first creature *was* like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature *was* like a flying eagle. (Revelation 4:7 NASB)

The eagle becomes the voice of death for “those who dwell on the earth” but in chapter 12 becomes the agent of salvation for the woman persecuted by the red dragon. In the same way, the Red Sea was the **passage of salvation** for Israel but a **watery grave** for the Egyptian army.

But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. (Revelation 12:14 NASB)

The eagle is symbolic of God’s salvation for His people, Israel.⁵⁵

"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. (Exodus 19:4 NASB)

"Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, That hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions. (Deuteronomy 32:11 NASB)

However, the eagle can also be used as a metaphor for destruction for apostate Israel.

"The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, (Deuteronomy 28:49 NASB)

⁵⁴ Waltke, p. 393

⁵⁵ Beale, pp. 490-91

"Behold, he goes up like clouds, And his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are ruined!" (Jeremiah 4:13 NASB)

As the eagle hovers over apostate Israel as a bird of prey, so the eagle hovers over unbelieving mankind as a bird of prey. Thus, the eagle here is a symbol not only of salvation but destruction—salvation to believers and destruction to the enemies of God, including unbelievers in the church. The eagle's message dominates chapter 9.⁵⁶

Revelation 9

¹Then the **fifth angel sounded**,
and I saw a star **from heaven which had fallen to the earth**;
and the **key** of the bottomless pit was given to him.

There are differences of opinion about whether this "star" is a good angel or a fallen angel. Isaiah 14 may provide a clue.

And it will be in the day when the LORD gives you rest from your pain and turmoil and harsh service in which you have been enslaved,⁴ that you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, "How the oppressor has ceased, *And how* fury has ceased!" (Isaiah 14:3-4 NASB)

"**How you have fallen from heaven**, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations!¹³ "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north.'¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' (Isaiah 14:12-14 NASB)

It is clear from the passage that Isaiah is speaking of **the king of Babylon**, yet this king epitomizes (represents) all those who exalt themselves above God. Later Jewish literature applied this passage to Satan. Yet, Osborne says that this would be the only place in Revelation where God uses a **fallen** angel to execute his will. How could a **fallen** angel be entrusted with the key to the abyss—**his own prison**?⁵⁷ (In Revelation 20: 1, a good angel comes down from heaven with the key to the abyss and binds Satan.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, **holding the key of the abyss** and a great chain in his hand.² And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; (Revelation 20:1-2 NASB)

Beale argues that the angel of 9: 1 is a fallen, evil angel because of the similarity of wording with 8: 10.⁵⁸

The third angel sounded, and a great star **fell** from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters. (Revelation 8:10 NASB)

Commented [D21]: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matthew 24:29 NAU)

⁵⁶ Osborne, p. 360

⁵⁷ Osborne, p. 362

⁵⁸ Beale, p. 491

Also, we may compare the wording with Luke 10: 18 where the same word *pipto* (fall) is used. In Revelation 12: 9, Satan and his angels are thrown down to the earth.

And He said to them, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning. (Luke 10:18 NASB)

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Revelation 12:9 NASB)

Also helpful is the fact that in Revelation 9: 11, the angel of the abyss is given the name Abaddon ("Destroyer").

However, the "star" of 8: 10 **may not be an angel at all**, but something else, possibly a celestial meteorite or some other "natural disaster" which God uses to punish mankind. Along with Osborne, Mounce identifies the star in 8: 10 as "a mass of molten material".⁵⁹ However, the "star" in 9: 1 is a **person** who receives a key to open the abyss. The association of this angel with the angel who has the key to the abyss (20: 1) strongly suggests that this is a **good angel** whom God uses to do His will upon those who dwell upon the earth. He is probably the same angel.⁶⁰

[I use "natural disaster" in quotation marks according to its usual designation—disasters with natural causes. Yet, it is a regrettable term. There are no disasters in this world caused by impersonal "nature" or "mother nature" as it is sometimes called. The Lord upholds all things by the word of his power (Heb. 1: 3). The philosopher and theologian Samuel Clarke, in his Boyle lectures of 1705, noted that natural forces or natural laws are simply **the activity of God upon matter at any moment of time**. The "course of nature"—as it was then called, is a "fiction" and is simply "God's producing certain effects in a continual and uniform manner." **Miracles, therefore, are not violations of natural laws or contrary to nature**; they are merely unusual effects which digress from the continual and uniform manner—the unusual "interposition of God into the regular order in which he acts".⁶¹]

² He opened the **bottomless pit**,
and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace;
and the **sun and the air were darkened** by the smoke of the pit.

Excursus: The Abyss

The bottomless pit and the abyss are one and the same. Satan will be imprisoned in the abyss for a thousand years (20: 1-3). A very interesting parallel passage concerning the abyss is Luke 8: 31, Jesus' confrontation with the demons.⁶²

They were imploring Him not to command them to go away into the abyss. (Luke 8:31 NASB)

Commented [D22]: "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (Matthew 24:29 NAU)

⁵⁹ Mounce, p. 192

⁶⁰ Mounce, pp. 192-193

⁶¹ William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, p. 252.

⁶² The following commentary on this passage is taken from McNeill, *Synoptic Gospels*, unpublished.

While the word “torment” has reference to the final destruction of demons in the “lake of fire” (Rev. 20: 10), the “abyss” (Lk. 8: 31) is most likely a reference to the **temporal** punishment of demons before their **final** punishment.⁶³ Revelation 20: 1-3 teaches that Satan will be bound and thrown into the “abyss” for a thousand years so that he will not be able to deceive the nations as he had before. But after a thousand years, he will be released from the abyss and will make war against the saints (Rev. 20: 7-9). Thus, Satan’s imprisonment in the “abyss” is **temporary** until he is released just before the second coming of Christ and the final judgment.

If the abyss is a temporary place of punishment for Satan, it is also most likely a temporary place of punishment for demons until the final “torment” in the “lake of fire”. This theory is supported by such texts as Jude 6, “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in **eternal bonds** under darkness for the judgment of the great day.” When Satan rebelled, many of the angels in heaven rebelled with him. The Bible does not tell us **when** these fallen demons were placed in “eternal bonds” but it is possible that they were imprisoned at the same time Satan was imprisoned (Rev. 20: 1-3), or **some** of the fallen angels may have been immediately placed in the abyss while **others** were allowed to roam the earth. At this point, they are “kept” (*tereo*—held in custody) until the final judgment.

For passages related to the binding of Satan, see Matt. 12: 29; Mk. 3: 27. Satan is the “strong man” whom Jesus has bound. It is difficult to understand how Satan continues to blind the minds of the unbelieving (2 Cor. 4: 4) while being bound, but the typical reformed position is that to some extent his power on earth was seriously diminished at the first coming of Christ with his atoning work and resurrection. (See also Rev. 12 and Lk. 10: 17-18, references to Satan falling from heaven.) The passage in Revelation 20: 1-3 says that he can no longer deceive the “**nations**”; nothing is said about his inability to blind “**individuals**”. Nevertheless, it is difficult to explain how Satan can be bound in the abyss “shut and sealed over him” while his influence on earth is evident to all. The Dispensationalists have a ready answer for this, saying that Satan is bound during the 1000 year reign of Christ on earth, but their position, in my opinion, brings up more problems than it solves.

We find the same idea expressed in 2 Pet. 2: 4, “...God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, **reserved for judgment**....” The words, “reserved [*tereo*—the same word used in Jude 6] for judgment” indicate that “hell”—not the same term as “lake of fire”—or the “pits of darkness” are temporary places of confinement for demons until the final Day of Judgment.⁶⁴

Our brief examination of the above texts has provided the background for questions which arise from the healing of the demoniac in Luke 8. The demons beg Jesus not to send them into the abyss (*abusson*, Lk: 8: 31, the same word used for abyss in Rev. 20: 3). Exactly what did this punishment imply for the demons which had been roaming freely upon the earth and were doing what they wished to their possessed victims? It meant that they were faced with the possibility of being **banished from the earth forever only to await their final destruction in the lake of fire at the final judgment**. It seems unreasonable to assume that every time Jesus cast out demons during his ministry, they were simply free to possess someone else. What would be the

⁶³ For a more thorough treatment of this position, see C. Jonathin Seraiah, *The End of All Things: A Defense of the Future*, pp. 90-97

⁶⁴ Seraiah, pp. 92-93

point of the exorcism? Matthew 12: 42-45 may seem to indicate otherwise, but that text speaks only of a demon which left a man on his own free will, not one who was cast out by force. Moreover, if the demons could simply possess another man after being cast out of the Gadarene demoniac, then **why are they so afraid** of the consequences of Jesus' actions against them?⁶⁵ The demons were faced with a **real punishment** which terrified them, but they also figured that their final judgment was premature ("before the appointed time").

We can only speculate why Jesus granted their request to enter the swine. Perhaps they wished to generate ill feelings against Jesus who would be accused of killing the swine.⁶⁶ If this was their purpose, it worked, for the whole population of the region asked Jesus to leave. Alternatively, their request could have been one of providing temporary housing for themselves until the next human victim. This motive is unlikely if the demons themselves destroyed the swine by causing them to run off the cliff and drown. But how do we know that the **demons** caused the drowning of the herd—a common but unproven assumption? Jesus had control over the demons, and **He** may have caused the herd of swine to drown in order not to grant them the ultimate goal of their request, embodiment in the swine. After the swine drowned, the demons were now left in the same predicament as before, without bodies wandering around and seeking rest in another victim (Matt. 12: 43) **or banished to the abyss**—my preference. I believe that after the drowning of the swine, the demons were then and there banished to the abyss where they could do no one any more harm. Jesus refused to grant their ultimate request—and why should he?—continued existence upon the earth. If one has a problem with Jesus destroying someone's pigs, he must keep in mind that they were **His** pigs in the first place.

Returning to v. 2, the "smoke of a great furnace" is once more an indirect reference to Exodus 19: 18 and the giving of the law.

Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and **its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace**, and the whole mountain quaked violently. (Exodus 19:18 NASB)

Here in Revelation 9: 2 we have the curse of God's law upon unbelieving and rebellious mankind. Just as the sky was darkened at Mt. Sinai, the sun is darkened here and in Joel 2: 10 which also speaks of a locust plague that devours everything in its path. The difference is that Joel could have been speaking of a literal locust plague.

Before them [*locusts*] the earth quakes, The heavens tremble, The sun and the moon grow dark And the stars lose their brightness. (Joel 2:10 NASB)

³ Then out of the smoke came **locusts** upon the earth, and **power was given them**, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

'For if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring **locusts** into your territory. ⁵ They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They will also eat

⁶⁵ Geldenhuys, *Luke*, p. 255

⁶⁶ Hendriksen, *Matthew*, p. 415

Commented [D23]: Exodus 10: 4-19—the plague against Egypt

the rest of what has escaped—what is left to you from the hail—and they will eat every tree which sprouts for you out of the field. (Exodus 10:4-5 NASB)

Note the difference. The locusts in Egypt attack the vegetation, but the locusts of Rev. 9 attack only those who do not have the seal of God on their heads.

⁴They were told
 not to hurt the grass of the earth,
 nor any green thing,
 nor any tree,
 but **only the men** who do not have the seal of God on their
 foreheads.

Commented [D24]: See 8: 7 in which the trees and grass were burned up

Commented [D25]: Exodus 13: 6

⁵And they were **not permitted to kill anyone**,
 but to torment for **five months**;
 and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.

⁶And in those days
men will seek death
 and will not find it;
they will long to die,
 and death flees from them.

⁷The appearance of the **locusts** was
like horses prepared for battle;
 and on their heads
 appeared to be crowns like gold,
 and their faces
 were **like** the faces of men.

⁸They had hair
like the hair of women,
 and their teeth
 were **like** the teeth of lions.

⁹They had breastplates
like breastplates of iron;
 and the sound of their wings
 was **like** the sound of chariots,
 of many horses rushing to battle.

¹⁰They have tails
like scorpions, and stings;
 and in their tails
 is their power to hurt men for **five months**.

Long-haired, horse-shaped, flying locusts with scorpion tails and golden crowns above human faces marred by lion's teeth, they have to be reckoned among the more bizarre creatures in the Apocalypse. The total impact is one of unnatural and awesome cruelty....Most commentators note the similarity between the head of the locust and that of the horse....This likeness accounts for the word for locust in German (*Heupferd*, hayhorse) and in Italian (*cavalletta*, little horse)....The idea that it [the hair of women] symbolizes seductiveness ignores the overall grotesque appearance of the locust.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Mounce, pp. 195-196

¹¹ They have as **king over them**, the angel of the abyss;
his name in Hebrew is **Abaddon**,
and in the Greek he has the name **Apollyon**.

The king here is not the angel with the key to the abyss, as Beale suggests.⁶⁸ The Greek equivalent, Apollyon, is an interesting addition which implicates the emperor Domitian of Rome as the king of the destructive forces of hell. Domitian imagined himself as the earthly incarnation of Apollo. This allusion is supported by the fact that the locust was one of the symbols of the god Apollo. If this allusion to Domitian is correct, it is a “master stroke of irony: the destructive host of hell had as its king the emperor of Rome!”⁶⁹

¹² The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.

Mounce mentions swarms of locusts four miles long and one hundred feet thick.⁷⁰ In Algiers, 200,000 people died of famine after a locust swarm.⁷¹ However, no commentator that I know of suggests that this is a literal locust plague. Thomas maintains that the plague represents evil forces that bring men into terrible spiritual bondage.⁷² Evil forces are released into human history that are both “attractive and repulsive” at the same time (however, see Mounce’ quote above concerning their grotesque appearance.) Thomas quotes Ephesians 6: 12 and 1 Jn. 5: 19.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. (Ephesians 6:12 NASB)

We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one. (1 John 5:19 NASB)

The word, “like” is used seven times in vv. 7-10, indicating that John is having trouble describing what he is seeing.⁷³ This also gives us a clue that he is not describing literal locusts. The destruction coming from the pit is interpreted by Beale as deceptive influences—false teaching, affecting **unbelievers but not believers**.⁷⁴ Thomas, on the other hand, interprets the locusts as more of a moral judgment upon mankind; yet, doctrinal error, idolatry, and immorality go hand in hand.

But where is the judgment? If we glance at this world with its God-defiant audaciousness, where are the judgments of which these passages speak? Although it would be all too possible to discover answers to this question in the physical calamities that befall the earth, we seriously misunderstand the nature of the judgment if we think solely this way. Paul’s answer to this very question is: these expressions of defiance *are* the judgments! God gives men over to shameful lusts. This is his answer (*Rom. 1: 26*). The very expressions of ungodliness in the world are the evidence of the curse. Those who deny the existence of God’s judgments in this world are experiencing it! God has abandoned

⁶⁸ Beale, p. 492.

⁶⁹ Mounce, pp. 197-198

⁷⁰ Mounce, p.194

⁷¹ Mounce, p.194 footnote, citing Barclay

⁷² Thomas, p.77

⁷³ Beale, p. 499

⁷⁴ Beale, p. 503

them to their folly. God does not destroy man, even in hell. Hell will be a confirmation of man's choice: to live with the consequences of his own choice.⁷⁵

This interpretation is supported by v. 21, "and they **did not repent** of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts." Such things are themselves judgments upon sinful mankind. Contrary to this interpretation, all of these sins affect not only the wicked but the righteous. For example Christians get murdered and robbed, and Christians have unfaithful spouses who commit adultery. Yet, the passage indicates that **the locusts were told not to harm anything except those who did not have the seal of God on their forehead (v. 4)**. Therefore, the locusts must represent the inward psychological and emotional turmoil of the wicked rather than anything external to them. "The locusts cause and reveal to the wicked the hunger and emptiness of their hearts."⁷⁶ Hendriksen says that the locusts describe "the operation of the powers of darkness in the soul of the wicked during this present age. Here are the demons, robbing men of all *light*, that is, of all true righteousness and holiness; joy and peace; wisdom and understanding."⁷⁷

Although men will seek death, they will not be able to find it (v. 6). They desire death but are unwilling to commit suicide.

The effect of the locusts is to remind compromisers and some of the church's ungodly persecutors that their idolatry is vain and that they are separated from the living God and consequently have no hope....Likewise, the Exodus plagues demonstrated that the gods of Egypt were false and that Yahweh was the only true God. This realization caused the Egyptians psychological turmoil because of the realization that their religious commitments were vain and that they were in opposition to God through their idolatry and their persecution of God's people. This realization included the anxious conviction of sin, not accompanied by repentance (so Pharaoh's response to God in Exod. 9: 27-28; 10: 16-17). As with the Egyptians, so now the fifth trumpet plague also hardens the victims against turning to God from their despair. Such hardening is actually a deceptive influence of the demons.⁷⁸

¹³ Then the **sixth angel sounded**,
and I heard a **voice**
from the four horns of the **golden altar** which is before God,
¹⁴ one saying to the **sixth angel** who had the trumpet,
"Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

Commented [D26]: See other references to "a voice"

¹⁵ And the **four angels**,
who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year,
were released,
so that they would kill a third of mankind.

Commented [D27]: After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. ² And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, (Revelation 7:1-2 NAU)

Commented [D28]: Note references to "third" elsewhere

These four angels are not the angels of 7: 1 who are themselves **holding back** the four winds of judgment. The angels in this picture are now bound themselves before being released to do harm to mankind. Their location is also different. The four angels in 7:1 are at the four corners of the earth, not at the Euphrates River.⁷⁹ The four angels of 9: 15 are in charge of the 200 million

⁷⁵ Thomas, pp. 78-79
⁷⁶ Beale, p. 500
⁷⁷ Hendriksen, 147
⁷⁸ Beale, p.498
⁷⁹ Mounce, p. 200, so also Beale, p. 507

horsemen of v. 16. The Euphrates River was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, beyond which was occupied by the Parthians who had defeated Crassus of Rome in 53 BC and Vologeses in 62 AD. Yet, we should not literalize the 200 million horsemen as a Parthian invasion of Rome. Two hundred million horsemen and their plague of death and destruction upon one third of the earth's population is "an eschatological event of fantastic proportions" not to be limited to a literal war.⁸⁰ The Roman army of the first century boasted a considerable number: 125,000 soldiers along with auxiliary armies of the same size, but two million dwarfs the size of even the Roman army.⁸¹ Remember also that this trumpet blast is directed to those who dwell on the earth, unbelievers. While the locusts were not allowed to kill mankind, these angels are allowed to do so—indicating both spiritual and physical death.⁸² The angels are in a state of readiness. "God has fixed the exact time for every event."⁸³

¹⁶The number of the armies of the horsemen was **two hundred million**;
I heard the number of them.

¹⁷And this is how I saw in the vision
the horses and those who sat on them;
the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone;
and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions;
and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and **brimstone**.

The description here should not be literalized as tanks, cannons, battleships, etc. as Hendriksen and Walvoord suggest, but may be an allusion to monsters like Leviathan which were mythological figures.⁸⁴ For fire and brimstone, see Gen. 19: 24 and the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. This suggests once more that mankind is being punished for its immorality.

¹⁸ **A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues,**
by the **fire**
and the **smoke**
and the **brimstone** which proceeded out of their mouths.

¹⁹For the power of the horses
is in their mouths and in their tails;
for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.

²⁰The **rest of mankind**, who were **not killed by these plagues,**
did not repent of the works of their hands,
so as not to worship demons,
and the idols of gold
and of silver
and of brass
and of stone
and of wood,

⁸⁰ Mounce, p. 201

⁸¹ Osborne, p. 381

⁸² Beale, p. 512

⁸³ Mounce, p. 201

⁸⁴ Mounce, p. 202

Commented [D29]: 6: 1-6 See references to the four horsemen

Commented [D30]: Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven, (Genesis 19:24 NAU)
Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. (Psalm 11:6 NAU)
"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. ²⁸"It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building; ²⁹but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. (Luke 17:26-29 NAU)
cf. Rev. 14: 10; 19: 20; 20: 10; 21: 8

which can neither see
nor hear
nor walk;

²¹ and **they**
did not repent of their murders
nor of their sorceries
nor of their immorality
nor of their thefts.

The delusion of sin is evident here. Although a third of mankind has been destroyed by these forces of evil, the rest of mankind continues to worship them. Although warned, men persist in sin.⁸⁵ Although repentance is mentioned here, it is not directly stated that the intended **purpose** of the plagues was to bring men to repentance, as some commentators claim.

The “plagues” were never intended to cause the vast majority of idolaters to “repent” of worshipping demons, but only have the effect that those “not having the seal of God” remain in their hardened condition....These plagues will have a redeeming effect only on a remnant of compromisers inside the church and idolaters outside the church, who, it will turn out, will have been sealed beforehand and finally benefit from its protective function....

The pattern of the exodus plagues is still apparent. Just as the plague of death against the firstborn of Egypt ultimately led to hardening instead of softening the remaining Egyptians, so the plagues here have the dual effect of death and continuing delusion for the remainder (cf. Exod. 14: 4-8, 17). Just as the death of the firstborn led to the decisive judgment at the Red Sea, so here the death of others as a warning sign does not induce repentance but prepares for the final judgment of the intractably impenitent at the seventh trumpet (11: 18). This reaction is implicitly part of the purpose of the plagues, especially in the light of the overall intention of hardening inherent throughout the exodus plagues...and the ideal of deception and judgment inferred from 9: 17-19. This is consistent with the probability that the sixth trumpet, like the fifth, is meant as a judgment only against those who do not have God’s protective seal (9: 4). Therefore, the sixth trumpet includes spiritual-physical death for some and hardening, resulting in deception, for others as they refuse to heed the divine warnings and to turn in faith to the true God....

The reason for “warning” the remaining unbelievers is not to accomplish actual repentance among the majority, since they did not have it in them, so to speak, to repent. Rather, the theological purpose is that God, by providing sufficient opportunities for spiritual reform should demonstrate his sovereignty and especially his justice in finally judging the entire host of “unsealed” people at the seventh trumpet. The pastoral purpose is to remind readers that antagonism to their faithful witness will continue to the end of history and that they should not be disheartened since it is part of God’s plan in which they can trust.⁸⁶

So also Osborne and Mounce,

Yet with all this, with the natural disasters of the first four trumpets, the supernatural torment of the fifth trumpet, and the horrible demonic cavalry that produces the greatest death count in the history of this world; people will still reject the god of the universe and refuse to repent.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Mounce, p. 204

⁸⁶ Beale, pp. 517-518

⁸⁷ Osborne, p. 376

“Nowhere will you find a more accurate picture of sinful humanity pressed to the extreme. One would think that the terrors of God’s wrath would bring rebels to their knees. Not so. Past the point of no return, they respond to greater punishment with increased rebellion. Such is the sinful nature untouched and unmoved by the mercies of God.”⁸⁸

Revelation 10

I saw **another strong angel**

coming down out of heaven,
clothed with a cloud;
and the rainbow was upon his head,
and his face was like the sun,
and his feet like pillars of fire;

² and he had in his hand a **little book** which was open.

He placed his right foot on the sea
and his left on the land;

³ and he cried out with a loud voice,
as when a lion roars;

and when he had cried out,
the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.

⁴ When the seven peals of thunder had spoken,

I was about to write;
and I heard a voice from heaven saying,
"Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken
and do not write them."

⁵ Then **the angel** whom I saw

standing on the sea
and on the land

lifted up his right hand to heaven,
⁶ and swore by Him who lives forever and ever,
WHO CREATED HEAVEN
AND THE THINGS IN IT,
AND THE EARTH
AND THE THINGS IN IT,
AND THE SEA
AND THE THINGS IN IT,

that there will be delay no longer,

⁷ but in the days of the voice of the **seventh angel**,

when he is about to sound,
then the mystery of God is finished,
as He preached to His servants the prophets.

By the time we come to chapter 10, judgment upon the earth has escalated (intensified) to the point that “there shall be delay no longer” (v. 6)—final judgment is about to come. Yet, it does not come until 11:15 and the **sound of the seventh angel**. There is no way of discerning the period of time which elapses between the **partial judgment** of the four angels who bring destruction to a “third of mankind” (9: 18) and the **final judgment**. Likewise, any attempt to pinpoint the timing of the return of Christ in history is futile from the start.

Commented [D31]: Rev. 7: 2; 8: 3

Commented [D32]: 10: 9

Commented [D33]: 10: 1

⁸⁸ Mounce, quoted from Osborne, p. 376

The angel in chap. 10 is a giant who is able to place one foot on the sea and the other on the land. He is accompanied by “seven peals of thunder” (symbols of judgment for the wicked) and a “cloud” and “rainbow” (symbols of God’s presence and promise of covenant love for his people.⁸⁹ The salvation of God’s people comes through the destruction of their enemies. At present, the enemies of God are being destroyed through persuasion—the preaching of the word of God. At the end, the time for persuasion will be past; and those who have refused to repent will face the only possible outcome, destruction.

Although some have interpreted this angel as Christ, in the book of Revelation Christ never appears as an angel. However, the description reminds us of God’s appearance to the Israelites in Exodus 14—a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day—symbols of God’s presence with His people providing protection and guidance. Likewise, the rainbow reminds us His covenant promise to Noah.⁹⁰ He is clothed with a cloud, reminding us of the vision of Daniel 7, and his face was like the sun as in Revelation 1: 16. The rainbow may be a reference to the throne room scene of 4: 3 and the book of v. 2 to the book of 5: 5-6.⁹¹

And He who was sitting *was* like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and *there was* a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. (Revelation 4:3 NASB)

If, indeed, this angel is Christ, other conclusions follow. His presence here with John—an apostle representing the church—indicates God’s continuing presence and protection of His people. As God was with Israel in the wilderness, Christ is with the “new Israel in the wilderness of the world”.⁹² Moreover, the ironic method by which Christ overcomes the world is the method of suffering and death, precisely the method of Chapter 11, the faithful witnesses of the church rejected by the world who puts Christians to death even as they put Christ to death.

“The persecution of the church is thus the secret weapon by which God intends to win his victory over the church’s persecutors” ...⁹³

The mysterious nature of the saints’ victory is to be understood as having the same ironic nature as Christ’s victory through his apparent defeat by the same evil kingdom.⁹⁴

By placing one foot on land and the other on the sea, Christ indicates that he has dominion over the entire universe (cf. Joshua 10: 24). This fact becomes important when the dragon stands on the seashore to bring up the beast from the sea (Rev. 13: 1). In other words, Christ remains in control of the cosmos despite the threat of the dragon and the beast. Yet, it can be said that all of these conclusions follow whether the angel is Christ or the representative of Christ. The symbolism still applies.

The peals of thunder represent God’s retribution upon the wicked (8: 5; cf. 11: 19 and 16: 18) corresponding to the thunder at the giving of the law at Sinai (Ex. 19: 16). Whatever it was that

⁸⁹ Hendrikson, p. 149

⁹⁰ Mounce, p. 207

⁹¹ Beale, p. 524

⁹² Beale, p. 525

⁹³ Beale, p. 544, quoting Caird, p. 128

⁹⁴ Beale, p. 544

the seven peals of thunder spoke, we will never know this side of heaven. John was just about to write down what they said when a voice from heaven told John to seal them up and not write them. We are reminded of the inexpressible words which Paul was not permitted to speak (2 Cor. 12: 4). It may be correct in saying that the voices of thunder were about to bring additional plagues upon mankind, but that their lack of repentance rendered the additional plagues unnecessary. It was too late to utter other warnings that lack of repentance would render useless.⁹⁵ This assumes, however, that the plagues in chapters 9 and 10 are primarily designed to bring men to repentance, something denied by Beale. Rather, the locusts and plagues are closely associated with the plagues of Egypt for the purpose of demonstrating God's power against all false gods. "But, indeed, for this reason I have allowed you to remain, in order to show you My power and in order to proclaim My name through all the earth." (Exodus 9:16 NASB) Whatever the reason for their not being written down, God will delay no longer in avenging His people (v. 5). Hendriksen offers this explanation for not writing the voices.

The meaning is clearly this: never shall we be able to know and to describe *all* the factors and agencies that determine the future.—We know the meaning of the lampstands, the seals, the trumpets, the bowls, etc., but there are other forces at work; there are other principles that are operating in this universe, namely, the seven thunders. What they are we do not know. Hence, let us be very careful in making predictions regarding the future: we may be leaving out a very important factor!⁹⁶

Likewise Beale,

The point could be that, despite God's disclosures throughout the Apocalypse, the totality of his plans will still remain hidden from humanity until the end of history.⁹⁷

The command not to write them down is in direct contrast to other occasions in Revelation when John is expressly told to write things down (Rev. 1:11; 2: 1, 8, 12, 18; 3: 1, 7, 12, 14; 14: 13; 19: 9; 21: 5). According to Mounce,

Man's adamant [unyielding] decision not to repent (9: 20-21) would render another series useless. Possibly it is too late to record any further warnings....In the verses which immediately follow, an angel under oath will declare that there shall be no further delay (vss. 5-7)...From this point forward God will not intervene to give man further opportunity to repent.⁹⁸

The phrase, "there will be delay no longer" reminds us of the question of the martyrs in 6: 10 and the response in 6: 11.

¹⁰and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" ¹¹And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until *the number of* their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (Revelation 6:10-11 NASB)

The voice of the seventh angel is termed a **mystery**...

⁹⁵ Mounce, pp. 209-210

⁹⁶ Hendriksen, pp. 149-150

⁹⁷ Beale, p. 534

⁹⁸ Mounce, pp. 209-211

...not because it is something entirely unknown, but because it would have remained unknown if God had not revealed it—this mystery of God’s decree with respect to the history of the world is about to reach its culmination in the final judgment.⁹⁹

Compare v. 7 with Romans 16: 25-26.¹⁰⁰

Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of **the mystery** which has been kept secret for long ages past,²⁶ **but now is manifested**, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, *leading* to obedience of faith; (Romans 16:25-26 NASB)

“...the mystery of God is finished” (v. 7) compares with “the wrath of God is finished” in 15: 1 and “the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished” in 15: 8. As the secret will of God in salvation is manifested in the gospel, the secret will of God in judgment is manifested in the prophetic scriptures and finally revealed to all mankind in the final judgment.

Although the angel says there will be no more delay, the seventh angel does not sound until Revelation 11: 15. Not only does the world refuse to repent after the six plagues, it also kills the two witnesses of Revelation 11. The delay is only apparent since the witnesses of chapter 11 represent the suffering witness of the church throughout the same time period as the six plagues. During the time that God is judging the world, the church is bearing witness to Christ.¹⁰¹ A purely chronological understanding of Revelation is thus discouraged.

The “mystery” in v. 7 is the “purpose of God as revealed in the consummation [fulfillment] of human history” This interpretation agrees with the revelation in 11: 15 that “the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ...”¹⁰² It is a mystery only to those who do not read and believe the Bible, for when Christ comes to consummate His kingdom, it should come as no surprise to His people (1 Thes. 5: 1-2).

⁸ Then the voice which I heard from heaven,
I heard again speaking with me,
 and saying,
 "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel
 who stands on the sea and on the land."

⁹ So I went to the angel,
 telling him to give me the little book.

And he said to me,
 "Take it and eat it;
 it will make your stomach bitter,
 but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."

¹⁰ I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it,
 and in my mouth it was sweet as honey;
 and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.

Commented [D34]: 10: 5

Commented [D35]: 10:2

Commented [D36]: Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." ² So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. ³ He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. (Ezekiel 3:1-3 NAU)

⁹⁹ Hendriksen, p. 150
¹⁰⁰ quoted by Beale, p. 543
¹⁰¹ Hendriksen, pp. 150-151
¹⁰² Mounce, p. 212

This command to eat the book corresponds to the one given to Ezekiel.

Then He said to me, "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel." ² So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. ³ He said to me, "Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you." Then I ate it, and it was **sweet as honey in my mouth.** ⁴ Then He said to me, "Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. ⁵ "For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, *but* to the house of Israel, ⁶ nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you; ⁷ yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate. (Ezekiel 3:1-7 NASB)

John must assimilate the message before communicating the message to others.¹⁰³ Hendriksen says the scroll is the gospel which is...

...glorious and sweet...But its proclamation is ever followed by bitter persecution...the apostle must not merely understand and digest the message of the Gospel; he must *experience* both its sweetness and the suffering, the cross-bearing, which is ever the portion of those who truthfully proclaim it.¹⁰⁴

Before the kingdom of Christ is consummated in 11: 15, more persecution will come upon the church represented by the "two witnesses" of 11: 3-12.¹⁰⁵ It should be remembered that the book of Revelation began with Christ's warning to the churches. The eating of the scroll is an obvious reference to Ezekiel's commissioning as a prophet to Israel to warn her of apostasy. Likewise, here. The message in Revelation is to the church, not to Israel, to avoid compromise with the world.¹⁰⁶

The book has been interpreted as the gospel—or, more broadly, the prophetic ministry of the church—which is "sweet" to the ears of believers but one which causes them hardships ("bitter") when it is rejected by the world (cf. 11: 1-13). The apostle John—and by extension the whole church—must not only understand the message of the gospel, but must also experience its sweetness and suffering through bearing the cross of Christ.¹⁰⁷ Assimilation of the content of the scroll is crucial before the prophet can preach to others. It reveals the suffering the church must endure in the last days of Satanic opposition. Thus, it specifically reveals the story of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 who represent the persecuted church.¹⁰⁸ Beale says that the eating the scroll signifies Johns' total identification with its message.¹⁰⁹

Before the final triumph of believers, they will go through many ordeals and persecution. The afflictions of the church do not contradict the fact that the trumpets of judgment will not harm the church. The witnesses are not delivered **from** martyrdom but **through** martyrdom.

¹⁰³ Mounce, pp. 214-215

¹⁰⁴ Hendriksen, p. 151, emphasis his

¹⁰⁵ Mounce, p. 216

¹⁰⁶ Beale, p. 551

¹⁰⁷ Hendriksen, p. 151

¹⁰⁸ Mounce, pp. 214, 216

¹⁰⁹ Beale, p. 550

The prospect of no further delay in the fulfillment of God's eternal purposes is sweet indeed. That it will involve a bitter prelude is hard to swallow.¹¹⁰

¹¹ And they said to me, "You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

This fourfold classification—peoples, nations, tongues, and tribes—is used five times in Revelation. Here "kings" replaces "tribes" to suggest the priority of prophetic utterance to human rank or social status.¹¹¹

Revelation 11

¹Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff;
and **someone** said,

"Get up and measure
the temple of God
and the altar,
and those who worship in it.

²"Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it,
for it has been given to the nations;
and they will tread under foot the holy city for **forty-two months**."

Measuring the temple seems to correspond to the application of the seal of God on the forehead of believers (7: 3). The temple refers not to the literal OT temple just prior to its destruction in 70 AD, but to the church—the eschatological temple of Ezekiel 40—48.¹¹² In these 9 chapters in Ezekiel, the temple is measured and restored.

By defiling her worship, Israel had rendered herself unclean and had defiled temple, city and land. From such defilement God could only withdraw and judge his people with national destruction.

But God's faithfulness to his covenant and his desire to save were so great that he would revive his people once more, shepherd them with compassion, cleanse them of all their defilement, reconstitute them as a perfect expression of his kingdom under the hand of "David" (34: 23-24 [a reference to Christ]), overwhelm all the forces and powers arrayed against them, display his glory among the nations and restore the glory of his presence to the holy city.

Ezekiel powerfully depicts the grandeur and glory of God's sovereign rule...and his holiness, which he jealously safeguards. The book's theological center is the unfolding of God's saving purposes in the history of the world—from the time in which he must withdraw from the defilement of his covenant people to the culmination of his grand design of redemption. The message of Ezekiel, which is ultimately eschatological, anticipates—even demands—God's future works in history proclaimed by the NT.¹¹³

Therefore, by commissioning Ezekiel to measure the temple, God is protecting Israel from further spiritual harm and **securing the transformation of his covenant people comprised in the faithful remnant**. He is also looking ahead to the **new Israel of God, the church**, who will

¹¹⁰ Mounce, p.216

¹¹¹ Mounce, p. 216

¹¹² cf. Mounce, Beale, Osborne

¹¹³ Zondervan NIV Study Bible

Commented [D37]:

Commented [D38]: There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. (Revelation 13:5 NAU)

He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. (Daniel 7:25 NAU)

But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. (Revelation 12:14 NAU)

dwell in the new temple-city, the new Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven (Rev. 21). Likewise in Revelation, measuring the inner sanctuary of the temple symbolizes the **spiritual protection of the true people of God**. They are measured, corresponding to the numbering and sealing of the tribes of Israel and the countless numbers from every tribe and tongue and people (chapter 7).

Yet, they will not be delivered from **physical persecution**; hence, the outer court of the temple is not measured but is given over to the Gentiles (“the nations”) who will trample the church (“the holy city”) under foot for a limited period of time—**forty-two months**—or a time, times, and half a time, or 1260 days (cf. 12: 1-6), however it appears in the text. That this **limited** period refers to a period of testing for the church is evident from Revelation 12: 1-6 which refers to the woman with her child (Christ) who flees from the dragon into the wilderness to be protected and nourished for one thousand, two hundred and sixty days or time, times, and half a time (12:14). It is also the period of the testing of Israel in the wilderness—42 years if we consider that they were in the wilderness two years before they were judged to remain there another 40 years.¹¹⁴

The outer court and the inner temple both represent the church from two different perspectives—**inner spiritual security** and **outward persecution**. Inside the inner sanctuary, they are safe from harm; but outside in the court of the Gentiles they—the “holy city”, the church—will be trampled underfoot.

Thus, the distinction between the sanctuary and the outer court is a way of pointing up the limitations placed upon pagan hostility....It may physically decimate the witnessing church...but it cannot touch its real source of life (the witnesses are raised and ascend to heaven; 11: 11-12).¹¹⁵

The reference to 42 months also corresponds to Daniel’s vision.¹¹⁶

He will speak out against the Most High and **wear down the saints of the Highest One**, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a **time, times, and half a time**. (Daniel 7:25 NASB)

And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long *will it be* until the end of *these* wonders?"⁷ I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a **time, times, and half a time**; and as soon as they finish shattering the power of the holy people, all these *events* will be completed. (Daniel 12:6-7 NASB)

"From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there will be 1,290 days*.¹² "How blessed is he who keeps waiting and attains to the 1,335 days! (Daniel 12:11-12 NASB)

And she gave birth to a son, a male *child*, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.⁶ Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for **one thousand two hundred and sixty days**. (Revelation 12:5-6 NASB)

¹¹⁴ Beale, p. 565; so also Osborne, who cites 42 encampments of Israel in Numbers 33).

¹¹⁵ Mounce, 220

¹¹⁶ See McNeill, *Major and Minor Prophets*, where I give a summary of E. J. Young’s commentary on Daniel 7 and 12

But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for **a time and times and half a time**, from the presence of the serpent. (Revelation 12:14 NASB)

The persecution of faithful Jews under Antiochus Epiphanes IV was an OT type of the NT antitype of Christian persecution under Satan's accomplice, the beast or Antichrist. Satan attempts to destroy the people of God as Antiochus attempted to destroy the faithful Jews and their religion. In the same way the **man of lawlessness**—the Antichrist—will attempt to destroy the church.

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and **the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 NASB)

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but **in the middle of the week** he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:27 NASB)

Forty-two months is three and a half years corresponding to time, times, and half a time—also 1260 days (cf. Daniel 7, 12, and Revelation 12: 14). This period also corresponds to the **last half** of Daniel's week in Daniel 9; one-half of seven is three and a half. Some preterist interpreters believe this refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Romans—the war itself lasting from 66-70 AD. This period would correspond to the prediction in Daniel 9. The preterist interpretation fails, in my opinion, to adequately address why the book of Revelation is addressed to the churches in **Asia Minor** which would have been far removed from the situation of the Christian church in **Jerusalem** in 70 AD. Moreover, the **inner part of the temple** is preserved according to Revelation 11: 1, but there is nothing in the destruction of the temple in 70 AD—during which the temple was totally destroyed—that corresponds to this.¹¹⁷ But these are just two reasons among many that I reject the preterist position that the Revelation of John was fulfilled in 70 AD. Foreshadowed, yes; fulfilled, no.

Therefore, both in the Old and New Testaments, we have the expression of 42 months; time, times, and half a time; one half of a week; and 1260 days as a time of testing and persecution for the old and new covenant people. It is not clear why Daniel 12: 11 uses 1290 days instead of the usual 1260. The period comes up again in Revelation 13: 5

There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for **forty-two months** was given to him.

³ "And I will grant *authority* to my **two witnesses**, and they will prophesy for **twelve hundred and sixty days**, clothed in sackcloth."

⁴ These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands

Commented [D39]: "From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there will be* 1,290 days. (Daniel 12:11 NAU)

¹¹⁷ Thomas, p. 93

that stand before the Lord of the earth.

Who are these two witnesses? I don't believe they are literal individuals but represent the witness of the church throughout the church age in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah, Zerubbabel and Zechariah (cf. Zech. 4).¹¹⁸ When Jesus initially sent out His disciples, He sent them out in pairs (Lk. 10: 1), and just as these two witnesses are killed, Jesus sends the disciples out as "as lambs in the midst of wolves."

Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in **pairs** ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come.² And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest."³ "Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. (Luke 10:1-3 NASB)

Another possible allusion of the number "two" is that in the OT a capital crime worthy of death was confirmed only on the basis of two witnesses.

"On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. (Deuteronomy 17:6 NASB)

Unbelief is a capital crime against God, therefore God sends out two witnesses to confirm the guilt of unbelief. Like the 70 missionaries, Jesus now sends His church into the world to bear witness. They are clothed in sackcloth as a symbol of humility and mourning. The sackcloth is also a reference to Elijah (2 Kings 1: 8) and John the Baptist (Mark 1: 6).¹¹⁹ The witnesses are sent out to beseech others to be reconciled with God through repentance and faith. Some of the witnesses will be put to death, even as the two witnesses of Revelation 11.

"But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put *some* of you to death,¹⁷ and you will be hated by all because of My name. (Luke 21:16-17 NASB)

The two lampstands represent the church as a whole. In chapters 1—3, the churches of Asia Minor are represented as lampstands bearing their light in a dark world of sin and unbelief. How can these lampstands continue bearing light? The answer is found in Zechariah 4.

Then the angel who was speaking with me returned and roused me, as a man who is awakened from his sleep.² He said to me, "What do you see?" And I said, "I see, and behold, a **lampstand** all of gold with its bowl on the top of it, and its **seven lamps** on it with seven spouts belonging to each of the lamps which are on the top of it;³ also **two olive trees** by it, one on the right side of the bowl and the other on its left side."⁴ Then I said to the angel who was speaking with me saying, "What are these, my lord?"⁵ So the angel who was speaking with me answered and said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" And I said, "No, my lord."⁶ Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel saying, '**Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,**' says the LORD of hosts. (Zechariah 4:1-6 NASB)

¹¹⁸ But see Osborne who interprets them primarily as two individuals and secondarily as the entire witness of the church.

¹¹⁹ Osborne, p. 420

Only through the Holy Spirit will the light of the gospel witness in the church continue to shine. Human effort alone will not be able to endure and succeed. The same was true of Zerubbabel and Joshua during the rebuilding of the temple in 520 BC. While Christians bear the light of the gospel, they stand before the world as priests (Joshua) and kings (Zerubbabel)¹²⁰, as well as prophets in the power of Elijah, Moses, and John the Baptist. Most importantly, they “stand before the Lord of the earth” (v. 4b). This is the picture of a courtroom scene as God’s people act as **prosecutors of the whole world** for their acts of rebellion and unbelief (1 Cor. 6: 2). The word they bear must be His word and none other, like the prophets of the OT speaking only what the Lord tells them to speak (1 Kings 22: 14). Thus, the two witnesses represent the Law and the Prophets or the word of God preached and witnessed by preachers, missionaries, and all Christians witnessing the truth to the world entrapped in idolatry. It is not Christians themselves who bring the message of judgment, but the word of God judges the world. Christians are only messengers of what God says. If the world will not hear the word of life and live, they will be destroyed by this same word (2 Cor. 2: 15-16).

The 1260 days is symbolic for the **entire church age**, the last half of the final week in Daniel 9: 27.

"And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but **in the middle of the week** he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations *will come* one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate." (Daniel 9:27 NASB)

Christ confirms the New Covenant in His blood in the middle of the **70th week** of Daniel, the **first** week being the issuing of a decree by Artaxerxes (not Cyrus) giving Nehemiah permission to rebuild the walls (not the temple) of Jerusalem.¹²¹ In the middle of the 70th week, all the OT sacrifices become obsolete, null and void.

⁵ And if anyone wants to harm them,
 fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies;
 so if anyone wants to harm them,
 he must be killed in this way.

This is an allusion to Elijah being hounded by the son of Ahab, King Ahaziah, who sent an army to capture him.

Elijah replied to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, **let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty.**" Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.¹¹ So he again sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he said to him, "O man of God, thus says the king, 'Come down quickly.'" ¹² Elijah replied to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. (2 Kings 1:10-12 NASB)

⁶ These have the power to shut up the sky,
 so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying;

Commented [D40]: Elijah replied to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.¹¹ So he again sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he said to him, "O man of God, thus says the king, 'Come down quickly.'" ¹² Elijah replied to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty." Then the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. (2 Kings 1:10-12 NAU)

Commented [D41]:

Commented [D42]: Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." (1 Kings 17:1 NAU)

¹²⁰ Osborne, p. 421
¹²¹ cf. Barnes' Notes on Daniel 9; also McNeill, sermons on Daniel 9

Now Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the settlers of Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, surely there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." (1 Kings 17:1 NASB)

"But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for **three years and six months**, when a great famine came over all the land; (Luke 4:25 NASB)

Elijah was able through the power of God to shut up the sky for three and a half years as a judgment against Israel. I believe Revelation 11: 6 is speaking primarily about the binding and loosing [not losing] power of the church in its prophetic mission.

"I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:19 NASB)

The fire coming out of the mouths of the witnesses refers to the **power of the prophetic word** which declares God's demands for repentance and faith and obedience to His word. This message cannot be ignored without suffering severe consequences ("devours their enemies"). When people respond in faith, they are "loosed" (set free); when they reject this message, they are "bound" and shut out of heaven. Sinners who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads do not like to hear this message, and this is why the whole world rejoices over the death of the two witnesses (v. 10).

^{6b}and they have power over the waters
to turn them into blood,
and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

Commented [D43]: As in the plagues of Egypt

Once more Revelation alludes to the exodus plagues. The meaning is that the proclamation of the gospel is life to those who believe and death to those who disbelieve (2 Cor. 2: 15-16). The allusion is to the prophetic word of Moses who was God's agent in judging the Egyptians.

⁷When they have finished their testimony,
the beast that comes up out of the abyss
will make war with them,
and overcome them
and kill them.

Commented [D44]: The same beast that comes up out of the sea (Rev. 13: 1)

John draws his description from the **beastly kingdoms of Daniel 7**.

"And four great beasts were coming up **from the sea**, different from one another. (Daniel 7:3 NASB)

Who is this beast? One school of interpretation (preterism) says that the beast is Nero of Rome who persecutes the church and, according to Christian tradition, puts Peter and Paul to death—who may also be the two witnesses. Revelation 13: 1 identifies the beast as the Antichrist.

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names. (Revelation 13:1 NASB)

The dragon is Satan. The beast is **any kingdom or world power allied with Satan** against the kingdom of God and the true church—the representative of the kingdom of God.

Persecution and death will be a reality for many of God's witnesses throughout the church age (cf. 6: 9). God will allow unbelievers, seemingly, to overcome the testimony of believers through physical force; yet it is **through sacrifice and martyrdom** that the church conquers the world even as Christ conquered the world through sacrifice and death. The first mighty kingdom conquered was the Roman Empire which serves as a prototype of all world kingdoms. Christ rose victorious from the grave and conquers the world through His incarnate witness through the church. Even as Christ could not be killed—despite multiple attempts—until His “time had come” (Jn. 7: 8), the witnesses will not be killed until they have **“finished their testimony”**. Therefore, believers on earth are indestructible until their work of witness-bearing is done. The “finished” testimony could also mean the final testimony of the church just before the final judgment.

Hendriksen believes v. 7 is symbolic of the destruction of the church at the end of the age just before the return of Christ.

This is the Battle of Harmagedon....The beast will not kill every believer. There are going to be believers on earth when Christ comes again, although **they will be few in number**, Lk. 18: 8. But the church itself, as a mighty organization for the dissemination of the Gospel and regular ministry of the Word, will be destroyed.¹²²

His interpretation seems a bit extreme especially in light of Jesus' promise to Peter that the gates of hell would not prevail against the church (Matt. 16: 18)—even if we believe that John is talking about a short period of time at the **end** of the 1260 days when the two witnesses are killed. Before that time the church has covered the earth with the gospel which is certainly a success story; but according to Hendriksen's amillennial interpretation, most of those gains seem to have been lost. However, he is not alone in this interpretation. Beale also argues that Revelation 11: 1-12 refers to the **final testimony** of the church at the end of the church age. The section parallels Daniel 7 in which the little horn overpowers the saints.¹²³

"Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, *and which* devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet,²⁰ and *the meaning* of the ten horns that *were* on its head and the other *horn* which came up, and before which three *of them* fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great *boasts* and which was larger in appearance than its associates.²¹ "I kept looking, and **that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them**²² **until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.**²³ "Thus he said: "The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it.²⁴ "As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings.²⁵ "He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and

¹²² Hendriksen, p. 157, emphasis mine

¹²³ Cited in Beale, p. 588

in law; and **they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time.**²⁶ 'But the court will sit *for judgment*, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.²⁷ **Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.'** (Daniel 7:19-27 NASB)

When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss **will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.**⁸ And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.⁹ Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations *will* look at their dead bodies for **three and a half days**, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.¹⁰ And those who dwell on the earth *will* rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.¹¹ **But after the three and a half days**, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.¹² And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.¹³ And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.¹⁴ The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.¹⁵ **Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever."** (Revelation 11:7-15 NASB)

Thus, both Daniel 7 and Revelation 11 depict a short period of time (3 ½ days or time, times, and half a time) in which a "final kingdom on earth" defeats God's people.

John sees this prophecy from Daniel as fulfilled in the world's persecution of the church at the end of history...this is not just any opponent of the saints but the one that Daniel prophesied. And Revelation 12, 13, and 17 will further describe this beast through more allusions to Daniel 7...

...this language of "the beast arising from the abyss" has primary reference here to his actual earthly appearance at the end of the church age, when he will attempt to exterminate the church but will himself be destroyed by Christ at the parousia (so 17: 8-14).¹²⁴

Note also from the text in Revelation 11 that this short period of time in which the church is overcome is followed immediately by the final judgment, **the same sequence of events as Daniel 7** when the Ancient of Days came and passed judgment upon the beast who had been overpowering the saints. Mounce believes that v. 7 is symbolic for the **oppression** of the church but not its **destruction**; but in agreement with Hendriksen, the two witnesses are symbolic of the "witnessing church in the last tumultuous days before the end of the age" and **not the church throughout the entire period** of time between the first and second appearance of Christ.¹²⁵ The period of their ministry is the same time frame as the trampling of the holy city—forty-two months corresponding to 1260 days. In other words, the church being persecuted in v. 2 is the same time period which **ends** with the killing of the witnesses by the beast in v. 7. The period of the two witnesses is the entire time frame of the church age, from the first coming of Christ to the second coming (cf. Rev. 12: 6, 14). During this entire time the church is persecuted (v.2), but the persecution is **intensified toward the very end** resulting in the killing of the witnesses who had "finished" their testimony (v. 7). This would agree with the historical facts so far, since more

¹²⁴ Beale, p. 588, emphasis mine

¹²⁵ Mounce, p. 223

believers have been killed for their faith in the 20th Century than all the centuries combined since the resurrection of Christ. The 21st century appears to be no different.

The phrase, “will make war” with the witnesses, anticipates Revelation 12 where the dragon makes war with the angels in heaven and later with the offspring of the woman. The war theme is also carried farther into Revelation 16, 19, and 20.¹²⁶

And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels **waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war**, (Revelation 12:7 NASB)

So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off **to make war with the rest of her children**, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 12:17 NASB)

And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;¹⁴ for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, **to gather them together for the war** of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 16:13-14 NASB)

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies **assembled to make war** against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. (Revelation 19:19 NASB)

When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, **to gather them together for the war**; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.⁹ And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. (Revelation 20:7-9 NASB)

The prophecy of Daniel also predicts war.

"I kept looking, and that horn was **waging war** with the saints and overpowering them²² until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. (Daniel 7:21-22 NASB)

Here, Daniel is not speaking primarily of the Maccabean Revolt against Antiochus Epiphanes, but the cosmic war between Christ and Satan, between the people of God and the allies of Satan. We need not interpret this as literal warfare, but the **spiritual warfare** of Ephesians 6 and Matthew 10; however, the final war between Christ and His enemies must include some kind of physical warfare with tangible victory.

"Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.³⁵
"For I came to SET A MAN AGAINST HIS FATHER, AND A DAUGHTER AGAINST HER MOTHER, AND A DAUGHTER-IN-LAW AGAINST HER MOTHER-IN-LAW;³⁶ and A MAN'S ENEMIES WILL BE THE MEMBERS OF HIS HOUSEHOLD. (Matthew 10:34-36 NASB)

⁸ And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the great city
which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt,
where also their Lord was crucified.

¹²⁶ Cited by Osborne, p. 425

⁹ Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations
 will look at their dead bodies for **three and a half days**,
 and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.

The city is a symbol of worldly power, as in Daniel.

"Twelve months later he [*Nebuchadnezzar*] was walking on the *roof* of the royal palace of Babylon.³⁰
 "The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?' (Daniel 4:29-30 NASB)

We see in v. 8 that John is presenting "the great city" as a conflation (combination) of ancient cities which opposed God's people and which **represented the moral evils and seductions of the world**. Egypt was a persecutor of God's people, Israel. Sodom was the godless seducer of Lot, nephew of Abraham. Lot moved his tents toward Sodom resulting in the destruction of his family and the propagation of two nations through incest—Ammon and Moab—who continually opposed Israel. Sodom represents any seductive force within the world which is a greater threat than those who actively persecute it. Satan will seduce the **compromisers** within the church to accomplish his mission of destroying the church from within.

The last phrase, "where also their Lord was crucified" represents Jerusalem which was once the city where God dwelled but which became the quintessential¹²⁷ persecutor of God's people through the crucifixion of Christ and the stoning of Stephen. In John's mind, Jerusalem is allied with Egypt and Sodom; they are synonymous. However, we should not limit the "great city" to Egypt, Sodom, and Jerusalem. This becomes clear in the oracle against Babylon (another name for Rome) later on in the book (Rev. 18).

"The 'great city' is **every city** that embodies self-sufficiency in place of dependence on the creator, achievement in place of repentance, oppression in place of faith, the beast in place of the Lamb, and murder in place of witness to God."¹²⁸

The two dead bodies lie dead in the streets without being buried, open to public shame. Lack of a decent burial was the utmost disgrace in the ancient world, and for the Jews was a sign of the Mosaic curse. In the same way, the body of Jesus was hanged on a cross—a tree—another sign of being cursed.

"Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten *them* away. (Deuteronomy 28:26 NASB)

...his corpse shall not hang all night on the tree, but you shall surely bury him on the same day (for he who is hanged is accursed of God), so that you do not defile your land which the LORD your God gives you as an inheritance. (Deuteronomy 21:23 NASB)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE"—(Galatians 3:13 NASB)

¹²⁷ Quintessential means the perfect manifestation of something. Jerusalem became the quintessence of what it meant to be a persecutor of God's people.

¹²⁸ Krodel, p. 226, quoted by Osborne, p. 427, emphasis mine

¹⁰ And those **who dwell on the earth**
 will rejoice over them
 and celebrate;
 and they will send gifts to one another,
 because these two prophets tormented those **who dwell on the earth.**

The rejoicing over their deaths recalls the satisfaction of the Jewish leaders over the death of Christ.

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking *Him* and saying, ⁴² "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. (Matthew 27:41-42 NASB)

The **torment** pertains to the message of repentance and judgment. The world does not wish to be "tormented" by being confronted with their sins, the need to repent, and inevitable judgment if they don't. Although they know God, they suppress this truth in unrighteousness because they wish to continue their evil ways. They want to silence the Christian message and its prophets so that they will no longer hear about God's judgments. The mention of diverse tribes, tongues, and nations (v. 9) indicates that although God's people will come from every tongue and nation, there is also widespread hatred of the gospel and the church throughout the world. We should acknowledge the persecuted church throughout the world today which faces severe danger from those who espouse other religions, including the "religion" of secular humanism.

¹¹ But after the three and a half days,
 the breath of life from God came into them,
 and they stood on their feet;
 and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.

During the church age, the world will not witness any resurrections. Here, John is speaking in **anticipation** of the resurrection from the dead at the end of the church age.¹²⁹ The fear of unbelievers recalls the fear of the Lamb in Revelation 6: 15-16.

¹² And they heard a loud voice from heaven
 saying to them, "Come up here."
 Then they went up into heaven in the cloud,
and their enemies watched them.

There will be no secret rapture in which Christians will be taken up into heaven and unbelievers will be "left behind" to wonder what on earth happened to them. As in 1 Thessalonians 4, the resurrected saints will rise from their graves and meet the Lord in the air. Meanwhile, unbelievers will be **watching** these resurrections in horror knowing that they have rejected the message of the gospel. They will not have much time to reflect on such wonders. At the **same time** of the resurrection, judgment will come on the earth as in Rev. 11: 13. Notice the correspondence between "in that hour" in this passage and the passage in 1 Thes. 4: 15—5: 3. The "coming of the Lord" for His people corresponds to the simultaneous destruction of their enemies on "the day of the Lord." It is exegetically untenable (unreasonable) to distinguish in time between these two events. They are the same day, **as we see here in Revelation 11.**

¹²⁹ So also Osborne, p. 432

¹³ And in **that hour** there was a great earthquake,
and a tenth of the city fell;
seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake,
and the rest were terrified and **gave glory to the God of heaven.**

Some commentators believe that some people repented when they saw the resurrection of the two witnesses.¹³⁰ However, the text does not say they gave glory to God when the witnesses rose from the dead, but **when they saw the earthquake** and seven thousand were killed. The glory being given is the involuntary glory of those who are forced to admit that Jesus is Lord.¹³¹ Likewise, in Philippians we read,

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and that **every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.** (Philippians 2:9-11 NASB)

This text does not teach universalism or universal salvation for all, but that every human being who has ever lived will one day be **forced** to acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord and will be forced to bow to Him. Nothing short of this admission will ever satisfy God. Judgment has already begun in 11: 13a, and it would be inconsistent with any other NT reference to the judgment that the conversion of the lost takes place after its commencement.

Indeed, the very fact that the seventh seal, which partly includes a description of the last judgment (11: 18), follows on the heels [sic] of 11: 13 confirms this conclusion, especially since the earthquake imagery of 11: 19 is the climax of the seventh seal itself....Such a “second chance” conversion especially has no other analogy in biblical literature.¹³²

So also Thomas.

The survivors will acknowledge his glory (11: 13), though it is doubtful that this means that they will be converted. They will acknowledge God’s glory, but it will be too late, for the seventh trumpet is about to sound (11: 15).¹³³

John is speaking about the final judgment when all recourse to repentance has passed. The city of man falls to God’s judgment. The text here is consistent with previous events of judgment. Jesus likens the judgment at the last day to the days of Noah when the people refused to listen to Noah’s warning for 120 years (Matt. 24: 37-39). When the floods came, it was **too late to get on the ark**; and when Christ returns with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet sound, the opportunity for repentance is past. All peoples will recognize that Jesus is Lord—that fact will be undeniable—but not unto salvation. This passage anticipates a fuller description of judgment in Revelation 16.

Then the seventh *angel* poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, “It is done.”¹⁸ And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the

¹³⁰ Osborne, pp. 434-435

¹³¹ Mounce, p. 229

¹³² Beale, p. 607

¹³³ Thomas, p. 97

earth, so great an earthquake *was it, and* so mighty.¹⁹ **The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell.** Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.²⁰ And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.²¹ And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe. (Revelation 16:17-21 NASB)

¹⁴The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.

¹⁵Then the **seventh angel** sounded;
and there were loud voices in heaven,
saying, "The kingdom of the world
has become *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ;
and He will reign forever and ever."

There has been a long interlude (10: 1—11: 13) since the second woe (9: 13-21).¹³⁴ Instead of the third woe coming immediately, however, there is a pause for worship. The voices of heaven—which are not identified—praise God for His realized (actualized) kingdom on earth. The verb tenses in vv. 15- 17 are aorist signifying the certainty of Christ's realized kingdom—"has become" and "have begun to reign". Christ has **always** ruled over the nations—He is God—yet His kingdom has not been a "realized" kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, where all the angels obey Him perfectly. These verses speak of the **consummation** of the kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6: 10), according to the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray. Verse 15 is what we are praying for, the realized kingdom of God on earth.

The **preterist** interpretation holds that the fulfillment of this verse is the destruction of second-temple Judaism in 70 AD, a great persecutor of Christianity. After 70 AD, Christianity is finally severed from Judaism and the "reign of God" in Christianity begins as the world religion. However, the "cosmic dimensions" of this passage will not allow this interpretation, and nowhere in the NT (including the gospels) do we see such significance placed upon the destruction of Jerusalem.¹³⁵ Besides, can anyone argue today that Christianity has no serious competitors—at least from a worldly perspective? There are many, especially millions of Muslims, who believe Christianity will be completely wiped out. As I read 2 Peter 3, I fail to see any compelling reason to believe that the conflagrations¹³⁶ of that chapter are ultimately fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem.

⁷ But by His word **the present heavens and earth** are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. ⁸ But do not let this one *fact* escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.... ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for **new heavens and a new earth**, in which righteousness dwells. (2 Peter 3:7-10, 13 NASB)

¹³⁴ Osborne, p. 439

¹³⁵ Osborne, p. 444

¹³⁶ Huge, destructive fires

¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders,
 who sit on their thrones before God,
 fell on their faces and worshiped God,

The twenty-four elders are heavenly representatives of the OT and the NT people of God—twelve **tribes** plus twelve **apostles** (cf. Rev. 4—5). They worship God because He has brought His realized kingdom on earth to pass. Beale notes that vv. 14-18 is “The clearest statement of consummative judgment and salvation...where the eternal kingdom of God and Christ, as well as the final judgment of the impious and salvation of the faithful, is said to have been completely accomplished (v. 18). The burden of proof rests on those who argue otherwise.”¹³⁷

¹⁷ saying,
 "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty,
 who are
 and who were,
 because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.

Once more, God has not **started** reigning on earth, but He has begun to reign on earth **as in heaven** because no wickedness and no wicked people are allowed.

¹⁸ "And the nations were enraged,
 and Your wrath came,
 and the time *came*
 for the dead
 to be judged,
 and *the time*
 to reward
 Your bond-servants the prophets
 and the saints
 and those who fear Your name,
 the small and the great,
 and to destroy those who destroy the earth."

Verse 18 is an allusion to Psalm 2 where the kings of the earth take their stand against God and His anointed king, Jesus Christ.

Why are the nations **in an uproar** And the peoples devising a vain thing?² The kings of the earth take their stand And the rulers take counsel together Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
³ "Let us tear their fetters apart And cast away their cords from us!" (Ps. 2: 1-3 NASB)

Why do the nations **rage** and the peoples plot in vain? (Psa 2:1 ESV)

¹⁹ And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened;
 and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple,
 and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder
 and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

¹³⁷ Beale, p. 122

This verse is an **inclusion** with verse 1. The chapter **begins** with the temple and **ends** with the temple. It begins with the church being protected and ends with the wicked being judged. The temple is opened to the people of God, equivalent to being allowed into the heavenly Jerusalem.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (Revelation 22:14-15 NASB)

Revelation 12

Chapter 12 marks the **second major division** in the book of Revelation. The first major division is chapters 1-11 and the second is chapters 12-22. The first division deals with the “outward struggle between the church and the world, the second part of the book reveals the **deeper** background. We now see more clearly than in the preceding division that the conflict between church and world is but the outward manifestation of the war between the Christ and Satan.”¹³⁸

“It is the age-long conflict between God and Satan which accounts for the persecution the church is to experience. Although **the crucial battle was won** when Christ arose victorious over death and the grave, the adversary continues this struggle....By laying bare the root cause of persecution John would encourage believers to hold fast in the coming tribulation. The death struggle of a defeated foe will bring severe tribulation, but the outcome is certain—God will come in judgment to destroy his enemies (chaps. 15-19) and reward his own (chaps. 20-22).¹³⁹

Revelation 12 tells essentially the same story as the previous 11 chapters, except in greater detail. In the first 11 chapters, the Revelation has told the story of the church being tempted by the world, the flesh, and the devil. The seven seals are unleashed upon the whole earth, affecting believers and unbelievers alike—warfare, economic hardship, famine, disease. Trumpets of judgments have been sounded as warnings to earth-dwellers of the greater judgment to come. Demonic forces are unleashed upon the world to punish it for its mistreatment of the people of God. God’s people will be protected spiritually, although not always physically. The woes upon the earth will serve to refine believers and strengthen their faith. We now come to the center of the story to discover the deeper meaning behind the evils of this world, the dragon (Satan) who attempts to destroy the Christ and the people of God. Believers are reminded in this chapter that, in spite of their physical suffering, their real struggle is against spiritual forces of darkness. Yet, they must take courage because Satan and his demonic angels have been overthrown by Christ and the forces of good.¹⁴⁰

¹A great sign appeared in heaven:

a woman
 clothed with the sun,
 and the moon under her feet,
 and on her head a crown of twelve stars;
² and she was with child;
 and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

¹³⁸ Hendriksen, p. 163

¹³⁹ Mounce, p. 234, emphasis mine

¹⁴⁰ Beale, pp. 622-623

The woman in v. 1 is the church of God in the Old Testament and the New Testament.¹⁴¹ More specifically, she is the “ideal Israel”.¹⁴² Rushdoony identifies her as the “true church of God in every age”.¹⁴³ It was Israel according to the flesh from whom we received Jesus Christ (Rom. 9: 5). Roman Catholicism cannot claim this verse as a reference to Mary in all her glory and splendor—the woman has other offspring besides the male child (v. 17). The description is a reference to the glory and splendor of the universal church of God (His elect people) in the Old and New Testaments. The OT church—specifically the elect remnant whom God preserved during and after the exile—gave birth to Christ incarnate (in the flesh). Christ spiritually gives birth to the NT church through the Holy Spirit. Spiritually, the two—elect Israel and elect Christians—are not distinct, but one universal church.¹⁴⁴

Notice that the church is “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” The language of 12: 1 is the language of Joseph’s dream.¹⁴⁵

Then Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more.⁶ He said to them, “Please listen to this dream which I have had;⁷ for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and lo, my sheaf rose up and also stood erect; and behold, your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.”⁸ Then his brothers said to him, “Are you actually going to reign over us? Or are you really going to rule over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.⁹ Now he had still another dream, and related it to his brothers, and said, “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.” (Genesis 37:5-9 NASB)

The eleven stars refer to Joseph’s eleven brothers. Joseph is the twelfth star. Thus, the twelve stars represent the twelve tribes of Israel. Note that the woman is represented with a crown of twelve stars before she gives birth to the male child. Afterward, the woman gives birth to the male child—who is obviously the Christ—and other offspring with whom Satan continues to wage war. The other offspring are believers incorporated into the true church. It would be equally legitimate to interpret the twelve stars as the twelve apostles, because it is generally agreed that Jesus’ choice of twelve apostles corresponds to the twelve tribes of Israel as He makes a new beginning for the people of God. The church of Christ is built upon the foundation of the apostles and NT prophets (Eph. 2: 20).¹⁴⁶ At any rate, this is further evidence of the organic, redemptive relationship between the elect Israel of the OT and the NT church. “Ch. 12 presents the woman as incorporating the people of God living both before and after Christ’s coming.”¹⁴⁷

The brightness of the woman (sun, moon, stars) indicates her purity and worth in the sight of God. To the world, the church doesn’t look like much in her apparent weakness, sin, misery and distress. Yet, God sees his church as the most beautiful thing on earth, the mystical body of His

¹⁴¹ Hendriksen, p. 164

¹⁴² Mounce, p. 236

¹⁴³ Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come—Studies in Daniel and Revelation*, p. 168

¹⁴⁴ Yet, we must recognize that in Christ there is a **new beginning** for the people of God who are not only Jews but Gentiles. “I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I **will** build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. Note, Christ **will build His church**, not **have built** (Matthew 16:18 NASB). But Christ does not imply here that He **never** had an *ekklesia* (“called out ones”) in the OT.

¹⁴⁵ Osborne, p. 456; Beale, p. 625

¹⁴⁶ See Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, in which he argues for prophets referring to NT prophets, not OT prophets

¹⁴⁷ Beale, p. 627

son in His royal splendor.¹⁴⁸ Christ sees the church not in her weakness, misery, and imperfection, but in her future perfection as His bride, cleansed from every stain (Eph. 5: 27), the very opposite figure from the whore of Babylon, the unbelieving world of earth-dwellers whom God will destroy.¹⁴⁹ She is even now, with all her flaws, the witness of God's light in this world of darkness (2 Cor. 4: 6), and she "foreshadows the glory of the new Jerusalem (21: 11, 22-27)".¹⁵⁰

The woman is pregnant and in labor pains with her child (v. 2). The labor pains represent the suffering of the Old covenant community throughout its history, including the 400-year inter-testamental period¹⁵¹ and the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes IV who attempted to stamp out the Jewish religion. During Israel's entire history, the faithful remnant suffered alongside the unfaithful, apostate majority; but the faithful remnant clung to the covenant promise made to Abraham and his believing seed (cf. Isa. 26: 17-18).¹⁵² Jewish Christians living at this time would not have missed the allusions to the persecution of faithful Jews by Antiochus. The suffering of God's elect, who are persecuted by those who claim to be the covenant people, apostate Jews, continues after the death of Christ.

³Then **another sign appeared in heaven:**

and behold, a great red dragon

having seven heads and ten horns,

and on his heads *were* seven diadems.

⁴ And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth,

so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.

⁵ And she gave birth

to a son, a male *child*,

who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron;

and her child was **caught up** to God and to His throne.

The woman is just about to give birth to a male child, Christ, while the great red dragon, Satan, stands over her to devour the child immediately after birth. The dragon has seven heads and ten horns and on the seven heads were seven diadems or crowns (See also Rev. 13: 1; 17: 3; 17: 7). We find a beast with ten horns first in Dan. 7: 7, one that some scholars have identified with the Roman Empire.¹⁵³ In Daniel 7, the beast with ten horns arises after the lion with wings (Babylon), the bear (Medo-Persia), and the leopard with four wings (the world-wide Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great). According to Young, it is impossible to determine the separate identity of the ten horns upon the fourth beast.¹⁵⁴ Possibly, the number 10 represents the **completed number of all the kingdoms of the earth** which have come and will come after the Roman Empire and have, in some sense, opposed the church. All of these, in an indirect way, may have originated from the Roman Empire in the sense that the Roman government has been a

¹⁴⁸ Mounce, p. 236; Hendriksen, p. 164).

¹⁴⁹ Derek Thomas, *Let's Study Revelation*, p. 103

¹⁵⁰ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King—A Guide to the Book of Revelation*, p. 134

¹⁵¹ Beale, p. 629

¹⁵² Cited in Osborne, p. 458

¹⁵³ Edward J. Young, *Daniel*, p. 147

¹⁵⁴ Young, pp. 143-146

model for many modern forms of government.¹⁵⁵ The little horn (the eleventh horn) which arises out of the ten represents the Antichrist who poses the biggest threat to the church at the end of the age.¹⁵⁶ The fact that the little horn of Daniel arises out of the ten horns is evidence of the fact that the biggest enemy of the church at the end of the age—currently as well—will be organized government (Ps. 2).

Governments have the power of the sword to hinder the work of God’s kingdom. They enact laws (e.g. Sharia law), making it illegal to become a Christian and legal to put to death anyone who converts from Islam to Christianity. We don’t know, of course, how history will play out or whether, at the end of the age, Islam will even be considered a world religion. One thing is sure: Christianity will still be considered a **threat** to any one-world government of men, as the two witnesses in Revelation 11 demonstrate.

Could this composite government (with seven heads and 10 horns) be the “one-world government” which many world leaders propose? This interpretation is tenable since the Bible recognizes only **one** true “one-world” government, the government of Christ (See Isa. 9: 6-7; 11: 1-5). The government of man will attempt to **imitate** Christ’s one-world government by incorporating the whole world under one system, be that the United Nations or any other composite of nations. Just as Adam and Eve attempted to arrogate (seize without right) the authority of God over their personal lives, corporate mankind has ever since attempted to do the same through organized rebellion against the law of God (e.g. Gen. 11—the tower of Babel). Of course, they will never succeed. Christ has been crucified and has risen to establish His kingdom over the whole earth. Human kingdoms (the beasts of Daniel and Revelation) will wax and wane,¹⁵⁷ but the kingdom of Christ will get stronger and will ultimately defeat any human usurper. This is the assurance we have from Revelation. Things are not often as they appear to be. God’s kingdom appears weak and frail, but behind the scenes, the victory has already been won in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. While Christ was dying on a cross, Michael and his angels were defeating Satan in the heavens, and when He rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, they were throwing him down to the earth (vv. 7-9)

The dragon in Revelation 12: 3 represents Satan; yet, not Satan standing alone against the Christ, but Satan standing with his **human and demonic** accomplices—particularly organized governments and the peoples of the earth who place them in power.¹⁵⁸ Remember that “those who dwell on the earth” (unbelievers in general) rejoiced when the two witnesses of Revelation 11 were killed. Daniel 7 (as well as Ps. 2) represents the “men who dwell on the earth” in their organization against the Lord and against his anointed. The dragon, Satan, is chief of the demonic forces which are the power behind all human resistance to the kingdom of God. **The spiritual battles being waged on earth have their counterparts in the cosmic battles being waged in heaven.**

¹⁵⁵ However, in a broader sense, the beasts of revelation represent every kingdom arrayed against the kingdom of Christ.

¹⁵⁶ Young, pp. 147-150

¹⁵⁷ And expression which means, “get stronger and then weaker”

¹⁵⁸ See Daniel 10: 13 and context in which the “prince of Persia”, a demon assigned to Persia [?], opposed the angel sent to help Daniel.

The picture of the woman bearing a child and the dragon (serpent) waiting to devour the child alludes to Genesis 3: 15.¹⁵⁹ Eve is promised to bear a human seed who would crush the head of the serpent. Satan is not omniscient (all-knowing). Although aware of the predictions of his demise in Genesis 3 (Satan reads the Bible—Matthew 4), he was not always convinced that his rebellion was hopeless. He attempted many times throughout human history to vanquish his arch-enemy, the seed of the woman, the God-man Jesus Christ—even by eliminating the entire Jewish seed from whom Christ would spring. The most obvious historical allusion in Revelation 12 is Herod’s attempt to kill the baby who had been born king of the Jews when he orders all the male children in Palestine two years old and under to be murdered (Matt. 2: 16)—the NT antitype of Pharaoh’s attempt to destroy the male Israelite children (Ex. 1).

Other conspiracies include, but are not limited to, the following: (1) Satan’s temptation of the sons of Seth to intermarry with the daughters of Cain resulting in the violence which fills the earth and the flood, (2) the bondage of Abraham’s descendents in Egypt resulting in idolatry, (3) the persecution of the sons of Israel in Egypt by Pharaoh, (4) the temptation of Israel for calf worship which would have resulted in their total destruction except for the intercession of Moses, (5) the temptation of David to sin with Bathsheba,¹⁶⁰ (6) Athaliah’s usurpation of the throne in Judah and her murder of all but one of David’s descendents, Josiah, and (7) Haman’s attempt to annihilate the whole Jewish race [*Esther*].¹⁶¹ Satan’s ultimate attempt to rid himself of Christ was the betrayal by Judas and the crucifixion of Christ. But this attempt was useless as well. Christ triumphed over death by rising from the dead, leaving Satan with yet another failed attempt to destroy his competitor to earthly authority.

The crowns upon the dragon are not signs of legitimate authority, but “arrogated authority” without legitimate basis.¹⁶² They are counterfeits of Christ’s authority, who is crowned with many crowns (Rev. 19: 2). Satan is described by Jesus as “the ruler of this world” (Jn. 12: 31; 14: 30; 16: 11), by Paul as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4: 4), but not in any sense as legitimate. He is a **usurper** who seeks to seize something not lawfully his. As always, he is an imitator of the real authority, Jesus Christ, as the seven diadems on the dragon’s head clearly show—symbols of kingly authority. Yet, there is no mistaking the true king who will one day rule with a rod of iron (v. 5; cf. Ps. 2: 9). Throughout the history of mankind since the fall, God has permitted the unlawful seizure of His kingdom both by Satan and by men, but the coming of Christ into the world marked the **beginning of the end** of all Satanic authority over men, as well as man’s abusive power over others.

The identity of the stars thrown to the earth is variously interpreted. Based upon his interpretation of Daniel 8: 10, Beale interprets the stars as persecuted Israel.¹⁶³ Hendriksen and Osborne believe that they are the fallen angels who were originally judged with Satan.¹⁶⁴ Satan’s original rebellion sweeps away some of the angelic host away from their loyalty to God to loyalty to himself. By participating in Satan’s rebellion, the fallen angels lost their positions in heaven and were thrown down to earth with Satan at Christ’s ascension. Against this

¹⁵⁹ Beale, pp. 630-631

¹⁶⁰ Not Hendriksen’s, but my observation

¹⁶¹ Hendriksen, pp. 165-170

¹⁶² Hendriksen, p. 165

¹⁶³ Beale, p. 637

¹⁶⁴ Hendriksen, p. 165; Osborne, p. 461

interpretation is that the original rebellion and judgment of Satan does not appear as the subject of Revelation 12, nor does the Bible elsewhere give us any information about this fall.¹⁶⁵ The stars may stand for the angels who represent the church in heaven. When the devil assaults the church, he is at the same time assaulting heaven.¹⁶⁶

Suddenly (v. 5) the child is caught up to God and to His throne symbolizing the **resurrection and ascension** of Christ to heaven where He sits at the right-hand of the throne of God. His earthly work and crucifixion are omitted from the passage since this is not the purpose of the vision. Its purpose is to assure John's audience, the persecuted church, that Christ has been victorious over His enemies and the enemies of His people. Moreover, just as God has raised Christ from the dead, He will also raise those who have suffered for His name. Death is not the final victor, because Christ is now reigning and ruling at the right hand of God the Father. Thus the vision of John moves quickly from the birth of Christ to the ascension of Christ.

The period between Christ's birth and his ascension is skipped because Christ began to rule at the ascension **in a more formal sense than before**, and ruling is the purpose for which he was born.¹⁶⁷

⁶ **Then** the woman fled into the wilderness
 where she had a place prepared by God,
 so that there she would be nourished
 for **one thousand two hundred and sixty days**.

Satan is unable to destroy the male child, so he now turns his attention to the woman, the church. It should be emphasized once again that the woman symbolizes the **true church, not the organized institutional church** which is often used by Satan in his struggle against Christ (Rev. 13: 11-12, the beast from the earth or the false prophet, Rev. 16: 13). In the gospel accounts, the Pharisees, Sadducees and organized Judaism (Jewish religion) were the fiercest opponents of Jesus. Through the influence of the organized leadership of the Jewish religion the multitudes were turned away from Christ and cried out for His crucifixion, just one week after they were crying, "Hosanna to the Son of David; BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD; Hosanna in the highest!" (Matt. 21: 9). It was a rigid Pharisee, Saul, who attempted with all his might to destroy the church. The leaders of the Roman Catholic Church burned at the stake many godly men like John Huss and William Tyndale who wished to preach the truth, and they attempted to kill others like Martin Luther and John Calvin. Moreover, even the 16th century reformers persecuted and killed (by drowning) Baptists who refused to submit their children to infant baptism—a sad historical fact most of us Presbyterians would rather forget.¹⁶⁸ Thus, even a church otherwise teaching sound doctrine can be used by Satan to prosecute his war against the kingdom of God. Satan sees no need to oppose **religion**, but the one and only **true faith**, the Christian faith handed down from Christ and the apostles. False religion is the tool of Satan just as much as anti-Christian government.

As Satan begins his attack upon the woman, she flees into the wilderness where God has prepared a place for her. Here she is nourished for 1260 days corresponding to **the same period**

¹⁶⁵ This would include Isaiah 14: 12-13, which has been erroneously interpreted as Satan, although explicitly applied to the king of Babylon (14: 4).

¹⁶⁶ Poythress, p. 135

¹⁶⁷ Beale, p. 640, emphasis mine

¹⁶⁸ McNeill, *Religious Persecution During the 16th Century Protestant Reformation*

of time the witnesses are prophesying (11: 3). One can see from this that Revelation is now returning to this period of 1260 days and describing it in a different way. The woman (the church) in the wilderness is the **same witnessing community** of chapter 11 from a different perspective. She is the mother of all those who believe.

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman.²³ But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the **free woman** through the promise.²⁴ This is **allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants**: one *proceeding* from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar.²⁵ Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children.²⁶ But **the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.** (Galatians 4:22-26 NASB)

The wilderness in scripture can be a symbol for both **refuge and testing**. It was both for the children of Israel coming out of Egypt. On the one hand it was a refuge as they escaped from the persecution of Pharaoh; on the other hand it was a time of severe testing and trial. Elijah went into the wilderness to escape Jezebel and to receive God's nourishment and encouragement (1 Kings 19). Jesus was taken into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil but received food from angels at the end of his testing (Matt. 4). Paul was taken into the wilderness to receive the revelation of Christ (Gal. 1: 12, 17). Thus, the wilderness can be both a place of refuge and reflection and a place of testing, both of which are included in v. 6. God's people are both tested and encouraged during the church age beginning with the ascension of Christ until his second coming—1260 days, 42 months, or three and a half years, the **normal period of trial and persecution** for the church. Thus, the wilderness here represents the trial and testing of the church, from which she emerges spiritually unharmed, although many have been put to death.

⁷ **And there was war in heaven,**

Michael and his angels
waging war with the dragon.

The dragon and his angels
waged war,

⁸ and they were not strong enough,
and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

⁹ And the great dragon was thrown down,
the serpent of old
who is called the devil and Satan,
who deceives the whole world;

he was thrown down to the earth,
and his angels were thrown down with him.

¹⁰ **Then I heard a loud voice in heaven,** saying,

"Now the salvation,
and the power,
and the kingdom of our God
and the authority of His Christ
have come,

for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down,
he who accuses them before our God day and night.

¹¹ "And they overcame him
because of the **blood of the Lamb**
and because of the word of their **testimony,**
and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

Commented [D45]: Rev. 6: 10; 7: 9-10; 19: 1

¹² "For this reason,
 rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them.
 Woe to the earth and the sea,
 because the devil
 has come down to you,
 having great wrath,
 knowing that he has *only* a short time."

Verse 7 indicates that the entire struggle on earth between the world and the church is being waged on a different level in heaven.¹⁶⁹ The mention of Michael links the reader back to the heavenly conflict in Daniel 10 in which Michael the archangel fights a heavenly battle against the prince of Persia. Some commentators, Beale and Osborne included, believe the other heavenly personage in Daniel 10 is Christ.¹⁷⁰ I question this conclusion because there can be no real contest between Christ and demonic angels (as in Dan. 10: 13). As Osborne himself says, "There is no dualism¹⁷¹ in this book [*Revelation*] between Satan and God, for there is no equality. The dragon's adversary is the archangel Michael, and he is the more powerful."¹⁷² So also in Daniel, the pre-incarnate Christ of Daniel's prophecy does not need Michael's help against the demonic prince of Persia, who is no match for Him. But regardless of the identity of the other person in Daniel 10, Christ or another angel, the similarity between this chapter and Revelation 12 clearly indicates that the warfare of Revelation 12 is foreshadowed in Daniel 10.¹⁷³

In Revelation, Michael's struggle **in heaven** corresponds to Christ's struggle **on earth**. In this particular case, it may not be accurate to say that the outcome on earth is decided by the outcome in heaven, but vice versa.¹⁷⁴ Christ, the God-man, succeeds on earth by rising again from the dead, a victory from which flow all the victories in heaven against demonic forces. The victory is won **on earth** as the basis of all future victories against the principalities and powers of the air (Eph. 6: 11-19). The angels in heaven led by Michael are waging war with the dragon and his angels (demons). The demonic forces are overcome by Michael and his angels, and they, along with the dragon, are thrown down to the earth. The dragon, which is now clearly identified as Satan, is also thrown down (v. 9). He is the "accuser of the brethren", accusing them before God day and night. Satan appears before God in Job 1 to accuse Job of worshipping God only for what he received from God in return. His accusations, unjustified in this case, are the basis for the test God used in proving Satan wrong in his accusations against Job.¹⁷⁵ Job passes the test—typical of all true believers throughout history—and through all his sufferings he curses the day of his birth (3: 1-3) but never curses God. Yet, Job lived before the crucifixion of Christ, when the final basis for God's forgiveness, the final atonement, was only promised but unaccomplished. But on the other side of the atonement, the Apostle Paul emphatically denies

¹⁶⁹ See Daniel 10 in which the prayers of Daniel are linked to the struggles going on in heaven between the forces of good and evil.

¹⁷⁰ Beale, p. 651. See McNeill, *Major and Minor Prophets*, for a different interpretation.

¹⁷¹ Dualism, as it pertains to God and Satan, means that God and Satan are struggling against one another to see who will win. But the Bible makes clear that there was never any real contest between Satan and God (cf. Job 1—2, in which Satan must ask God's permission to do anything against Job).

¹⁷² Osborne, p. 469

¹⁷³ For more details on this, see Beale, pp. 651-652

¹⁷⁴ The other way around

¹⁷⁵ Likewise, the accusations made against Christ in his trial by the Sanhedrin were false and unjustified.

that anyone, including Satan, has any **legal grounds** for accusing God's people, even if they are actually guilty of the crime.

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one **who** justifies; **who** is the one **who** condemns? Christ Jesus is **He who** died, yes, rather **who** was raised, **who** is at the right hand of God, **who** also intercedes for us. (Rom. 8: 33-34).

Notice the **who's** in these two verses. Who may accuse and condemn us? No one; that's **who**. Why? Because of the one **who** justified us, died for us, was resurrected for us, sits at God's right hand, and intercedes for us. This is why the loud voice in Rev. 12: 11 says that they (the brethren) "overcame him [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb..." Christians cannot overcome Satan through human strength.

The question which comes up at this juncture is: **When** were Satan and his angels thrown out of heaven? The answer appears to be: **after the ascension of Christ into heaven**. The context of Satan's expulsion from heaven (vv. 7-9) down to the earth is the **complex of events**¹⁷⁶ occurring in the birth, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. Partly for this reason I disagree with Osborne that Revelation 12 refers to the **original** expulsion of Satan from heaven **at the dawn of history**. It is certainly true that Satan and his demonic accomplices fell from their positions as servants of God **before** Adam's fall, but the specific description in Revelation 12 indicates that their being thrown down to the earth is the **result** of Christ's atoning work—"and her child was caught up to God and to His throne." Apart from this, the "war in heaven" of v. 7 seems to be out of context with the remainder of Revelation 12. Further, one must ask: If Satan is thrown out of heaven at the dawn of history, how must we explain how he has continued access to God's throne in Job (Job 1: 6-7; 2: 1-2)? Osborne's explanation of this difficulty is unconvincing: that "...Satan would be coming not as an occupant of heaven but as a permitted guest."¹⁷⁷ However, it makes little sense that after being kicked out of heaven, Satan would be invited back.

A better explanation is that Satan somehow has access to the throne of God before the atoning work of Christ, but this access is taken away when he and his angelic accomplices are thrown down to the earth.

The Bible indicates that **until the time of Christ's triumph**, Satan was permitted to appear in the heavenly places (Job 1: 6; 2: 1; Zech. 3: 1-2; Luke 10: 18). His abilities were curtailed by Christ's earthly ministry and above all by his resurrection and ascension (cf. Rev. 12: 11).¹⁷⁸

Notice that after the dragon fails to devour the child, the "child was caught up to God and to His throne" (v. 5). After the death, resurrection, and ascension, the work of Christ is complete. He has fully atoned for the sin of his people and satisfied the wrath of God against sin. The struggle in heaven, then, constitutes the legal battle of a courtroom even though described in terms of a military battle.¹⁷⁹ Satan accuses believers for failing to measure up to God's standard of perfection **but no longer has any legal basis for his arguments**. Those sins are fully atoned for in the sacrifice of Christ whose righteousness is also our righteousness and whose sanctification

¹⁷⁶ A combination of events

¹⁷⁷ Osborne, p. 480

¹⁷⁸ Poythress, p. 137, emphasis mine

¹⁷⁹ Mounce, p. 243

is our sanctification (1 Cor. 1: 30). We overcome Satan by the blood of the Lamb and because of our testimony that we are saved by grace in the blood of Christ, even if that testimony results in death (v. 11).

Christ foresees Satan's defeat in heaven when his seventy disciples, having returned from their mission, report that even the demons had been subject to them in Jesus' name. On that occasion he said, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning" (Lk. 10: 18).¹⁸⁰

Luke 10: 17, 19-20 explains this statement as meaning that the disciples have begun to have power over Satan by being able to cast out demons. But v. 20 also says that the meaning of Jesus' vision is that, above all, the disciple's "names are recorded in heaven." That is, the devil's fall means that the salvation of Jesus' followers is secure from Satanic threat, and their power over demons is an initial indication of the devil's defeat **and their salvific security....**

If the devil's accusations had been effective with God, **then all of God's people would have been cast from his presence** and would have begun to experience the anguish of the final judgment, which would be consummated at the Last Day. **Instead, the devil was cast out from heaven**, because his charges had become groundless. The saints' status in heaven has been legitimized finally by Christ's suffering on the cross.¹⁸¹

Just as his disciples rejoiced on that day, the saints who are now in heaven and the angels in heaven rejoice that Satan and his demons are thrown out of heaven at the ascension of Christ (v. 12; cf. Rev. 6: 10; 7: 9-10; 19: 1). But at the same time, the earth is warned that Satan's wrath will now be **concentrated** upon the earth since he only has a "**short time**" before his final destruction. At the ascension of Christ, Satan was doomed, but he is still allowed a large degree of freedom to oppress the people of God throughout the church age (1260 days, 3 ½ times or years, 42 months, or the 1000 years of Revelation 20).¹⁸² However, he is not allowed a direct frontal assault upon the church until later toward the **end** of the church age when the "two witnesses" are killed, a shorter period of 3 ½ **days**, not **years**.¹⁸³

But is it exegetically defensible to interpret the "short time" of v. 12 as a thousand years? Seraiah thinks not.

Satan knows that his "time is short." Does a short time do justice to the idea of a "thousand years"? With all of the references to time lengths (three and a half years, ten days, etc.) in Revelation, it is impossible to make the symbolism of a thousand years equate with a "short time." If a thousand years does not denote a long duration of time, then it has lost all its symbolism....

What event, then, could the short time be waiting until? The next significant event in the history of the Church would be the destruction of Israel in A.D. 70, at which time Satan was bound and cast into the abyss. Satan knew that he only had a short time (**forty years**) to stop the Church from growing up. This is why he is said (after realizing he is cast down and only has a short time to work) to go "off to make war on...those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus" (12: 17); he wants to destroy the New Covenant Church.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Osborne, p. 470, who also interprets this verse as a possible reference to the original fall of Satan.

¹⁸¹ Beale, p. 660, 663, emphasis mine

¹⁸² Hendriksen, p. 173

¹⁸³ Hendriksen, p. 172; see also 13: 7

¹⁸⁴ C. Jonathin Seraiah, *The End of All Things—A Defense of the Future*, pp. 94-95, emphasis mine

However, where do we see in the history of the church that Satan had only 40 years to stop the church from growing? The fiercest persecution of the church happened after AD 70, not before, during the Roman persecutions of the second, third, and early fourth centuries before the Edict of Milan in 313 AD under Constantine. No wide-spread, organized persecutions of the Jews took place for 200 years until Decius (249-251 AD); but local persecutions were a constant threat under Nero (54-68 AD), Domitian (81-96 AD), Trajan (98-117 AD), Hadrian (117-138 AD), Marcus Aurelius, the philosopher-emperor (161-180 AD), and Septimus Severus (193-211 AD).¹⁸⁵ When persecution arose under Decius in 249 AD (137 years later) all Christians in the empire were ordered to sacrifice to the ancient gods and to burn incense before the statue of Decius. Thus, Decius' persecution was not as haphazard and local as previous persecutions had been, but systematic and widespread.¹⁸⁶ Emperor Valerian continued executing Christians from 253-260 AD including Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, among other notable believers. The last **and worst** persecution under Roman emperors began in 303 under Diocletian (285-305 AD) under whose reign emperor worship reached its peak.¹⁸⁷ We should also be reminded that the twentieth century witnessed the greatest number of Christians who have been put to death for their faith, more than all other centuries combined.¹⁸⁸

Hendriksen believes the 3 ½ years of affliction alludes to the severe persecution of true believers during the purge of Jezebel in Elijah's day.¹⁸⁹ During that time many prophets of the Lord had been put to death by Jezebel (1 Kings 18: 4) and only 7,000 people remained who had not bowed the knee to Baal (19: 18). Thus, in Elijah's day, the true worship of God had almost been wiped out, but God had left a remnant of true believers for Himself. This OT episode may be a type of what will happen in the church age toward the very end when the beast is given authority over all the earth and "overcomes" the saints (Rev. 11: 7; 13: 7), but only for a short period of time—three and a half days (Rev. 11: 9, 11).

Perhaps the difference is like that between a full-scale military attack by a whole army and the constant harassment of guerilla troops who make hit-and-run attacks. Satan has been defeated at the cross, but he still harasses the church with hopes of deceiving it, discouraging it, and destroying it. Christ assures Peter before this happens that the gates of hell shall not prevail against the Church (Matt. 16: 18). There was also once a time in which Satan was allowed to deceive **the nations** (Rev. 20: 3; cf. 12: 9, "the whole world"), a situation which is **no longer true** since the gospel has been spread to every corner of the globe through the witness of the church. This also appears to be the teaching of other non-apocalyptic texts.¹⁹⁰

"Now judgment is upon this world; **now** the ruler of this world **will be cast out**. (John 12:31 NASB)

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.¹⁵ **When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities**, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Colossians 2:13-15 NASB)

¹⁸⁵ Pillay and Hofmeyr, *Perspectives on Church History*, p. 9

¹⁸⁶ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1, pp. 85-87).

¹⁸⁷ Pillay and Hofmeyr, pp. 9-10

¹⁸⁸ Source unknown

¹⁸⁹ Hendriksen, p. 174; Rev. 11: 6; James 5: 17).

¹⁹⁰ Poythress, p. 181

"But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.²⁹ "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first **binds the strong man**? And then he will plunder his house. (Matthew 12:28-29 NASB)

In John 12, Jesus speaks of Satan being cast out. From the context, it is clear that this will occur in association with His death, resurrection, and ascension. In the second text in Colossians, Paul declares that God, through the death of Christ, "disarmed the rulers and authorities" and triumphed over them. Thus, God has already triumphed over Satan through the cross. In the last text, Christ's casting out demons indicates that He has bound Satan, the completion of which occurs in the cross, resurrection, and ascension.

However, after the 1000 years, Satan is released, presumably with the ability to deceive the nations once more for the purpose of one final onslaught against Christ's church. Therefore, we see the **limited ability** of Satan during the **church age** after the ascension of Christ followed by a time of increasing hostility and persecution of the church. This terrible period of persecution is followed by the second coming of Christ and the final judgment.

¹³ And when the dragon saw
that he was thrown down to the earth,
he **persecuted the woman** who gave birth to the male *child*.

¹⁴ But the two wings of **the great eagle** were given to the woman,
so that she could fly into the **wilderness** to her place,
where she was nourished for **a time and times and half a time**,
from the presence of the serpent.

¹⁵ And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman,
so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood.

¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman,
and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.

¹⁷ So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and **went off to make war with the rest of her children**,
who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

To protect the woman (the church) from Satan, she is borne away on eagles wings into the wilderness where she is nourished for "a time and times and half a time"—calculated: time (1) + times (2) + half a time $\frac{1}{2} = 3 \frac{1}{2}$ times. This period is equivalent to (equal to) the 1,260 days of v. 6. Some of the symbolism of the exodus event is incorporated into this episode. The pursuit of the woman corresponds to Pharaoh's pursuit of the Israelites, and their escape is described by God as being borne upon eagles' wings.

'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. (Exodus 19:4 NASB)

Her nourishment corresponds to the giving of manna to the Israelites to sustain them on their wilderness journeys and also to God's prophet, Elijah, who is nourished by the ravens in his flight from Jezebel (1 Kings 19). The motif¹⁹¹ of the Christian's journey through this world is

¹⁹¹ Pattern

often described in terms of wandering through this world as a pilgrim or stranger (1 Pet. 2: 11). Even though Abraham owned the land of Palestine through God's promise, he lived in tents as a stranger wandering through his own land looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Heb. 11: 10, 13, 16). So it is with the church who will inherit the earth. For a time the church must be nourished in the wilderness of this earth and be sheltered from the attack of Satan before she receives the full promise of her inheritance, the new heavens and the new earth.

Having lost the main battle—the decisive battle—Satan and his angels launch an earth-bound attack against the woman, the true church. Christ can no longer be touched; He has ascended into heaven never to suffer again or die again,¹⁹² but the church continues His incarnate ministry in this world through its suffering, sacrificial witness. Saul's persecution of the church is identified as being the persecution of Christ himself (Acts 9: 4-5). Satan's means of persecution is described as a river of water pouring out of his mouth so that the woman will be swept away like a flood (v. 15), possibly an allusion to Satan's plan to drown the Israelites in the Red Sea.¹⁹³ Floods are commonly used as metaphors for "overwhelming evil"¹⁹⁴, and it is likely that the greatest evil the church has ever faced is not physical harm but the harm which comes through **lies and deception**, the ultimate source of which is **Satan's mouth** (v. 15). Rushdoony has interpreted the flood as the delusions of Satan which consist of "every kind of false doctrine and teaching, every delusion of religion and science whereby men try to infiltrate and destroy the true Church of God". But Satan's plan is frustrated; for the "earth", or the world of men who dwell upon the earth absorbs this flood of delusions so completely that they do not harm the church (v. 16).¹⁹⁵ The earth swallowing this river may also be an allusion to the earth swallowing up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram for their rebellion against the leadership of Moses, a rebellion consisting of lies against Moses (Num. 16).¹⁹⁶ There is a wise saying that "He who does not believe in Christ will believe anything." The world of men readily believes this flood of lies, false religions, and philosophies because they are inescapably religious and must believe in something bigger than themselves to make some sense out of life.

Thus, Satan not only fails to destroy the child (Christ), he also fails to destroy the woman (the church). The chapter ends with Satan going off to make war with the woman's offspring, individual Christians "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (v. 17).

Revelation 13

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore.

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea,
 having **ten horns** and **seven heads**,
 and on his horns *were* **ten diadems**,
 and on his heads *were* blasphemous names.

Commented [D46]: cf. 12: 3

¹⁹² The Roman Catholic practice of the mass as the re-sacrifice of Christ is thus, an abomination. The Lord's Supper is a commemoration (remembrance) of Christ's sacrifice, but not the actual sacrifice of Christ.

¹⁹³ Thomas, p. 106

¹⁹⁴ Mounce, p. 246; cf. Isa. 43: 2

¹⁹⁵ Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come—Studies in Daniel and Revelation*, p. 170, emphasis mine

¹⁹⁶ Beale, p. 675

² And the beast which I saw
 was like a leopard,
 and his feet were like *those* of a bear,
 and his mouth like the mouth of a lion.

Commented [D47]: See description of the four beasts of Daniel 7

And **the dragon** gave him
 his power
 and his throne
 and great authority.

³ I saw one of his heads
 as if it had been slain,
 and **his fatal wound was healed.**

And the whole earth was amazed
 and *followed* after the beast;

⁴ **they worshiped the dragon**
 because he gave his authority to the beast;
 and **they worshiped the beast**, saying,
 "Who is like the beast,
 and who is able to wage war with him?"

⁵ There **was given to him**
 a mouth
 speaking arrogant words
 and blasphemies,
 and authority to act for forty-two months
was given to him.

Commented [D48]: Daniel 7: 8

Commented [D49]: Same time as Rev. 12: 6

⁶ And he opened
 his mouth
 in blasphemies against God,
 to blaspheme His name
 and His tabernacle,
that is, those who dwell in heaven.

⁷ **It was also given to him**
 to make war with the saints
 and to **overcome** them,
 and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation
was given to him.

Commented [D50]: Rev. 11: 2, 7. The beast coming out of the abyss and the beast coming out of the sea are the same

⁸ All who dwell on the earth
will worship him.
everyone whose name has not been written
 from the foundation of the world
 in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

⁹ **If anyone** has an ear,
 let him hear.

¹⁰ **If anyone is destined** for captivity,

to captivity he goes;
if anyone kills with the sword,
 with the sword he must be killed.
**Here is the perseverance and the faith of the
 saints.**

At the beginning of the chapter we find the dragon standing on the seashore. John sees a beast coming up from the sea. In scripture, the sea is often associated with evil. The Israelites were backed up to the Red Sea when the armies of Egypt pursued them. The psalmists often mention the sea with a negative connotation¹⁹⁷ (Ps. 42: 7; 88: 7; 89: 9; 107: 29; also Job 9: 8). The beast has ten horns and seven heads and on his heads are blasphemous names. The beast is a **composite**¹⁹⁸ of the **four beasts** in the book of Daniel (Dan. 7: 1-8)—the leopard, the bear, the lion, and the beast with ten horns. Although each of the first three kingdoms in Daniel 7 fell in succession, the evil manifested in each kingdom continued in the fourth kingdom that followed. Thus, the allusion to the beasts in Daniel 7 found in Revelation 13 indicates the “transtemporal nature of the beast”.¹⁹⁹ Notice that the leopard of Dan. 7: 6 has **four** heads. The Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great was divided after his death (at 33 years of age) among four of his generals—Ptolemy of Egypt, Seleucus of Syria, Cassander of the western portion or Macedonia, and Antigonus of Asia Minor (Calvin, contra Young). Thus, the four heads of the leopard plus the head of the lion, the head of the bear, and the head of the beast with iron teeth and ten horns equals **seven** heads. The difference is that in Daniel there are **four** separate beasts while the one in Revelation is **one** beast. Although the beast is described in much the same terms as the dragon (ten horns and seven heads, with only the order reversed), he is distinguished from the dragon since the dragon gives the beast its power and authority (v. 2).

Commentators who disagree with one another on the interpretation of many portions of Revelation are in agreement on the general identity of the beast. It represents **world governments**—more specifically, “demonized state power”²⁰⁰—marshaled against the Christian faith and the true church. Ten horns and seven heads represent “the completeness of oppressive power and its worldwide effect”. Because of the symbolic significance of seven and ten, the heads and horns cannot be limited to some specific world kingdom or ruler either in the first century or later.²⁰¹

Just as the four beastly kingdoms of Daniel 7 spanned hundreds of years, so the empire dominant in the first century A.D. has latent within itself manifestations of other oppressive kingdoms that may be manifested in the future, as 17: 10-11 shows. In the light of Daniel 7, the Roman Empire transcends many centuries and represents all world powers who oppress God’s people until the culmination of history.... ‘[John] sees Rome as the residual legatee of all the pagan empires of the past,’ and the evil spirit inspiring Rome as potentially able to dominate other world empires after Rome. The dragon and the beast include world empires of the past and the present and potentially of the future.²⁰²

A series of quotations will further illustrate this consensus of opinion.

¹⁹⁷ Suggested meaning

¹⁹⁸ Combination

¹⁹⁹ Beale, p. 686. “Transtemporal”, meaning that the beast of Revelation cannot be limited to one time period.

²⁰⁰ Poythress, p. 139

²⁰¹ Beale, p. 684

²⁰² Beale, p. 685, also quoting Caird, *Language and Imagery*, p. 229

The sea-born beast symbolizes the persecuting power of satan embodied in all the nations and governments of the world throughout all history. World-dominion directed against God's people wherever and whenever it appears in history: that is the beast.²⁰³

The beast has always been, and will be in a final intensified manifestation, the deification of secular authority....Deification of secular power is in fact the worship of Satan.²⁰⁴

The beast, symbol of human government and empire, of anti-Christian states and cultures generally....represents the totality of all such empires in the ancient world, and all to come....This world is clearly Satan's messiah. Man is man's own and only savior for humanism. The humanist therefore delights in the centralization of power into the hands of human government, because this is his hope. The pretensions of apostate culture are his glory and hope. The humanist holds to the limitless possibilities of human culture and to the sovereignty of man's rule, and he declares proudly, "Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"²⁰⁵

...this *Beast*, the Dragon's messiah, stands for the secular world culture generally....That the dragon has *committed its authority* to the Beast means that the world culture has become Satan's messiah and is dedicated to bringing out his rule in the affairs of men—hence man's *worshipping* of both figures.²⁰⁶

The whole earth (with the exception of the redeemed) is amazed at the power of the beast and submits to its authority saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?" (v. 4), an acclamation Osborne interprets as one of many **parodies** of Christ found in Revelation 13.²⁰⁷

"Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders? (Exodus 15:11 NASB)

The world of earth-dwellers (unbelievers) is awed by the power of the State, but not the power of Christ to change lives and cultures. Additional parodies include the following:²⁰⁸

- The beast is the exact image of the dragon, seven heads and ten horns (compare 13: 1 with 12: 3)
- Ten diadems (crowns) (v. 1)
- Blasphemous names (v. 1)
- Dragon gives authority to the beast (v. 2b)
- The beast's head was slain (v. 3)
- The fatal wound is healed (a counterfeit resurrection) (v. 3b)
- The crowds were "amazed" at the beast (v. 3b)
- Christ is the exact image of God the Father
- Christ's diadems (19: 12) (from Beale, p. 684)
- The worthy names of Christ (19: 12, 13, 16)
- God the Father gives His authority to Christ
- Christ was slain (v. 8)
- Christ rose from the dead (a true resurrection)
- The crowds were "amazed" at the miracles of Christ (Matt. 9: 31)

²⁰³ Hendriksen, p. 176

²⁰⁴ Mounce, pp. 251, 253

²⁰⁵ R. J. Rushdoony, p. 173

²⁰⁶ J. W. Bowman, *Drama of the Book of Revelation*, p. 85, quoted by Rushdoony, p. 173

²⁰⁷ Osborne, p. 497, including the citation of Ex. 15: 11. A parody is a distortion. The similarities between the beast and Christ are distorted imitations.

²⁰⁸ A compiling of parodies from Osborne and Poythress. But see also Mounce and Beale.

- The earth-dwellers worship the dragon and
- “Who is like the beast?” (v. 4)
- The beast speaks boastfully, arrogantly, and blasphemously (vv. 5-6)
- The dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the earth (v. 11; also called the false prophet in 19: 20) form an unholy trinity
- The false prophet, the third member of the unholy trinity, performs signs and wonders to persuade people to worship the beast (vv. 13-14)
- The second beast forces the image of the first beast, 666, to be placed upon the foreheads of his worshippers (vv. 16-17)
- The second beast, the false prophet, encourages worship of the first beast, not himself (v. 12)
- Believers worship God the Father and God the Son (Jn. 5: 23)
- “Who is like You among the gods, O Lord?” (Ex. 15: 11)
- Although accused of blasphemy, Christ speaks the truth that He is the Son of God
- The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit form the Holy Trinity
- The Holy Spirit, through the signs and wonders of Christ, the Apostles, and other NT prophets, persuades people to worship Christ
- Believers have the name of the Father and the Son on their foreheads and are sealed with the Holy Spirit through faith in Christ (Eph. 1: 13)
- The Holy Spirit glorifies Christ, not Himself (Jn. 16: 14)

In Daniel 7: 24 the ten horns of Daniel’s fourth beast represent ten kings.

‘As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom **ten kings** will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. (Daniel 7:24 NASB)

Continuing with the identification of this beast with the four beasts of Daniel 7, we also note that the blasphemous names on the seven heads correspond to the great boasts (blasphemous boasts) of the little horn.

“While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, **a little one**, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and **a mouth uttering great boasts**. (Daniel 7:8 NASB)

Putting the beast in the context of the Apostle John’s world, the beast represents ancient Rome which had conquered the then-known world and subjugated all peoples under its crushing power.²⁰⁹ Notice that the beast carries its crowns on its horns (symbols of power) rather than on its heads. This indicates that Rome does not rule by rightful authority but merely by virtue of military might. The main idea, according to Rushdoony, is that

“Might makes right,” and might is worshipped and obeyed in its every implication. The names of blasphemy indicate that human governments arrogate to themselves the authority and sovereignty which properly belong to God. This is true not only of kings and dictators but of democracies also, with their blasphemous doctrine, *vox populi, vox Dei*, the voice of the people is the voice of God. Majorities are thereby equated with righteousness, and appeal beyond the government and its courts is rendered null and void: “god” has spoken only through his approved voice, the government!²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Cf. Rushdoony, p. 173; Hendriksen, p. 177; Mounce, p. 250

²¹⁰ Rushdoony, pp. 172-173

In the history of the Roman Empire, the emperors increasingly assumed their role as “saviors” of the world and gave names to themselves which expressed their claim to divinity (v. 1b, “and on his heads were blasphemous names”). On the minted coins of Augustus Caesar, the Roman denarius,²¹¹ Augustus placed a picture of himself which said, “Augustus, son of the divine,” and Nero’s coins had the phrase, “Savior of the World.” Domitian, who later became one of the most brutal persecutors of Christians, was addressed as “Our Lord and God.”²¹² Such names were blasphemous to Christians who were willing to die for their faith rather than say, “Caesar is Lord.” For them, there was only one Lord, and His name was Jesus Christ, the second person of the Holy Trinity.

Christians were not put to death in the Roman Empire merely because they worshipped Christ, but because they would not worship anyone or anything but Christ. Roman emperors routinely tolerated different forms of religion as long as the adherents of those religions would recognize the sovereignty of Caesar and the Roman State. Those who would not do so were considered traitorous and subversive to the Roman State and its welfare. When Rome fell to the Barbarians, many pagan Romans believed it was because Christianity had neglected the worship of the Roman gods.

Christ himself had been confronted with this emperor worship when the Pharisees tested him with the question in Luke 20:22, “Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” Jesus responded to this question by saying, “Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?” The image on the coin was that of Caesar Augustus with the inscription, “Augustus, son of the divine.” Jesus then said, “Then render to **Caesar** the things that are Caesar’s, and to **God** the things that are God’s” (Lk. 20: 25). There is more to Jesus’ statement than a casual recognition of the right of governments to assess taxes. The primary emphasis was His command to distinguish between legitimate governmental authority and the authority of God. They are two entirely different things. Augustus claimed to be god walking on earth, a claim which Jesus explicitly and forthrightly denies in his response. “Give to **God** what He requires and to **Caesar** (who is not God) what he requires.”

We are confronted once again with this Caesar worship in Peter’s bold proclamation before the Jewish rulers, elders, and scribes gathered together to examine Peter and John (Acts 4: 1-12). Annas, the high priest, was there on this occasion who, along with the other chief priests of the Jews had told Pilate, “We have no king but Caesar” (Jn. 19: 15). Remembering this blasphemous statement and the coin of Nero which said “Nero, Savior of the World”, Peter proclaims, “He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, *but* which became the very corner *stone*. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven [*including Nero—my addition*] that has been given among men, by which we must be saved” (Acts 4: 11-12).

Thus we see in Jesus’ and Peter’s teaching that there is no contradiction to proper submission to the government taught by the Apostle Paul in Romans 13:1, “Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.” There is such a thing as legitimate governmental authority to which every Christian should willingly submit, but there is also illegitimate governmental authority which

²¹¹ The denarius was the average daily wage for common labor. See Matthew 20: 2

²¹² Mounce, pp. 250-251

requires Christians to compromise their faith. A Christian is never required to deny his faith or violate the law of God in submission to governmental authority or governmental law. To do so is to deny the absolute authority of God. The archbishop of Uganda well understood this fact when he refused to submit to the authority of Idi Amin, who attempted to Islamize the whole country under his murderous regime, and lost his life as a result of his courageous stand.

But we must remember that the beast represents more than ancient Rome, but **all worldly power** raised up in opposition to God and His church (see discussion above). The seven heads symbolize the completeness of world powers, omitting none. The composite form of the beast as the combination of Babylon (the lion), Persia (the bear), Greece (the leopard), and Rome (the beast with ten horns) of Dan. 7—the biggest world powers which ever existed up until John’s time—indicates that the beast also represents all **future** governmental powers which had never existed when John wrote. For John, Rome was the “sum total of all evil”; thus for the Christian church today, the beast stands for all organized political opposition to the kingdom of God, both present and future, which arrogates (seizes unlawfully) the rights of God to itself.²¹³ Psalm 2 is always helpful in understanding this point since it represents the kingdoms of this world in **mutiny** against the lawful king whom God has installed upon his throne, even Jesus Christ.

Why are the nations in an uproar
And the peoples devising a vain thing?² The kings of the earth take
their stand
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
³ “Let us tear their fetters apart
And cast away their cords from us!” (Psalm 2:1-3 NASB)

One of the beast’s heads is slain (v. 3), the result of Christ’s resurrection in Revelation 12. At the cross, the devil and all his demonic accomplices were dealt a **fatal** blow from which they would never **really** and **ultimately** recover. Yet, it appears in John’s revelation that the beast appears to recover from the wound, a distortion or parody of Christ’s resurrection which was not an apparent recovery from death, but a **real** recovery. The language used in v. 3, “as if he had been slain”, is the same language used of the Lamb in Revelation 5: 6, “as if slain”. The language of 5: 6 does not imply that Christ was only apparently dead on the cross. Analogously, the language of 13: 3b, “his fatal wound was healed”, does not imply that the beast’s wound was not really fatal. A **fatal** wound leads inevitably to death; otherwise, it is not fatal. But as Christ rises from the dead eternally, the recovery of the beast is only for a short time before his ultimate destruction (Rev. 17: 8; 19: 20). As Thomas says, “The beast is not dead, but dying.”²¹⁴ Thus, I believe that John is speaking proleptically²¹⁵ in anticipation of something which is sure to happen. Satan’s wound from Christ’s resurrection is fatal, but he is not yet completely dead. Revelation speaks of the certainty of Satan’s demise, yet throughout the book until the end, he is still active and dangerous to the people of God.

The continued activity of the beast in persecuting the saints does not mean that Satan has fully recovered from the death blow of the cross. He can no longer accuse the saints before God, and his authority is limited to the world of unbelievers and has no application to believers.²¹⁶ And

²¹³ Mounce, p. 251

²¹⁴ Thomas, p. 111

²¹⁵ Treating a future event as if it had already happened

²¹⁶ Believers are not obliged to obey Satan. They do so voluntarily because of **remaining** sin, not **reigning** sin (Rom. 6).

even his authority over unbelievers is under God's control.²¹⁷ It should be noted that only one of the beast's heads is fatally wounded, possibly indicating that although he is defeated at the cross and will ultimately succumb to his "fatal wound", he will be allowed for some time to manifest his evil in many ways—with the other **six** heads, an incomplete manifestation of evil, one short of seven. According to the prophecy of Genesis 3: 15, Christ has crushed the serpent's head—the "now" of the kingdom of God—yet Christ must continue to crush His head through the continued activity of His church—the "not yet" of the kingdom of God. In other words, Satan's defeat at the cross has not been finally realized in the life of the church.

The God of peace **will** soon **crush** [*indicative future active*] Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you. (Romans 16:20 NASB)

From the vantage point of John's audience, the fatal wound appeared to be the suicidal death of Nero in AD 68 who may well have been the most brutal monster to assume the throne of the Roman Empire, hated even by the pagan Romans themselves. Nero viciously persecuted the church in A.D. 64 by rolling Christians in tar, nailing them to posts, and using them as human torches to light up his gardens. His death ended persecution for a time, but it was resumed to a more brutal degree under Domitian; thus, the "fatal wound was healed".²¹⁸ After his death, a legend was propagated that Nero had not died but was raising an army in Parthia (the archenemy of Rome) to retake the throne. Thus, the beast of Rome, though fatally wounded, appeared to revive. But looking at the Roman Empire from a broader perspective, Rome continued ruling the earth for hundreds of years after Nero's death and seemed to the world as an invincible power that would never die.²¹⁹ Yet, it **did** die. Rome's fall was made certain when Christ died on the cross and rose again, and this kingdom cut out of the mountain without hands (Dan. 2) will be the death-blow to all worldly kingdoms. They all must die.

Another explanation is that the slain **head** does not recover but only the **beast** (see above). This means that even though pagan states arise and are removed from the scene of human history, **the beast of state worship** recovers repeatedly in different forms to exalt itself against the people of God. "It had survived every assault and recovered from every deadly blow....man is made to worship some absolute power and in the last analysis will give his allegiance either to the beast (whose power is that of inflicting suffering) or to the Lamb (whose power lies in accepting suffering)". The fact that the people worship the beast as well as the dragon indicates the inescapable connection between Satan worship and the worship of the State.²²⁰

Nevertheless, Satan appears to many Christians as stronger than ever before in the history of the world. When we read the newspapers and view the internet news, all external appearances would lead us to believe that Satan is winning—the civil war in Syria, claiming 150,000 lives so far, many of them children, the civil war in South Sudan, a new country claiming to be the "Christian" portion of Sudan, two twelve-year-old girls in the United States who plot for months to stab their close friend to death, another 12 year old girl. But looks can be deceiving. What we see with our physical eyes is temporal, but the vision of John we share in the book of Revelation is eternal.

²¹⁷ Beale, pp. 688-689

²¹⁸ Hendriksen, p. 178

²¹⁹ Poythress, p. 142

²²⁰ Mounce, p. 253

The dragon gives his authority to the beast (v. 4) and in subsequent verses the words, “was given” occur twice for emphasis (v. 5, 7). The real power behind the beast is the dragon. As we have seen, this is a parody of God giving His authority to the Son. His authority lasts for 42 months, a time period which we see many times signifying the entire dispensation of the church from the ascension of Christ to the second coming of Christ in judgment. The blasphemy of the beast has already been mentioned in regard to his names (v. 1), but is emphasized in vv. 5-6 in his open blasphemies against God and against the name of God “and his tabernacle”. History tells us that the Roman emperor Caligula attempted to set up his statue in the Holy of Holies in the Jewish temple, but the verse may not refer to any particular blasphemous incident.²²¹

So powerful is this beast that he will be allowed to make war with the true church and overcome it. There is an obvious connection with 13: 7 and the killing of the witnesses in 11: 7 who prophesy for 1260 days or 42 months. This is the same struggle seen in chapter 11 from a different perspective—the perspective of organized opposition to the kingdom of God. Notice that the beast will have authority “over every tribe, and people, and tongue, and nation”, the very description of those whom had been purchased by the blood of Christ in Rev. 5: 9, “men *from* every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Thus, there is competition for humanity between Christ and the beast, even as the serpent in Genesis competed for the allegiance of Adam and Eve. The beast will be worshipped by everyone whose name has not been written in the Lamb’s book of life before the creation of the world (v. 8). Thus, the book of life symbolizes the protection of all God’s people from the lies and deception of the beast. Everyone else lacks this protection and will succumb to satanic lies.

The ability to overcome the saints (v. 7) should not be surprising if we consider the power of the State to prosecute, harass, and kill—sometimes in alliance with the false church. The true church, on the other hand, does not use such carnal weapons, and is forbidden to do so. The heralded message of vv. 9-10, “Now hear this!” appears to warn believers against the use of force to protect themselves from their persecutors.²²² This is not a call to revolutionary opposition suggested by liberation theologians²²³, but rather a call to persevere in suffering. There are no instructions in Revelation for believers to make war with the beast or those who follow the beast in his persecution of the church. The Lamb will do that for us²²⁴, as Revelation 14 demonstrates with gruesome detail. The ESV translation captures the meaning, “Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.”

The phrase, “if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed” (NASB) mirrors Jesus’ rebuke of Peter, “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword” (Matthew 26:52 NASB). Our method of defeating Satan’s forces is not by military or political might, but by the power of the Spirit working in men’s hearts through His word. By the abuse of legislative and judicial power, abusive governments have harassed, prosecuted, and taken the lives of countless Christians and will continue to do so in the future. Jesus warned the twelve about this abuse of power at the beginning of their ministry.

²²¹ Mounce, p. 255

²²² Mounce, p. 257

²²³ Liberation theology distorts the true gospel by defining salvation in socio-economic and political terms. It has been very popular among theologians of South America.

²²⁴ Osborne, p. 506

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to *the* courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles” (Matt. 10: 16-18).

But the State can only kill the body. We are also reminded of Jesus’ words of encouragement to the twelve saying, “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10: 28). The power of the beast does not extend to the destruction of the soul, but only the body. His victory is only apparent or illusory just as the victory of the beast from the abyss is only apparent (Rev. 11). The two witnesses are raised to life and are transported to heaven in a cloud. Believers in Revelation 13 may be killed, but their names are written in the book of “life”, and their blood is avenged in Revelation 14. Osborne believes that although persecution has always been the lot of the church, this end-time persecution under the Antichrist “will become a universal experience of the church” foretold by Christ in the Olivet discourse (Matt. 24: 29). The destruction of Jerusalem, as we have said, is a foreshadowing of this final tribulation period.

Believers will overcome the beast from the sea (the same as the beast from the abyss), by the “blood of the Lamb.” Through perseverance and faith, the saints will overcome anything that the beast can throw against them (v. 10). John’s revelation therefore encourages believers not to compromise in the face of persecution and death.²²⁵

¹¹ **Then I saw another beast**
coming up out of the earth;
and he had two horns like a lamb
and he spoke as a dragon.

¹² He exercises all the authority of the first beast
in his presence.
And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it
to **worship** the first beast,
whose fatal wound was healed.

¹³ He performs great signs,
so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth
in the presence of men.

¹⁴ And he **deceives** those who dwell on the earth
because of the signs which it **was given him** to perform
in the presence of the beast,
telling those who dwell on the earth
to make an image to the beast
who had the wound of the sword
and has come to life.

¹⁵ **And it was given to him**
to give breath to the image of the beast,
so that the image of the beast would even speak
and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

²²⁵ Beale, p. 704

Commented [D51]: An imitation of Elijah?

Commented [D52]: "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:24 NAU)

¹⁶ And he causes all,
 the small and the great,
 and the rich and the poor,
 and the free men and the slaves,
 to be given a **mark**
 on their right hand
 or **on their forehead**,

¹⁷ and he provides that no one
 will be able to buy or to sell,
 except the one who has **the mark**,
 either the name of the beast or the number of his name.

¹⁸ Here is wisdom.
 Let him who has understanding
 calculate the number of the beast,
 for the number is that of a man;
 and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

The second beast of chapter 13 is the beast **from the earth** (v. 11). Although he takes the form of a lamb (another parody) he speaks as a dragon, an indication that he is not what he appears to be. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7: 15), a deceiver within the ranks of the covenant community. His primary purpose is **religious**—to make all mankind worship the first beast. As we learned from Revelation 1—3, false teachers within the church were encouraging believers to compromise their faith and moral integrity by participating in the cultic feasts and ritual prostitution associated with various craftsman's guilds. This was the sin of the Nicolaitans and Jezebel (Rev. 2: 6, 20).²²⁶ Paul warns the church of Thessalonica about the apostasy and the man of lawlessness who takes his seat in the temple, that is, the church (2 Thess. 2: 3). John warns that even as he writes that there are many antichrists plaguing the church with false teaching (1 Jn. 2: 18; 4: 1-3), thus linking these two passages with Revelation 13.²²⁷

When purported Christian teachers **take their primary cues from the surrounding culture** instead of from God's word, they corrupt the covenant community spiritually by encouraging it to live by norms and a faith that ultimately oppose the reign of God and Christ.²²⁸

With this second beast, the evil triumvirate ²²⁹ (the unholy trinity) is complete. We have the **dragon** which is the functional authority of the three, the **beast from the sea** which is given authority by the dragon, and now the **beast from the earth** which glorifies the first beast. Following F.F. Bruce, Mounce sees this unholy trinity as a parody (distortion) of the Holy Trinity—the Father, who gives authority to the Son, who in turn is glorified by the Holy Spirit. Unlike the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth, the beast from the earth is a deceiver who performs counterfeit miracles to entice men to believe in the first beast.²³⁰

²²⁶ Beale, p. 708

²²⁷ Osborne, p. 512

²²⁸ Beale, pp. 709-710

²²⁹ Government by three

²³⁰ Mounce, p. 258

Who is this beast? Revelation 16: 13, 19: 20, and 20: 10 identify him as a **false prophet**. He also represents **false religion** and false philosophy during the entire church age²³¹ and/or the unbelieving or apostate church.²³²

In the final days of Anti-christ the false prophet stands for the role of false religion in effecting the capitulation of mankind to the worship of secular power. It is the universal victory of humanism.²³³

In imitation of true prophets, signs and wonders are employed by this false prophet to convince people to worship the beast from the sea. Notice from vv. 12 and 14 that the second beast performs signs and wonders “in the presence of the *[first]* beast” even as the two witnesses prophesy in the presence of the Lord (11: 4).²³⁴ The Israelites were warned by Moses not to follow any prophet who led the people to follow false gods, even if he was able to produce signs or predict wonders which came true.

“If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder,² and the sign or the wonder comes true, concerning which he spoke to you, saying, ‘**Let us go after other gods** (whom you have not known) and let us serve them,’³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams; for the LORD your God is testing you to find out if you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3 NASB)

Christ, the second Moses warned of this as well, saying, “And then if anyone says to you, ‘Behold, here is the Christ’; or, ‘Behold, *He is* there’; do not believe *him*; for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray” (Mk. 13: 21-22).²³⁵ The distortion of Christ’s work continues in the work of the second beast. As the true apostles of Christ preach and perform miracles under the authority of Christ (Matt. 10: 1, “gave them authority”), the second beast exercises the authority of the first beast. As the apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2) attempt to persuade the world to worship Christ, the second beast attempts to persuade the world to worship the first beast. As the apostles constantly refer to the resurrection of Christ as the basis for worship, the counterfeit healing of the fatal wound is closely associated with the worship of the beast.²³⁶

How would John’s audience interpret signs, wonders, and mandated worship of the beast’s image (vv. 13-14)? Although we should not limit our interpretation to events of the first century, there were certain manifestations of the second beast and its image that merit our attention. Imperial cult priests were included among the political representatives of ruling provincial councils in major cities. In temples dedicated to the worship of Caesar, various tricks were used by these priests including ventriloquism²³⁷ and false lightening to make images of the Caesar appear to speak and move. All seven cities addressed in Revelation had temples for this purpose, and Ephesus had temples to Julius Caesar, Augustus, Domitian and Hadrian.²³⁸ In Ephesus, a

²³¹ Hendriksen, p. 179

²³² Rushdoony, p. 174

²³³ Mounce, p. 259

²³⁴ Beale, p. 710

²³⁵ Mounce, pp. 259-260

²³⁶ Beale, p. 709

²³⁷ Ventriloquism is the art of speaking so that the voice appears to come from some other source than the speaker.

Thus, it could be used effectively in ancient culture to make the image of Caesar appear as if it were speaking.

²³⁸ Osborne, p. 515

huge statue of Domitian²³⁹ was erected for the worship of the entire province. When the people of the whole province were summoned for the dedication of this statue, there would have been very strong pressure placed upon Christians to participate in the event, otherwise the city would have risked Domitian's wrath. Public expressions of Caesar worship were increasingly on the rise in Asia Minor during this time, many of them mandated by the civil authorities. When Christians refused to participate, public animosity would naturally follow.²⁴⁰ Interpreting the second beast from a wider historical angle, Rushdoony remarks,

It exercises its authority (v. 12) for one purpose, to subordinate man to human culture, to the state, to humanism, and to direct man's hopes from Christ to society, from salvation through the atonement of Jesus Christ to salvation by social action. For the second beast, the kingdom of God is this world in all its human hopes and pretensions: it is the world of Adam in revolt, attempting to build a tower of Babel in opposition to God, a one world order without God. And this beast comes out of the church and is the apostate church....The new god of the false church is the state, with which it is in union. The false beast, false Christianity, sees as its enemy all true Christianity and seeks to force its conformity to a man-centered doctrine, to a faith centered on the fulfillment of Adam's ideal, the self-deification of man, on all men. This enthronement of fallen Adam, however, is not sought as a conscious rebellion against God; it masks itself as true piety and true faith; it is now a highly moralistic religion in that it believes in man's works and man's law.²⁴¹

Thus, according to Rushdoony, just as the beast of the sea is **one-world government** organized like the tower of Babel against the Lord and his people, the beast of the earth is **one-world religion**, the religion of **secular humanism** which is basically the deification of man (man becoming God), the sin which God judged in the Garden of Eden and at Babel. But by worshipping himself, man also worships his own achievements in the form of money, science, or social engineering; thus his temple is the bank, the laboratory, or the academic institution.²⁴² In essence, all religion except true Christianity is the worship of man or secular humanism since all other religions fashion a god according to man's image and according to his likeness. Only Christianity claims the God of the Bible who sends a Savior to do for man what man is incapable of doing for himself. Even Islam, which claims absolute law and is the closest imitator of Christianity, is humanistic in that man improves himself and ultimately saves himself by doing the will of Allah. Man's futile attempt to be his own god lends support to the idea that the number of the beast, 666, is the number for fallen humanity who will forever fall short of the completeness promised in the salvation of God, the **seventh-day** Sabbath rest found in Christ alone (see discussion below).

It is difficult to determine exactly what signs and wonders will be displayed by the false prophet at the end of the world to deceive the earth-dwellers. If the modern reader considers it too far-fetched for sophisticated westerners to succumb to fantastic, miraculous deceptions in our day or the future, he forgets that many are now turning to very strange modifications of eastern mysticism, New Age religions, and so forth. It is also becoming clear to many scientists that science cannot answer the ultimate questions of life: where did life originate, is there any meaning to man's existence? Some of them, apparently frustrated by the failure of the evolutionary model to provide answers to man's origin, are now posing the theory that our DNA

²³⁹ The current Roman emperor when Revelation was written

²⁴⁰ Beale, pp. 711-713, 717; see also Osborne, p. 513

²⁴¹ Rushdoony, p. 175

²⁴² Cf. Osborne, p. 522

comes from another planet, transported to earth via spaceship by more intelligent life forms. (I'm not joking.) Even movies are being produced to propagate this myth. Ancient cultures did not have a monopoly on gullibility; thus, there is ample possibility in the future for some leader or coalition of political leaders and scientists to drag the whole world into a colossal religious lie. It appears to me that the unsubstantiated theory of evolution—now touted as law in almost every academic institution—is ample proof of this. By default, not evidence, it has now achieved the status of religious truth, and all dissenters are heretics. “Since the earth-dwellers have rejected God’s offer of salvation and refused to repent (9: 20-21), God is ‘giving them over’ to the very ‘deception’ they have already preferred.”²⁴³

Poythress suggests that mass media, educational institutions, advertising, and technologically enhanced communication are becoming the “principle means of deceit” in the modern world. Through these instruments, the modern world develops a world view based either on reality or deception. Too often progress is defined by jettisoning²⁴⁴ the cargo of the past and blindly accepting anything touted as “new”, although it is often a mere repackaging of the past (Ecc. 1: 9). The idols of the west—money, beauty, sex, political and economic power—have become the idols of the world through the mass media and advertising.

These ideas pervade the atmosphere. They are all the more insidious²⁴⁵ because they are “atmospheric.” They tend to be assumed rather than argued. One receives the subtle impression that it is all **obvious**. Everyone who is informed, everyone who is “with it,” has gone past the stage of questioning. In reality, though, there never was a fundamental questioning, because the ideas seem so natural and inevitable. The average person is no more aware of them than the fish is aware of the water in which it has swum since its birth. The few who are aware can still take comfort. They may say to themselves, “How could we possibly be wrong, when the **miracles** of modern science and technology show the superiority of our ideas over those of the past?”

Technology, then, becomes the worker of miraculous signs (13: 14). The signs tells [sic] us that true power resides in the modern view of the world. Worship the power of the Beast, the power of technocratic state organization, the power of the expert, because technology can work wonders like no one else.²⁴⁶

Adolf Hitler was able to convince the most educated military leaders in Europe²⁴⁷ that the most viable solution to the “Jewish question” was their extermination. But the end justified the means of securing the future of the Aryan race which was superior to all others. I’ve seen actual video footage of his speeches, and although I cannot understand German, it is understandable how his oratorical skills mesmerized an otherwise intelligent society. As the saying goes, “Sin makes people stupid.”²⁴⁸ The trite saying, “We need to make sure something like this never happens again,” commonly made by politicians, is a joke. Something like Hitler Germany has already taken place many times in the same century in similarly egregious ways—the death of 30 million Russians during the tyranny of Stalin, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the recent genocide in South Sudan, the five million dead in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2000. As Osborne suggests, if anyone were able to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the unrest (and, I might

²⁴³ Osborne, p. 514

²⁴⁴ Throwing overboard

²⁴⁵ Dangerous because undetected

²⁴⁶ Poythress, pp. 144-145, emphasis mine

²⁴⁷ One third or more of his German generals had Ph.D’s, some from Oxford and Cambridge.

²⁴⁸ A saying I got from a friend of mine, Mike Boyett.

add, poverty) of Africa, and establish peace throughout the world, he would have no difficulty attracting the world's admiration in religious proportions.²⁴⁹

The mark of the beast (vv. 16-17) corresponds to the seal of God upon the forehead of God's people (7: 3-4) and the name of the Lamb and God the Father upon the foreheads of all believers (14: 1). In Roman society, tattoos or brands were applied to slaves, soldiers, or cult members to indicate **ownership** or **loyalty**. Those who refuse to receive the mark of the beast upon their foreheads will be increasingly marginalized²⁵⁰ by the rest of society. There can be no neutrality in the war between God and Satan.²⁵¹ Christians who would not participate in emperor worship or the heathen festivals of the craftsmen's guilds—each of which worshipped their own deity—were increasingly ostracized in the Roman Empire.²⁵² They had difficulty getting jobs, keeping jobs or even in participating in the normal market economy of their day (Rev. 13: 17). How this ostracism will be exhibited at the end of the church age in the final and most severe persecution of the church is not difficult to imagine. There will be severe economic penalties for those who refuse to participate in the religious and political status quo. Even today, Christians in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and 74 other persecuting countries often find it difficult to acquire and maintain jobs in cultures hostile to the Christian faith.²⁵³

On a more subtle level, science professors in the West who do not accept evolution as dogma²⁵⁴, or philosophy professors who dare to believe in the absolute truth and trustworthiness of the Bible, will likely not receive employment, much less tenured positions, in most western universities. Today, endless governmental regulations, permits, licenses, etc., prevent honest people from starting and succeeding in businesses. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, is the most difficult place on earth to do business, taking a disproportionate amount of time and personnel to simply fill out the endless reports and tax forms required by kleptocratic²⁵⁵ governments whose continuing existence requires bribery and theft.²⁵⁶ Moreover, interest rates on business loans vary from 24% to 36%, depending on the principle amount borrowed, making it difficult if not impossible for Africans to repay business loans and make profits at the same time. Banks and microenterprise loan institutions are growing wealthy to the detriment of discouraging entrepreneurial activity and the squashing of middle-class Africans. Although these systemic forces are not aimed specifically at Christians, it is not difficult to imagine a scenario²⁵⁷ in which Christians become the main targets of governmental regulation and obstruction of justice.

Society regards the Christian as a misfit, a misanthrope, a victim of insanity. The Christian does not accept the "obvious verities,"²⁵⁸ and so cannot be trusted. Thus, a consistent Christian will find it difficult to fit in and mix with pagan society. The difficulties may be subtle, as in "tolerant" modern

²⁴⁹ Osborne, p. 522

²⁵⁰ Shoved off to the side and isolated

²⁵¹ Osborne, pp. 517-518

²⁵² Isolated from the rest of society

²⁵³ *Open Doors World Watch List*, cited in *Operation World*, 2001

²⁵⁴ Fact beyond reasonable question

²⁵⁵ Bureaucracies that steal from the citizens of a nation.

²⁵⁶ See George Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos*, and *Africa Unchained*, also Dambisa Moyo, *DeadAid*

²⁵⁷ A situation or set of circumstances

²⁵⁸ Truths, realities

democratic societies, or they may be blatant and harsh, as in the Roman Empire or modern totalitarian countries where Christians may suffer the confiscation of their property.²⁵⁹

The number of the beast has been the object of much speculation, and commentators intent on interpreting the antichrist as a single individual have resorted to using the numerical value of names (“gematria”) for identifying this person.²⁶⁰ I have heard one interpretation from a Ugandan—“the beast is the United States”. Well, maybe, and that interpretation would probably be acceptable to a vast majority of the world’s population despite massive doses of foreign aid from the US. Just as 13: 10, “Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints”, is a command to persevere, so verse 18, “Here is wisdom” is a command to exercise wisdom in determining the meaning of the number. Wisdom is needed, not in determining the numerical value of names, but in recognizing our utter incompleteness without God.

The number is 666...the number of a man, the human number, raised to its highest degree. Seven is the symbol of totality, of divine fullness; six is the human number. Man was created on the sixth day. The number 666 represents the essence of man’s messianic pretensions as well as their futility: at his highest, it constantly falls short of the divine totality and sovereignty. Neither 6 nor 66, nor 666 can ever become 7, or 77, or 777 in itself. Man is a creature and always remains a creature: his messianic dreams concerning himself cannot change the fact of his creaturehood or remove from him the divine judgment that faces his rebellion and sin.²⁶¹

Nevertheless, let not the believer despair. Let him remember that the number of the beast is the number of MAN. Now, man was created on the sixth day. Six, moreover, is not seven and never reaches seven. It ever fails to attain to perfection; that is, it never becomes seven. Six means missing the mark, failure. Seven means perfection, victory....The number of the beast is six hundred sixty-six, that is, failure upon failure upon failure! It is the number of MAN, for the beast glories in Man; hence, must fail!²⁶²

This generic notion is consistent with 13: 1, which affirms that the beast has its earthly origin in the sea of fallen humanity....The beast is the supreme representative of unregenerate humanity, separated from God and unable to achieve divine likeness, but always trying. Humanity was created on the sixth day, but without the seventh day of rest Adam and Eve would have been imperfect and incomplete. The triple six emphasizes that the beast and his followers fall short of God’s creative purposes for humanity. Believers are to beware of compromise, not just with the Roman emperor, but with all the facets of the state in collusion with religious, economic, and social aspects of the idolatrous culture, which all epitomize fallen humanity.²⁶³

The use of *Gematria* is more than a little questionable when it comes to identifying the number 666. No such attempt, for example, is made in identifying other numbers, such as 7, 10, 42, 1,260, or 144,000. The process is too ‘clever’ for a book that is more concerned with discernment than specialist knowledge....it is likely that John intends 666 to be a parody of 777. A number short of completeness repeated three times is a trinity of imperfection. The beast of the earth bears the spirit of utter imperfection. Despite his lofty claims he bears a deadly flaw.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Poythress, pp. 146-147

²⁶⁰ Osborne, pp. 518-519

²⁶¹ Rushdoony, p. 176

²⁶² Hendriksen, p. 182

²⁶³ Beale, pp. 724-725

²⁶⁴ Thomas, 113

Those who do not receive the mark are persecuted in various ways: politically, economically, and socially. Those of us who have not lived in the midst of severe religious persecution will have difficulty identifying the precise form this persecution takes. The best we can do is familiarize ourselves with the situation of Christians living during the Roman Empire who were shunned politically (no Christians could hold office), economically (they were nudged out of the market place), and socially (accused of being traitors to Rome and even cannibals, due to misinterpretation of the Lord’s Supper). However, Christians who are living in cultures dominated by Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc. understand perfectly what John is talking about. They live each day in fear of losing their jobs, not being able to get an education for their children, fear of not having access to justice, or even death, all because they are Christians and will not compromise their faith. They will not receive the mark of the beast on their hands or head, symbolic of ordering one’s total life—in thought and deed—in accordance with false philosophy. Instead, they order their lives according to the Christian faith (Dt. 6: 6-8).

In 2003, before the US-led war in Iraq, there were 1.2 million Christians living in Iraq. In 2010, there were 500,000, less than half the number seven years before. While militant Islam existed in the region long before the war, the absence of strong leadership to replace the powerful despot, Saddam Hussein, has resulted in the resurgence of Islamic jihadist terrorism with the consequent devastation and persecution of the Christian church—including the murder of its members. In St. George’s Episcopal Church in Baghdad, 1,000 members have died from violence in the past five years. Some experts are predicting that Christianity will not survive in the Middle East beyond another 30 years.²⁶⁵

Excursis: The Seven Cycles of Visions

Beginning in Revelation 12, John sees **seven cycles of visions**. These visions are marked off by the words: “then a sign appeared”, “then I saw”, “then I looked”, “and I saw”. Revelation 15: 1 serves as a parenthetical introduction to the seven bowls followed by the seventh vision.²⁶⁶

1. Chapter 12: Vision **One** of the Woman and the Dragon

¹A **great sign appeared in heaven:**

a woman

clothed with the sun,

³Then **another sign appeared in heaven:**

and behold, a great red dragon

having seven heads and ten horns,

Commented [D53]: cf. 13: 1

2. Chapter 13: Vision **Two** of the Beast from the Sea

¹And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore.

Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea,

having ten horns and seven heads,

Commented [D54]: cf. 12: 3

²⁶⁵ World Magazine, “The Edge of Extinction”, May 17, 2014

²⁶⁶ Beale, p. 730

3. Chapter 13: Vision **Three** of the Beast from the Earth

¹¹ **Then I saw another beast**
coming up out of the earth;
and he had two horns like a lamb

4. Chapter 14: Vision **Four** of the Lamb with the 144,000

¹**Then I looked**, and behold,
the Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion,
and with Him **one hundred and forty-four thousand**,

Commented [D55]: Rev. 7: 4

5. Chapter 14: Vision **Five** of the Angels Pronouncing Judgment

⁶ **And I saw another angel**
flying in midheaven,
having an eternal gospel to preach
⁸ And **another angel, a second one**, followed,
saying,
"Fallen, fallen is **Babylon the great**,
⁹ Then **another angel, a third one**, followed them,
saying with a loud voice,
"If anyone worships the beast and his image,
and receives **a mark** on his forehead or on his hand,
¹⁰ he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God,

6. Chapter 14: Vision **Six** of the Son of Man on the Cloud and the Harvest of the Wicked

¹⁴ **Then I looked, and behold**,
a white cloud,
and sitting on the cloud *was* one **like a son of man**,
¹⁵ And **another angel came out of the temple**,
crying out with a loud voice to **Him** who sat on the cloud,
"Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come,
¹⁷ And **another angel came out of the temple** which is in heaven,
and he also had a sharp sickle.
¹⁸ Then **another angel**,
the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar;

Commented [D56]: See 14: 7

7. Chapter 15: Vision **Seven** of the Victory of God's People over the Beast from the Sea

² **And I saw**
something like a sea of glass mixed with fire,
and **those who had been victorious** over the beast and his image

Revelation 14

¹**Then I looked**, and behold,
the Lamb *was* standing on Mount Zion,
and with Him **one hundred and forty-four thousand**,

Commented [D57]: Rev. 7: 4

having His name and the name of His Father **written on their foreheads.**

Commented [D58]: Those who refused the mark of the beast

² And **I heard a voice from heaven,**
like the sound of many waters
and like the sound of loud thunder,

Commented [D59]: Rev. 1: 15

and **the voice which I heard**
was like *the sound* of harpists playing on their harps.

Commented [D60]: Isa. 29: 1-6

³ And **they sang a new song**
before the throne
and before **the four living creatures and the elders;**

Commented [D61]: Ex. 15: 1; Rev. 5: 9; 15: 3

Commented [D62]: Rev. 4--5

and no one could learn the song
except the **one hundred and forty-four thousand**
who had been **purchased** from the earth.

⁴ **These are the ones**
who have not been **defiled with women,**
for they have kept themselves chaste.

Commented [D63]: Probably a reference to ritual prostitution in 2: 14, 20. See also 14: 8

These are the ones
who follow the Lamb wherever He goes.

These have been purchased
from among men
as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.

⁵ And no lie was found in their mouth;
they are **blameless.**

The contrast in Chapters 13 and 14 is between (1) the dragon and the two beasts and all the earth-dwellers who worship them and the image of the beast and (2) the true Lamb of God and all who worship Him. Notice the parallel language in the two opposing chapters.

Chapter 13

¹And the dragon **stood** on the sand of the seashore.

⁴ they **worshiped the dragon** because he gave his authority to the beast; and they **worshiped the beast,**

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

¹⁶ And he causes all,
the small and the great,
and the rich and the poor,
and the free men and the slaves,
to be given a **mark**
on their right hand
or **on their forehead,**

Chapter 14

¹Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb *was standing* on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, **having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.**

Mount Zion represents the capital where the Messiah will reign (Ps. 2: 6-12; 110: 2; 132: 13). The 144,000 does not represent a specific number of people or a specific group of believers but rather the **completed number** of God's people throughout the church age until the consummated kingdom: $12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10 = 144,000$. This complete number contrasts with those who have the mark of the beast, 666, a three-fold number of **incompleteness** representing the fact that the rest of humanity falls short of God's purpose and design.²⁶⁷ The 144,000 also correspond to the 12,000 from each tribe of Israel who were sealed on their foreheads for protection in (Rev. 7). In that chapter, these were not literal Israelites, but the new Israel of God consisting of believing Jews and Gentiles. These are the ones who have been purchased from the earth; that is, purchased by the blood of Christ (Acts 20: 28; 1 Cor. 6: 20) from among the earth-dwellers.²⁶⁸ For this reason they have reason to sing a new song of praise to God before His throne and before the four living creatures and twenty-four elders. A choir of this magnitude sounds like the roaring of the waters and the sound of thunder. From another perspective, it sounds like a multitude of harpists. This new song corresponds with the new song of Revelation 5: 9.

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood *men* from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. (Revelation 5:9 NASB)

Only those who have been purchased, the elect from every nation, are able to learn this new song of salvation. Only they are able to sing it, for the rest of the world cannot participate in their salvation. The phrase, "before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders" brings the reader back to the throne-room scene in Revelation 4—5. It is a picture of God in His awesome splendor and majesty surrounded by thousands upon thousands of worshippers.

The 144,000 purchased from the earth are chaste and pure. They have not been defiled with women (v. 4). The interpretation of this statement must conform to the context of the book of Revelation with its abundant metaphors.²⁶⁹ It should be obvious that John is **not** saying that only virgin men will inherit the kingdom of God. He is also **not** saying that those who have committed sexual immorality—fornication or adultery—are banned from heaven—as if sexual sins are unpardonable. Why should these sins be singled out from the rest? Besides, this would contradict the Bible who praises Rahab the prostitute for her faith (Heb. 11: 31). Within the context of Revelation, the greatest of sins was the sin of total apostasy from the faith without repentance, a final and conclusive sin for which there was no remedy or forgiveness. Moreover, this apostasy often expressed itself in the worship of money, and many professing Christians were tempted to continue their involvement in the trade guilds in the face of economic sanctions against them for non-participation. Later in the book, Babylon the great is presented metaphorically as a whore with whom the kings of the earth had committed fornication, another metaphorical expression for the worship of power and money (18: 2-3). Thus, those who are chaste are those who have not succumbed to the **idol worship of economic and political power**—two things which always go together. Of course, the worship of this world often includes literal sexual immorality, but John is referring more broadly to the sin of idolatry.

²⁶⁷ Beale, p. 733

²⁶⁸ This of course implies that there are others, the earth-dwellers, who are not purchased with the blood of Christ, supporting the doctrine of particular (limited) atonement.

²⁶⁹ A metaphor is a figure of speech containing an implied comparison. A word or phrase that ordinarily means one thing is applied to something else.

This view is supported from the OT in which Israel is often referred to as a “virgin” daughter (Isa. 37: 22; Jer. 14: 17). The virgin theme arises again in Jeremiah 31 in the context of Israel’s restoration under the new covenant (Jer. 31: 4, 13, 21). By way of contrast, the idolatrous behavior of Israel and Judah is portrayed as spiritual harlotry (Jer. 3: 1-10).²⁷⁰ Thus, John is warning believers reading Revelation to continue standing firm in their fidelity to the true God without staining themselves with the harlotries of pagan worship—which also included sexual intercourse with temple prostitutes. The Revelation emphasizes the necessity of this fidelity by juxtaposing²⁷¹ the spiritual adultery of those who follow the beast with those who follow the Lamb (v. 4). You cannot follow both at the same time; you must make a choice.

Rather than following the whore of Babylon, those who are purchased “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (v. 4). Jesus said that He knew His sheep and that they would follow Him because they knew His voice (Jn. 10: 4, 27). While the world of earth-dwellers listens to the voice of the beast, those who are purchased from among the earth-dwellers listen to the Lamb.

Those who are purchased are also the “first fruits” to God the Father and God the Son (v. 4). The first fruits were the **choice crops** of the land which belonged to the Lord and were used in support of the priesthood (Ex. 23: 16-19; Deut. 18: 3-5). As the first fruits, these crops were separated from the rest of the harvest and consecrated to God. In the same way, those who are purchased are separated from the rest of those who dwell on the earth and consecrated to God.²⁷² In 1 Corinthians 15: 20, Paul applies the term to Christ who is the “first fruits” of believers who have died. That is, Christ is the choicest person—separated from all others in His perfect humanity—among all those who will one day be raised from the dead as Christ was raised. Another predominant idea of the first fruits is faith. As the Israelites gave the first fruits of their crops to the Lord, they waited in faith for the Lord to prosper the remaining portion of their crops even when they had not yet appeared. By giving the first fruits, they testified that they trusted God’s future provisions, not by sight, but by faith. Applied in this context, believers from all generations from the beginning of creation to the end of this age are God’s choice fruits, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the earth (Eph. 1: 4) through faith by which they have laid hold of God’s promise of salvation even when it could not be seen with the physical eyes (2 Cor. 5: 7).

One other characteristic is mentioned. “And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless” (v.5). This does not mean that these chosen ones had never lied, but that their lives testify to the truth of the gospel (12: 11) rather than the lies of Satan (12: 11). They are “blameless” not by human merit but because of the blood of the Lamb to which they testify.

⁶ **And I saw another angel**
 flying in midheaven,
 having an eternal gospel to preach
 to **those who live on the earth,**
 and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;

⁷ and **he said with a loud voice,**

²⁷⁰ Beale, pp. 739-740

²⁷¹ Setting side by side

²⁷² Beale, p. 744

"Fear God, and give Him glory,
because **the hour of His judgment has come;**
worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."

Commented [D64]: See 14: 15

"**And I saw**" marks off another vision, the fifth, of the seven cycles of visions beginning in chapter 12: 1. Now we see the angels of heaven pronouncing judgment upon the earth-dwellers who have received the mark of the beast upon their forehead or hand. The "eternal gospel" (the "good news") does not appear to the reader as a message of judgment, and for this reason some commentators have reasoned that this is one last opportunity for earth-dwellers to repent and believe the gospel.²⁷³ But it would seem that the proclamation of this section presupposes²⁷⁴ the final, **irreversible division** of mankind into two classes—those with the mark of the beast and those with the name of Christ on their foreheads. The phrase, "who live on the earth" (v. 6) is always used in Revelation of entrenched unbelievers, not those who are susceptible to the influence of the gospel (Rev. 3: 10; 6: 10; 8: 13; 11: 10; 13: 8, 12, 14; 17: 2, 8), and there is no evidence in Revelation that any of those designated in this manner actually repent.

Nevertheless, there is much difference of opinion among interpreters about whether this is the genuine offer of the gospel. Beale argues, unconvincingly in my opinion, that the story of Nebuchadnezzar's acclamation of God's glory in Daniel 4 was not true conversion (cf. Rev. 14: 7, "give Him glory.")²⁷⁵ Yet, it seems clear that the context of Revelation 14 implies a gospel proclamation which "carries dire consequences if it is rejected, as Paul underscores in Rom. 1: 16ff.; 2 Cor. 2: 14-16; and Acts 17: 18-32." The focus of the text is on judgment, and the multitudes of earth-dwellers are not expected to respond to this gospel. "But if the notion of a coerced fearing, glorifying, and worshiping is ultimately not satisfactory, then the angel of 14: 8 must be seen as issuing a final decree for genuine conversion, which the directly following context shows will go unheeded."²⁷⁶ Thomas emphasizes that the "good news" here is not so much the good news of blessing to those who repent but the good news to believers that their persecutors are finally being brought to justice.

This is not a word of good news as such, but of judgment. Even so, it is vital to bear in mind that the downfall of all that is contrary to the purposes of God is, in the last analysis, good news for the believer, however painful that thought might be. The gospel always contains a dire warning of the consequences of rejecting the offer of grace in Jesus Christ. The twin roles of the covenant are that it contains curses as well as blessings.²⁷⁷

Also appealing to the context, Osborne argues from the command to worship in v. 7 that "worship" in twenty-one other passages in Revelation refers to genuine worship.²⁷⁸ The reader, as always, must make the difficult choice of which interpretation among many is most convincing to him.

²⁷³ Osborne, p. 535, although Osborne concedes that this could be "forced homage" instead of the free offer of the gospel.

²⁷⁴ Assumes

²⁷⁵ Beale, pp. 751-753

²⁷⁶ Beale, pp. 748-749

²⁷⁷ Thomas, p. 120

²⁷⁸ Osborne, p. 537

⁸ And **another angel, a second one**, followed, saying,

"Fallen, fallen is **Babylon the great**,
she who has made all the nations drink
of the wine of the passion of her immorality."

Commented [D65]: See 14: 4

The proclamation of Babylon's fall (v. 8) is intended for Rome (John's version of Babylon) as well as any political and economic power which opposes God's kingdom and persecutes God's people. From 18: 2-3, we learn that fornicating with the whore, Babylon the great, is equivalent to prospering from "the **wealth** of her sensuality."

And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. ³ "For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed *acts of* immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality." (Revelation 18:2-3 NASB)

It is unlikely that John is designating Babylon as the center of the world's sex trade, although one might be able to argue **futuristically**²⁷⁹ along these lines on the basis of current trends. Trafficking in human flesh has become one of the most lucrative businesses on earth, challenging illegal drug sales for the top position in illegal revenue world-wide.²⁸⁰ Sexual immorality with prostitutes was also a common practice in John's day; it would be revealing to know exactly how much of the ancient world's revenue came from this practice. Most likely, however, John refers to the intoxication from power and money associated with Roman trade of **all** kinds. Rome was not only the undisputed reigning world power, but the center of world trade situated directly on the Mediterranean Sea. Nations were not only **eager** to do business with Rome, but they were **required** to do so—thus, Babylon (Rome) "has **made** all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."

The nations' cooperation with Babylon ensures their material security (cf. 2: 9, 13, 13: 16-17). Without this cooperation, security would be removed. Such security is a temptation too great to resist. Therefore, the causative idea of the verb...("she made to drink") means that the nations were forced to "drink," to comply with Rome's and society's idolatrous demands, if they wanted to maintain economic security.

Babylon's promise of prosperous earthly welfare for its willing subjects is an intoxication that the majority of the world's inhabitants also want to imbibe. Once one imbibes, the intoxicating influence removes all desire to resist Babylon's destructive influence, blinds one to Babylon's own ultimate insecurity and to God as the source of real security, and numbs one against any fear of coming judgment....²⁸¹

Looking carefully at the details of Babylon's fall in Revelation 18, one will notice the abundant references to trade in precious stones, linens, building materials, spices, perfumes, chariots, horses, cattle, sheep, wheat, and, yes, "slaves and human lives." All these commodities provided the rich minority with luxurious life-styles, and they made the merchants and shippers who provided them very wealthy, indeed.

²⁷⁹ Futurists interpret chapters 4-22 as events taking place at the end of history to usher in the millennium and the final judgment of the wicked.

²⁸⁰ As of 2014, Italy now includes the sex trade in its calculation of its national GDP (Gross Domestic Product)

²⁸¹ Beale, p. 756

"The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, (Revelation 18:15 NASB)

The reference to slaves and human lives indicates that "the wealth of their sensuality" (18: 3, a phrase equivalent to "the wine of the passion of her immorality" in 14: 8) often resulted in the horrific, grinding abuse of others. We must postpone a detailed treatment of Revelation 18 until later, but there is no need to question that all of the trade mentioned (excluding human trafficking) would be perfectly legitimate from a modern majority point of view.²⁸² Is there anything wrong with precious stones, linens, building materials, automobiles (the equivalent of horses and chariots), and food commodities? Many of these things are essential for existence. The primary emphasis in Revelation, however—and throughout the Bible—is the elevation of material prosperity to **god-like status** and the **worship** of such things as a substitute for God. Paul warns believers in Philippi to watch out for professing Christians "whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who **set their minds on earthly things.**" (Phil. 3:19). Material prosperity in Rome among the elite, compared to the rest of the world's population at the time, had grown to epic proportions. One-half of the population of Rome itself consisted of slaves, and it was uncommon for the economic and political elite to do any work at all. Everything was done by slaves whose lives had no other purpose than making their masters comfortable. This was incongruous²⁸³ with the life of a true believer who must see his wealth as a means of helping others.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.¹⁸ *Instruct them* to do good, **to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share,**¹⁹ storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (1Timothy 6:17-19 NASB)

None of this is to say that yachts (boats costing millions of dollars) and Rolls Royce automobiles (costing a half a million US dollars each) are inherently sinful. After all, such luxuries provide jobs for skilled laborers, engineers, technicians, and materials manufacturers. However, **Revelation envisions a world drunk with the wine of material and sensual lusts as the end and purpose of everything.** Moreover, intoxication with such things dulls one's sensitivities to the plight of billions of people who do not have even the minimum requirements to sustain a healthy life. Personally, I have a difficult time envisioning a smiling Creator waving to the members of the yacht club trolling out to sea in view of thousands of people surviving on \$2 per day—especially when very few of these sailors have even moderate concern for the poor.²⁸⁴

Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you.² Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten.³ Your gold and your silver have rusted; and

²⁸² It should be noted here that Christianity was the driving force behind the abolition of slavery. Arab Muslims have no moral scruples against slavery, and the South Sudanese living today will testify to this. The word "black" to Arab Muslims in Sudan is the equivalent of slave.

²⁸³ Inconsistent and out of place

²⁸⁴ Although there is no evidence that Bill Gates (of Microsoft fame) and his wife Melinda, are Christians, one has to admire their willingness to give away billions of dollars to help people in developing nations. They have learned that there can be only limited enjoyment of money through personal consumption. The greatest joy comes from helping others. Too bad so many professing Christians cannot learn this lesson from the Scriptures. "In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" (Acts 20:35 NASB)

their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure!⁴ Behold, the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, *and* which has been withheld by you, cries out *against you*; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.⁵ You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.⁶ You have condemned and put to death the righteous *man*; he does not resist you.⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it, until it gets the early and late rains.⁸ You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. (James 5:1-8 NASB)

It should also be said here, in agreement with the teaching of Revelation 18, that riches, though neutral in themselves, are potentially dangerous.

But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment.⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either.⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.⁹ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and **some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**¹¹ But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. (1 Tim. 6:6-11 NASB)

Thus, Paul did not condemn riches outright. He did not tell the rich that they were sinful for being rich or that money itself was the root of evil. Rather, he instructed them not to be conceited (as many rich people are), not to put their trust in material riches, and to use their riches for the good of others and the glory of God. Conceit, the idolatry of riches, and contempt of those in need, characterize Babylon the great, ancient (and modern) Rome, and every other city, culture, or individual that will be utterly destroyed at the end of the age. God has already warned the many modern “Babylons” of their future destruction by destroying one kingdom after another and one city after another in past times. Yet, no one seems to be reading the book of Revelation, and the Christian church has not done an adequate job of heralding the gospel and the judgment to come for those who will not believe it.

⁹Then **another angel, a third one**, followed them, saying with a loud voice,

"If anyone worships A
the beast and his image, B
and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, C
¹⁰he also will drink D
of the wine of the wrath of God, E
which is mixed in full strength
in the cup of His anger;
and he will be tormented D
with fire and brimstone E
in the presence of the holy angels
and in the presence of the Lamb.
¹¹"And the smoke of their torment D
goes up forever and ever;
they have no rest day and night,

those who worship A
the beast and his image, B
 and whoever receives the **mark** of his name." C

¹² **Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.**

¹³ **And I heard a voice from heaven,**

saying,

"Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'"

"Yes," says the Spirit, "**so that they may rest from their labors,**
 for their deeds follow with them."

The warning in v. 9 may indicate that the proclamation of the gospel in vv. 6-7 is an opportunity to repent. It is a warning not to worship the beast or receive his mark. In light of the extreme pressures in the Roman Empire to conform to the rest of society, taking the mark of the beast was a very real temptation among Christians. Among the general population, unaided by the Holy Spirit, conformity to wicked cultural practices was normative. Even when God sent mitigated²⁸⁵ judgments before the final judgment (see earlier chapters in Revelation), men chose to continue their ungodliness. Four times in Revelation, the words, "did not repent" occur together (9: 20-21; 16: 9, 11). In spite of the extreme judgments upon the world, evil men persist in their rebellion because they are slaves to the Devil and their evil lusts. Apart from regeneration, they will remain entrenched against God.

But they cannot win because God is sovereign. Satan and his demons have power only because God in His inscrutable wisdom and providence grants them power to accomplish His eternal will. Satan is like a disobedient child who crawls up into his father's lap and slaps him in the face. The child is only able to slap his father's face because the father allows him to sit in his lap. This side of the consummation, we will never fully understand why God the Creator allows Satan the creature to slap his face by persecuting His church, but when He is finished using Satan, He will cast him into the lake of fire and brimstone.

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:10 NASB)

The torment of Satan with fire and brimstone forever and ever is the same description of punishment used of those who receive the mark of the beast (10b). Therefore, if the punishment of Satan is **forever**, then the punishment of those who follow him is **forever** (v. 11). The torment may eventually include physical punishment; but for certain it includes the psychological torment of extreme deprivation, the loss of everything that is good—love, community with others, a sense of accomplishment (everything they have ever done is destroyed), meaning and purpose. It is the absence of psychological and spiritual rest. There is no rest either day or night for those who have received the mark of the beast (v. 11). On the other hand, for those who die in the Lord, there is rest from their labors (v. 13), a reference to the Sabbath rest in Christ into which all true believers have entered by faith (Heb. 4: 10-11). Those who "die in the Lord" rest

²⁸⁵ Lesser

content—like the farmer who has just finished harvesting his crops—knowing that their labor has not been in vain (1 Cor. 15: 58).

Those who have become drunk with the wine of the whore, Babylon, will now be made to drink of God's wine, a wine mixed with the full strength of His anger but undiluted with any trace of God's mercy and grace (v. 10).²⁸⁶ The unbeliever has not understood that he has been existing all along upon God's mercy who sends the sunshine and the rain upon both believers and unbelievers (Matt. 5: 44-45). Indeed, God commonly blesses unbelievers with more material goods than believers, thus teaching believers to live by faith and not by sight. While living in this world, unbelievers receive the love of God who also commands His children to love those who hate them. But there are temporal limitations to His love, and in the final judgment those who have despised His grace and goodness and have lived ungratefully (Rom. 1: 21) will receive His undiluted hatred and wrath. Such warning should be too fearful to endure, but the evidence from Revelation is that men will not repent even in the face of a threatening, omnipotent God.

The idea of eternal punishment is hideous to the modern western reader who has taken the Christian ideal of love and distorted it to prove that God would never punish people for their sins. Such a barbaric idea of God, in their opinion, is sub-Christian, brutal, and cruel.²⁸⁷ Yet, such distortion fails to deal with the very nature of God who is holy and just. God must punish sin to be just, either in the person of Christ in His atoning sacrifice, or eternally in the person who sins. Without punishment, God's love is reduced to sloppy sentimentality. Psychologically, we are troubled by the prospect of knowing that many of our loved ones, friends, and family members will be punished in hell. Many of them are lovable, likeable people, whom we can hardly bear to think of being punished forever. Yet, just as we have little understanding of the believer's final sanctification at death by which all sin, known and unknown, is removed; so we have little understanding of the intensification of sin in every unbeliever when all vestiges²⁸⁸ of common grace²⁸⁹ are removed. We will hardly be able to recognize fellow believers in heaven given the sanctifying transformation of God's grace. None of us will be the same people we are today with our remaining sin. Analogously, our condemned loved ones, stripped of all common grace and decency in hell, will no longer be the same people we loved. As they hated Christ in this world, they will hate Him and also us more intensely at the prospect of eternal judgment. The final judgment will not transform rebellious sinners into repentant, holy saints. Hell is not for rehabilitation, but punishment. Sinners will continue to be sinners. Six times in Matthew's gospel Jesus says that in the judgment there will be weeping, but also "gnashing of teeth"—possibly in self-hatred, but likely in hatred of God and His people (Matt. 8: 12; 13: 42; 13: 50; 22: 13; 24: 51; 25: 30).

Moreover, during the present age we love and admire many things about pagans because, even in their rebellion, they display many admirable reflections of God's goodness. Our admiration may be proper now, but that will change when we see undiluted wickedness in all its ugliness and hideousness. The Second Coming brings about a separation between good and evil. This means not only a separation of good people from evil people, but a separation between good and evil **within**

²⁸⁶ Mounce, p. 275

²⁸⁷ Cf. Poythress, p. 150

²⁸⁸ Remnants

²⁸⁹ Common grace is the grace of God given to unbelievers by which their behaviour is influenced to some degree or another by mental consent to divine moral principles. They may not acknowledge that these moral laws come from God, but their lives are improved and rendered more respectable to others by keeping them.

people. Within evil people, evil will come to full fruition. Goodness will remain only with God and those enjoying his blessing. It is hard for us to picture just how bad evil may actually become.²⁹⁰

Some evangelical theologians have adopted the view of **annihilationism**, teaching that sinners do not suffer eternal torment but are annihilated or totally destroyed. This view would also have to concede that Satan and His demons are also annihilated since their punishment is described in the same terms as those with the mark of the beast. Moreover, Revelation 22: 14-15 implies that the existence of believers in heaven has the same temporal (related to time) and spatial (related to space) boundaries as the existence of unbelievers in hell.²⁹¹

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (Revelation 22:14-15 NASB)

In other words, believers are **inside** the temple-city while unbelievers are simultaneously²⁹² **outside** temple-city. Moreover, the believers' rest is contrasted with the absence of rest for unbelievers. Those who do not believe in Christ or in heaven and hell often do not seem disturbed at the prospect of the cessation of consciousness. They believe they will simply die and cease to exist physically and mentally. Many people commit suicide with the purpose of escaping from the mental sorrows of this life, hoping that they will merely descend into unconsciousness. Annihilation for the wicked would therefore be a form of rest, not punishment; but Revelation warns of everlasting torment for unbelief, not rest.²⁹³

The interlude²⁹⁴ in v. 12, "Here is the perseverance of the saints..." corresponds to the same interlude in 13: 10 and a somewhat different one in 13: 18, "Here is wisdom..." It is another command to persevere in the face of persecution lest they suffer the same fate as those who receive the mark of the beast. It is true that they may be put to death, but their suffering is only temporary compared to the eternal suffering of those who follow the beast.

¹⁴ **Then I looked, and behold,**

a white cloud,
and sitting on the cloud *was* one **like a son of man**,
having a golden crown on His head
and a sharp sickle in His hand.

Commented [D66]: Dan. 7: 13

¹⁵ And **another angel came out of the temple**,

crying out with a loud voice to **Him** who sat on the cloud,
"Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come,
because the harvest of the earth is ripe."

Commented [D67]: See 14: 7

¹⁶ Then He who sat on the cloud
swung His sickle over the earth,
and the earth was reaped.

²⁹⁰ Poythress, p. 151, emphasis mine

²⁹¹ Beale, p. 762

²⁹² At the same time

²⁹³ Beale, p. 764

²⁹⁴ A pause

¹⁷ And **another angel came out of the temple** which is in heaven,
and he also had a sharp sickle.

¹⁸ Then **another angel**,
the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar;
and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying,
"Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth,
because her grapes are ripe."

¹⁹ So **the angel** swung his sickle to the earth
and gathered *the clusters from* the vine of the earth,
and **threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.**

²⁰ And the wine press was trodden outside the city,
and blood came out from the wine press,
up to the horses' bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.

"Then I looked and behold" marks the beginning of the **sixth** vision in the cycle of seven visions (see above). The vision of the Son of Man on the cloud is an allusion to Daniel's prophecy.

"I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. (Daniel 7:13 NASB)

The crown upon His head is a crown of **legitimate** authority in contrast to the illegitimate authority of the beast or any world kingdom in opposition to the Son of Man. Rather than **standing** in the cloud, the Son of Man is **sitting** upon the cloud as a king enthroned in the heavens—the word *kathemai* (sit) is used three times in vv. 14-16 for emphasis. Our King is not in the least disturbed by the threat of the two beasts of chapter 13 or his followers. Here we have an allusion to Psalm 2: 4 as God "sits" in the heavens and laughs at the kings of the earth and their puny rebellion against Him (Ps. 2:4). A sharp harvesting sickle is in His hand, and He is instructed by the angel to reap the earth that is ripe for harvesting.

There is no implication in v. 15 that the Son of Man is taking orders from an angel. The angel is coming "out of the temple" from the presence of God the Father (see the temple scene in Rev. 4—5) who decides when the judgment of the earth will commence.²⁹⁵ God the Son has worked in functional subordination to the Father in His earthly ministry and crucifixion (Jn. 6: 38). He came to do His Father's will. Through the instrumentality of the Son, God created the earth (Heb. 1: 2). Now at the end of the age, **God judges the world through the instrumentality of the Son** (Rev. 19: 11-16).

However, there are differences of opinion concerning whether the Son's reaping in v. 16 is the reaping of sinners for judgment or the reaping of believers for salvation. In the parable of the wheat and the tares, the angelic reapers gather both sinners and saints. The saints (wheat) are gathered into the barn while the sinners (tares) are burned (Matt. 13: 30). It is exegetically

²⁹⁵ Beale, p. 772

tenable²⁹⁶ that while the Son of Man is using His sickle to reap believers for salvation, the other angels are reaping sinners for destruction. Mark's gospel speaks explicitly of the harvest of faith.

And He was saying, "The kingdom of God is like a man who casts seed upon the soil;²⁷ and he goes to bed at night and gets up by day, and the seed sprouts and grows—how, he himself does not know.²⁸ "The soil produces crops by itself; first the blade, then the head, then the mature grain in the head."²⁹ "But when the crop permits, he immediately puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." (Mark 4:26-29 NASB)

Against the view that v. 15 refers to the harvest of the faithful is the terminology: "the harvest of **the earth** is ripe". The mention of "the earth" in Revelation often has a negative connotation²⁹⁷ (Rev. 11: 10; 13: 8), and those "who dwell on the earth" are synonymous for unbelievers. We might be inclined to think, therefore, that the unbelievers "on earth" are now ripe for destruction. In addition, there is nothing in the context of vv. 15-20 to clearly distinguish reaping for salvation from reaping for judgment while the general context is clearly judgment. The verses seem to hang together in unison. Furthermore, "ripeness" in the OT **prophetic context** generally has the negative connotation of readiness for judgment (Nahum 3: 12; Amos 8: 1-2, in which "summer fruit" is synonymous with ripe fruit). Also, there is the allusion to Joel's prophecy.²⁹⁸

"For behold, in those days and at that time, When I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,² I will gather all the nations And bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. **Then I will enter into judgment with them there On behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel**, Whom they have scattered among the nations; And they have divided up My land. (Joel 3:1-2 NASB)

Let the nations be aroused And come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, For **there I will sit to judge All the surrounding nations**.¹³ Put in the sickle, for **the harvest is ripe**. Come, tread, for the wine press is full; The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. (Joel 3:12-13 NASB)

In this prophecy, God is judging the nations for their mistreatment of Israel and Judah, analogous to the situation we find in Revelation 14 in which the Lamb judges the beast and his followers on behalf of the church. Bauckham argues that John modifies the negative prophecy of Joel to give it a positive connotation—the harvest of the righteous. However, this interpretation fails to reckon with John's use of OT sources in Revelation consistently with their OT context. In other words, whatever meaning the OT texts conveyed in the OT is the same meaning John applies to them in Revelation.²⁹⁹

The winepress of God's wrath is trodden "outside the city", the place of judgment and curse (Num. 15: 35; Heb. 13: 13). Outside the temple-city is also the place where unbelievers—the "idolaters", "immoral persons", "murderers", and "everyone who loves and practices lying"—will be judged (Rev. 22: 15; also 21: 27). The judgment is described in horrific, exaggerated terms, a virtual flood of men's blood reaching almost two meters in height for over 330 kilometers. The 330 km corresponds to the length of Palestine from north to south. Literally, the

²⁹⁶ possible

²⁹⁷ Suggested or implied meaning in contrast to an explicit meaning or denotation.

²⁹⁸ Beale, pp. 774-776

²⁹⁹ Beale, pp. 777-778

number is 1,600 stadia (4x4x10x10). The number four can be symbolic of the four corners of the world (7: 1; 20: 8). Thus, the judgment depicted is world-wide.³⁰⁰

Revelation 15

¹**Then I saw another sign in heaven**, great and marvelous,
seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last,
because in them the wrath of God is finished.

The first verse of this chapter is an introduction to the seven bowls of God's wrath. "Then I saw" marks off another one of John's cycles of visions. The seven plagues of Revelation 16 recall the plagues of Egypt. It is clear, therefore, that **God's judgment of Egypt is a type of His judgment of all mankind in Revelation**. Egypt is the quintessential³⁰¹ persecutor of the people of God and the primary manifestation of all who oppose the kingdom of God. The seven plagues which come in chapter 16 are "the last" in that they are the last **visions** in the order of the cycle of visions John sees. They are not the last chronological **events** of history.³⁰² The seven cycles, according to Poythress' interpretation, are as follows:³⁰³

- Cycle 1: Seven Seals (4: 1—8: 10)
- Cycle 2: Seven Trumpets (8: 2—11: 19)
- Cycle 3: Symbolic Figures and the Harvest (12: 1—14: 20)
- Cycle 4: Seven Bowls (15: 1—16: 21)
- Cycle 5: Judgment of Babylon (17: 1—19: 10)
- Cycle 6: White Horse Judgment (19: 11-21)
- Cycle 7: White Throne Judgment (20: 1—21: 8)
- The Eighth and Culminating Act: New Jerusalem (21: 9—22: 5)

As we can see, John's visions do not end with the seven bowls, but the remaining three of the seven cycles of visions simply expand upon the first four visions. According to the explicit statement in 15: 1, "the last **because** [*hoti*] in them [*i.e. the seven plagues*] the wrath of God is **finished**". The bowls of wrath complement the divine wrath of the seven seals and seven trumpets and give God's wrath a fuller presentation.³⁰⁴

John picks up his vision of the seven bowls of wrath in v. 5, but in vv. 2-4, he sees another vision of the church, those who had refused the mark of the beast and through their faith had accomplished a three-fold triumph over the beast, his image, and the number of the beast. Thus, these verses conclude the triumph over the beast presented in chapter 14. The vision includes all believers, recalling John's words in his epistle,

For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the **victory** that has overcome the world—our faith. (1 John 5:4 NASB)

³⁰⁰ Thomas, p. 122; so also Beale, p. 782 and Mounce, p. 278

³⁰¹ Archetypal, prototypical, ideal model

³⁰² Beale, p. 786

³⁰³ Poythress, p. 160

³⁰⁴ Beale, p. 788

² **And I saw**

something like a sea of glass mixed with fire,
 and those who had been victorious
 over the beast
 and his image
 and the number of his name,
 standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.

Commented [D68]: Rev. 4: 6

Commented [D69]: 1 Jn. 5: 4

The victorious saints are standing on a “sea of glass” recalling the sea of glass in the throne-room scene of chapter 4. Situated in the heavenly throne room, the sea of glass may recall the bronze sea of Solomon’s temple provided for the priests for washing their hands and feet, thus replacing the washing laver of the mobile³⁰⁵ tabernacle (Ex. 30: 18-19). The bronze sea was far from mobile, extending 15 feet (5 meters) in diameter from rim to rim, supported by 12 bronze bulls, and holding up to 12,000 gallons (48,000 liters) of water. The weight (without the water) is estimated by some scholars at 30 tons (60,000 pounds or over 27,000 kg)—not something you would ship to the next camp site on camels (2 Chron. 4; 2 Kings 25: 13-16).³⁰⁶ Why so big? Although the bronze sea was used for the simple purpose of priestly cleansing, it may have represented the **cosmic sea** which had negative connotations for the ancient Israelite. The sea was a place of danger and the unknown. In the OT God’s archenemy Leviathan arises from the sea (Ps. 74: 13-14) even as the beasts of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan. 7) and the beast of Revelation come up from the sea (13: 1).³⁰⁷ Early in their history, the Red Sea posed the greatest threat to the continuing existence of Israel.

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not You who cut Rahab in pieces, Who pierced the dragon? ¹⁰ Was it not You who dried up the sea, The waters of the great deep; Who made the depths of the sea a pathway For the redeemed to cross over? (Isaiah 51:9-10 NASB)

At the consummation of the kingdom of God and the coming of the new heavens and new earth, John says, “and there was no longer *any* sea” (Rev. 21: 1). For those readers who love the ocean waves and a nice view from shore, John is speaking figuratively. He is not saying there will be no literal sea in the new earth, but that there will be no more danger from the cosmic perils arising from the sea which harm God’s people. While storms caused boats to capsize in the turbulent waves of the sea, the bronze sea of the temple possibly symbolized God’s taming of the sea. The bronze sea was measured from brim to brim at five meters; and its volume of water was measured at 3,000 baths (2 Chron. 4: 5), symbolizing the fact that God had measured even the literal seas (Isa. 40: 12; Job 38: 4-5). Moreover, there were no waves on the bronze sea because of its weight and controlled environment. It was as smooth as **glass**, posing no threat to the priests who washed in it. It may also not be incidental that the sea was supported by 12 oxen—domesticated animals—further supporting the theme of a domesticated sea. Thus, the bronze sea of Solomon’s temple possibly represented the ability of God to calm the turbulent waters of life. One of the most memorable miracles Jesus performed in order to draw attention to His deity was the calming of the sea (Matt. 8: 23-27).

³⁰⁵ Movable³⁰⁶ S. Westerholm, “Sea, Molten”, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*³⁰⁷ Cf. Beale, pp. 328, 789

The sea of glass could represent the same divine power as the bronze sea; yet we would have to say that the throne room scene is antecedent³⁰⁸ to the bronze sea. The bronze sea is an earthly representation of the glass sea since, before the foundation of the world, God decreed peace and tranquility in the new heavens and earth for His elect people. From God's eternal perspective, there is no turbulent uncertainty for His people that will not "soon" be calmed. "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33 NASB).

³ And **they sang**

the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God,
and the song of the Lamb,

saying,

"Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty;
Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!

⁴ "Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy;
For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU,
FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED."

The immediate context consisting of victorious saints standing on the sea of glass singing the "song of Moses" confirms the identification of the glass sea with the Red Sea. After the crossing of the Red Sea, Moses and Israel sing a song of celebration of their deliverance from Egypt. Though faced with almost certain annihilation, God harnessed the waters of the sea, forcing them to separate as Israel walked over on dry ground. In the same way, God delivers the church from the destructive powers of the dragon, the two beasts, and the earth-dwellers who follow them. They **stand** on the sea undisturbed and unafraid because the sea has been calmed by God's sovereign power.

Terrible disasters do not come by accident, but according to the just judgment of God. They are harbingers³⁰⁹ of the final judgment of the Second Coming. As in 4: 6, the sea is reminiscent³¹⁰ not only of the crossing of the Red Sea, but also of God's power to subdue the chaos of the sea. The Israelites stood on the far shore of the Red Sea and observed the death of their enemies through God's power. In the last days, victorious saints likewise stand on the far side of their troubles and the persecutions of the Beast.³¹¹

Not only did the victorious saints sing the song of Moses, but also the song of the Lamb, thus uniting the typical and the antitypical mediators of God's people in the Old Covenant and the New Covenant—Moses and Christ. Salvation in the OT and NT is based upon the perfect life and atoning sacrifice of Christ, the ultimate divine-human mediator. All nations worshipping the Lamb fulfill the promise to Abraham that He would be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12: 3).³¹²

⁵ **After these things I looked.**

and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened,

³⁰⁸ Coming before in time

³⁰⁹ Indicators of events that follow them

³¹⁰ A reminder

³¹¹ Poythress, p. 154

³¹² Poythress, p. 155

⁶ and **the seven angels who had the seven plagues**
 came out of the temple,
 clothed in linen, clean *and* bright,
 and girded around their chests with golden sashes.

⁷ Then **one of the four living creatures**
 gave to the seven angels
seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God,
 who lives forever and ever.

⁸ And the temple was filled with smoke
 from the glory of God
 and from His power;
 and **no one was able to enter the temple**
 until the seven plagues of the seven angels were **finished**.

“**After these things I looked**” indicates the beginning of another vision, the vision of the seven angels with seven plagues introduced in v. 1. They emerge from “the temple of the tabernacle of testimony”. The temple is the place where God dwells in the presence of the four living creatures and the thousands of angels described in Revelation 4—5. The tabernacle of the testimony recalls the tabernacle in the wilderness which contained the Ark of the Covenant. Within the Ark of the Covenant was the law of God, also called the “testimony” (Ex. 31: 18; 32: 15). Therefore, it appears that the seven angels are coming from the presence of God to carry out His completed judgment against man for violation of His law.³¹³ The number seven indicates that His judgment will be perfect, complete, and totally just, according to the One who both gives the law and punishes its violations. They are dressed in linen as priests, signifying God’s holiness. The plagues recall the plagues of Egypt. When the last plague against Egypt was finished, the people of Israel make their exodus from slavery and oppression and head toward the promised land. Likewise, when God is finished punishing Satan and this world, believers will make their final exodus from a fallen world and will inherit the “promised land” of the new heavens and earth.

One of the four living creatures who sent out the four horsemen (Rev. 6) is now charged with sending out the seven angels with bowls of God’s wrath (cf. 16: 1). Once these plagues are given to the seven angels, the temple fills with smoke signifying the glory and power of God. No one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues had been poured out upon the earth. The filling of the temple with smoke (a cloud) recalls the completion of both the tabernacle (Ex. 40) and Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 8). On both occasions the glory cloud filled the temple so that even Moses could not enter the tabernacle (Ex. 40: 35), and the priests could not complete their work in the temple (1 Kings 8: 10-11). In these two passages, the cloud was confirmation that God was willing to dwell with His people—symbolically in the place they had built for Him. What is the significance of the glory cloud in the Revelation context? One view is that God is judging the world with the fullness of His power, glory, and wrath, and will allow “no one” into the temple to intercede for sinful men.³¹⁴ A similar scene occurs in Isaiah 6 when God sends Isaiah to proclaim a message of judgment to Judah. Thus, in Revelation, God will permit no one to enter His presence until He has completed His mission of judgment.³¹⁵ Another view is that

³¹³ Beale, p. 802

³¹⁴ Mounce, p. 290.

³¹⁵ Osborne, pp. 571-572

the saint’s plea for vindication is at an end because God is now answering their plea (compare 5: 8 with 6: 10).³¹⁶

Another possibility is that the glory cloud means the same thing in Revelation 15 as it does in the other two significant OT texts in Exodus and 1 Kings. The newly constructed tabernacle and the newly constructed temple were symbols of God’s continuing presence with His people. Likewise, with the destruction of all evil, God is making a new beginning for the people of God. He will be pleased to dwell with them in the new creation consisting of the temple-city coming down out of heaven (Rev. 21: 2, 10).

Revelation 16

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple,
saying to the seven angels,

"Go and pour out on the earth **the seven bowls of the wrath of God.**"

Commented [D70]: Rev. 15: 1 the finishing of the wrath of God

This verse forms an inclusion (or inclusio) with 15: 1. The seven bowls of the wrath of God is introduced in 15: 1 and is now explained in chapter 16. Revelation 15: 2-4 is devoted to the triumphant song of the redeemed, those who have been victorious over the dragon and the beast. Revelation 15: 5-8 forms a prelude to the seven bowls and the final judgment of God.

² So the **first angel**

went and poured out his bowl **on the earth;**
and it became a loathsome and malignant sore
on the people
who had the mark of the beast
and who worshiped his image.

Commented [D71]: Rev. 8: 7

Commented [D72]: Ex. 9: 9-10

³ The **second angel**

poured out his bowl **into the sea;**
and it became blood like that of a dead man;
and every living thing in the sea died.

Commented [D73]: Rev. 8: 8-9

Commented [D74]: Ex. 7: 20-21

⁴ Then the **third angel**

poured out his bowl **into the rivers and the springs of waters;**
and they became blood.

Commented [D75]: Rev. 8: 10

The fifth and sixth trumpets are not sounded until chapter 9 while the seventh trumpet is sounded in chapter 11. Notice the parallels between 15: 1, the bowls of wrath, and the seventh trumpet in 10: 7 and 11: 15. There is finality to seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl. The revelation of God’s mysteries in judgment was predicted through “His servants the prophets” (10: 7). Isaiah 13—23 provides a catalog of the nations upon which God will bring historical judgment—Babylon, Assyria, Moab, Philistia, et al, as well as Israel and Judah. All of these nations were devastated as types of the future judgment of the whole world. In Isaiah 24 the **whole earth** comes under His judgment for breaking His law.

Behold, the LORD lays **the earth** waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants.

³¹⁶ Beale, p. 807

²And the people will be like the priest, the servant like his master, the maid like her mistress, the buyer like the seller, the lender like the borrower, the creditor like the debtor. ³The earth will be completely laid waste and completely despoiled, for the LORD has spoken this word. ⁴The earth mourns *and* withers, the world fades *and* withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. ⁵The **earth is also polluted by its inhabitants**, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. (Isaiah 24:1-5 NASB)

Thus, the **whole earth** is bound by covenant with God to keep His “laws” and statutes. This becomes clear in Romans 1 and Colossians 3.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,¹⁹ because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them.²⁰ For since the creation of the world **His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood** through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:18-20 NASB)

Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.⁶ For it is because of these things that the wrath of God will come upon the sons of disobedience, (Colossians 3:5-6 NASB)

From the above texts, we see that God’s holy nature is understood by all, but that it is rejected. Thus, God’s wrath against unbelief of His revelation in creation and in Scripture will come upon the sons of disobedience.³¹⁷

...but in the days of the voice of the **seventh angel**, when he is about to sound, then **the mystery of God is finished**, as He preached to His servants the prophets. (Revelation 10:7 NASB)

Then the **seventh angel** sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world **has become the kingdom** of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 11:15 NASB)

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, **seven angels** who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them **the wrath of God is finished**. (Revelation 15:1 NASB)

Once more, the judgments of Revelation are the **antitypes** of the **typical** judgments in Exodus. When God judged Egypt for persecuting His people, it was a warning to all earth-dwellers to let His people serve Him in peace, but they were not willing to obey God even in the face of severe judgments (Ex. 7: 16; 8: 15, 32). Likewise, when judgments come upon the whole earth, men blaspheme the name of God and refuse to repent (Rev. 16: 8-11). Rejecting the testimony of Scripture, the people of this earth continue to persecute the church and reject the truth. The sores (v. 2) reflect the sores upon the Egyptians in Exodus 9. The blood of 16: 3-4 corresponds to the Nile River turning into blood.

³¹⁷ Incidentally, it should be noted from Colossians that if Christ has died for all the sins of unbelievers as well as believers, God’s wrath should not come upon unbelievers since these sins have already been atoned for in the death of Christ. God does not punish sin once in Christ and again in the unbeliever. We are reminded from John’s gospel that Jesus lays down his life for His “sheep”, not the goats (Jn. 10: 11, 26; cf. Matt. 25: 32-33).

"It will become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and will become boils breaking out with sores on man and beast through all the land of Egypt."¹⁰ So they took soot from a kiln, and stood before Pharaoh; and Moses threw it toward the sky, and it became **boils breaking out with sores on man and beast**. (Exodus 9:9-10 NASB)

So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that *was* in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that *was* in the Nile **was turned to blood**.²¹ The fish that *were* in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt. (Exodus 7:20-21 NASB)

We should notice, however, that while the earth and its occupants suffer a **partial** judgment from the trumpets—one third of the earth, one-third of the sea, one-third of the rivers and streams, one-third of mankind—there is **no such limitation** with the seven plagues. The judgment is therefore “finished” and complete with the seven plagues (cf. Rev. 8: 7-12; 9: 15-18).

God’s judgment against the Egyptians—as with all men in the final judgment and throughout history—entailed a judgment of their gods. The Nile River was worshipped as a god in that it provided material sustenance to the Egyptians. Unless the Nile River basin was flooded each year, there would be insufficient water for raising crops. In the same way, God judges the sea and the rivers of the earth since they are the means of commerce and material prosperity. The Roman Empire could not be sustained without maritime commerce—something true even today with the availability of air transport. Men worship the earth, but the earth is a false idol. In Romans, Paul says that rather than worshipping the Creator, men worshipped the creation instead.

Professing to be wise, they became fools,²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. (Romans 1:22-23 NASB)

Consequently, God sends judgments upon **creation** to register His displeasure against the **worship of creation** and the material prosperity creation brings. The plagues of frogs and locusts in Exodus 8 and 10 demonstrate this point further. The Egyptian goddess of resurrection, Heqt, was represented by a frog.³¹⁸

The similarities of the bowls with the trumpets can be seen when we compare Revelation 16 and 8. Differing from many commentators, Beale argues that the trumpets and the bowls are the same judgments from a different perspective. I will reproduce his comparison below, slightly modified.³¹⁹

The differences consist in the **partial** judgments of the trumpets (thirds) versus the **universal** judgments of the bowls (the whole earth) as well as their effects upon nature versus people. Beale argues that the similarities far outweigh the differences. First, we should not expect a one-to-one “photographic likeness” between the trumpets and the bowls. Second, it is too woodenly literal to say that the trumpets do not affect people. Judgments against nature would inevitably affect people; and in 8: 9, 11 ships are destroyed and men die from poisoned waters. The order in

³¹⁸ Beale, p. 833. The staff becoming a serpent was the other miracle duplicated (Ex. 7: 10-11)

³¹⁹ Beale, pp. 809-810

<p>Trumpet 1: Hail, fire, and blood fall on the <i>earth</i>, one third of which is burned up (compare Ex. 9: 22ff.)</p> <p>Trumpet 2: A blazing mountain falls into the <i>sea</i>. One third of the sea becomes <i>blood</i>, a third of <i>sea creatures die</i>, and a third of all ships are destroyed (compare Ex. 7: 17ff.)</p> <p>Trumpet 3: A blazing star (Worm-wood) falls on a third of <i>rivers and fountains</i>; their waters are poisoned and many die (compare Ex. 7: 17ff.)</p>	<p>Bowl 1: A bowl is poured on the <i>earth</i>. Malignant sores come on those who have the mark of the beast and who worship his image (Ex. 9: 8ff.)</p> <p>Bowl 2: A bowl is poured on the <i>seas</i>, which become <i>blood</i>, and <i>every living thing in them dies</i>. (Ex. 7: 17ff.)</p> <p>Bowl 3: A bowl is poured on <i>rivers and fountains</i>, and they become blood. (Ex. 7: 17ff.)</p>
<p>Trumpet 4: A third of <i>sun, moon, and stars</i> are struck. Darkness results for a third of a night and day. (Ex. 10: 21ff.)</p> <p>Trumpet 5: The shaft of the pit is opened. Sun and air are <i>darkened</i> with smoke from which locusts emerge to <i>torment</i> people without the seal of God. (Ex. 10: 4ff, 21ff.)</p> <p>Trumpet 6: Four angels bound at the <i>Euphrates</i> are released, with their cavalry of two hundred million, which kills a third of humanity.</p> <p>Trumpet 7: <i>Loud voices in heaven</i> announce the coming of the kingdom of God and of Christ. <i>Lightning, thunder, earthquake, and hail</i> occur. (Ex. 9: 22ff. and the Sinai theophany (Ex. 19: 16-19)</p>	<p>Bowl 4: A bowl is poured on the <i>sun</i>, which scorches people with fire. (Ex. 9: 22ff.)</p> <p>Bowl 5: A bowl is poured on the throne of the beast. His kingdom is <i>darkened</i> and people are in <i>anguish</i>. (Ex. 10: 21ff.)</p> <p>Bowl 6: A bowl is poured on the <i>Euphrates</i>, which dries up for kings from the east. Demonic frogs deceive the kings of the world to assemble for the battle at Armageddon. (Ex. 8: ff)</p> <p>Bowl 7: A bowl is poured into the air, and a <i>loud voice from God's throne</i> announces "It is done." <i>Lightning, thunder, and an unprecedented earthquake</i> occur, and terrible <i>hail</i> falls. (Ex. 9: 22ff. and the Sinai theophany, Ex. 19: 16-19)</p>

which the trumpets and bowls come is also the same: (1) earth, (2) sea, (3) rivers, (4) sun, (5) the realm of the wicked with darkness, (6) the Euphrates, and (7) the world with the final judgment accompanied by the lightning, thunder, earthquake, hail. Moreover, there is mention of seven angels and seven judgments and the likeness to the plagues of Egypt that every commentator recognizes. For these similarities, Beale considers them not only parallel literally and thematically, but also **chronologically**. He also explains the partial judgments of the trumpets as being "part of a larger process of judgment, which at the same time strikes the entire world. Therefore, the difference in effect does not necessitate seeing the trumpets as different judgments or as chronologically preceding the bowls."³²⁰ Beale further elaborates on this difference by

³²⁰ Beale, pp. 808-809

saying that “...the partial economic woe of the [trumpets] can be extended at times throughout the inter-advent age to the whole earth.”³²¹

Beale takes a “Progressive Recapitulation (Parallelism) Position” on the whole book, reasoning on the basis of “repeated combined scenes of consummative³²² judgment and salvation found at the conclusions of various sections throughout the book. The pattern of these scenes is always the same, consisting of a depiction of judgment followed by a portrayal of salvation...” He cites pairs of passages in support of this theory: (1) Revelation 6: 12-17 and 7: 9-17; (2) 11: 18a and 11:18b; (3) 14: 14-20; and 15: 2-4; (4) 16: 17-21, including 17: 1—18: 24...and 19: 1-10; (5) 20: 7-15 and 21: 1-8, including...21: 9—22: 5, which, he says, “serves as an intensified salvific conclusion to the entire book.” He rejects the conclusion of many commentators who deny “any element of consummation until the very end of the book (i.e. 20: 11-15).” The scenes mentioned above are interpreted by many as “pre-consummative punishments and deliverances that occur during the final tribulation period, while some futurists...understand them as proleptic³²³ visions of the final judgment of the wicked and reward of the righteous (chap. 20) parenthetically inserted within an overall chronological framework of the end-time woes.” Concerning Revelation 6: 12-17, Beale argues that the description is “too radical to fit a pre-consummation judgment, even one that occurs during a final tribulation period. It is hard to see how any further judgments could come after such a literally consummate one as portrayed in 6: 12-17.”³²⁴ Parallel phrases in chapter 16 lend support to the theory of chapter 6 portraying the final consummation.

- | | |
|---|---|
| • Great earthquake (16: 18) | • Great earthquake (6: 12) |
| • Great city split into three parts (16: 19) | • Sky split apart (6: 14) |
| • And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found (16: 20) | • every mountain and island were moved out of their places. (6: 14) |

Returning to the text, the first bowl judgment is a judgment upon idolatry. A sore arose upon those who had the mark of the beast. Appropriately, God places his own mark, a sore, upon those with the idolatrous mark.³²⁵ The second bowl brings economic punishment upon the nations, as we have already noted. The world economic system cannot exist without international commerce. In the U.S. crash of 2008, now called “The Great Recession”, the mistakes of the Federal Reserve, the banking system, and the government had negative consequences throughout the world. Every nation on earth is tied together economically, and it is not difficult to imagine how God could bring the entire world to its knees through the colossal errors of one or more nations. We remember that the mark of the beast, first introduced in 13: 16-17, has economic connotations; those who lack the mark can neither buy nor sell in the open market. Chapter 18 provides more detail of Babylon’s fall which is the city that represents the world economic system.³²⁶ Like the second bowl, the third also brings economic hardship, and the symbolic judgment is similar—the rivers and streams are turned to blood. Rivers are important avenues of

³²¹ Beale, p. 816

³²² Final and complete

³²³ Anticipatory

³²⁴ Beale, p. 123

³²⁵ Beale, p. 814

³²⁶ Beale, p. 814

trade and commerce, and springs supply water for drinking and for irrigation.³²⁷ It is possible that the world economy is being judged now and in the future for the economic persecution of Christians in many nations.³²⁸

Based upon the response of the angel in 16: 5-6, it is reasonable to assume that the third bowl is given as a retributive answer to the saints' prayers in chapter 6.³²⁹

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;¹⁰ and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "**How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?**" (Revelation 6:9-10 NASB)

⁵ **And I heard**

the angel of the waters saying, A
 "Righteous are You,
 who are } B
 and who were,
 O Holy One,
 because You judged these things; C

⁶ for they
 poured out the blood of saints and prophets,
 and You } D
 have given them blood to drink.
 They deserve it."

⁷ **And I heard**

the altar saying, A
 "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty,
 true and righteous } B
 are Your judgments." C

Verses 5-7 serve as a parenthesis between the first three judgments and the last four. Verse 8 resumes these last judgments. In the parenthesis, God's judgments against mankind are justified as "true and righteous". The law of retribution, sowing and reaping, demands that God repay the earth-dwellers according to their deeds. The persecuting world shed the blood of the saints, and for this God will force them to drink blood. Drinking blood is not intended literally. It may be a reference to the economic hardships that will be forced upon unbelievers who ostracized Christians refusing to participate in emperor worship or the worship of other pagan gods in the craftsman's guilds. Such ostracism resulted in loss of jobs and income (see earlier discussion of Revelation 1-3).

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matthew 16:27 NASB)

³²⁷ Today in the U.S., farmers in the mid-west and California are experiencing severe shortages in water necessary for irrigation in dry climates.

³²⁸ Beale, p. 817

³²⁹ Beale, p. 818; Mounce, p. 296

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7-8 NASB)

The main reason given for retribution is that they have poured out the blood of the saints, but other sins doubtlessly are included since not everyone on earth directly or indirectly persecutes the church. Men will be judged according to the deeds they have done on earth. This must be for God to be a God of justice. Those who do not believe in a God who would send people to hell also do not understand justice, fairness, or truth. God’s judgments are “true” because they are based on the facts of innocence or guilt. God is an omniscient judge who knows all the relevant facts or evidence of a man’s guilt. The guilty sinner will not be judged more harshly or more leniently than he deserves. God is also a “righteous” judge who is without imperfection or sin. He is therefore worthy to execute judgment, unhindered by any guilt of His own. Christ alone is worthy to open the seals of judgment (Rev. 5: 2-5).

⁸ The **fourth** angel

poured out his bowl **upon the sun,** A B
 and it was given to it to scorch men with fire. C
⁹ Men were scorched with fierce heat;
 and they **blasphemed** the name of God D
 who has the power over these plagues,
and they did not repent so as to give Him glory. E

¹⁰ Then the **fifth** angel

poured out his bowl **on the throne of the beast,** A B
 and his kingdom became darkened;
 and they gnawed their tongues C
 because of pain,
¹¹ and they **blasphemed** the God of heaven D
 because of their pains and their sores;
and they did not repent of their deeds. E

¹² The **sixth** angel

poured out his bowl **on the great river,** A B
the Euphrates; C
 and its water was dried up,
 so that the way would be prepared
for the kings from the east.

D and E:
Emphasizing
God’s justice
for punishing
the world.

The bowl of God’s wrath is once again poured out upon the object of men’s worship, the sun (vv. 8-9). In contrast to vv. 10-11, the sun is not darkened but intensified, possibly a reference to severe famine (cf. Rev. 7: 16).³³⁰ Instead of being a blessing upon men, it becomes a source of judgment—a reversal of common grace. In common grace, God sends sun and rain on the just and the unjust to give them produce from the ground (Matt. 5: 45); but mankind has been ungrateful for what God has given him. In contrast to this judgment is the promise of Revelation 7: 16 that the saints would never hunger or thirst again, nor would the sun smite them by day. As in so many of God’s temporal judgments (floods, draught, famine, storms, volcanic eruptions), He uses the forces of nature not for blessing but for curse; yet, before the end, there is a hidden

³³⁰ Beale, p. 822

blessing in all of His temporal judgments. They might lead men to repentance. But here in Revelation, it appears that the time for repentance for those with the mark of the beast is past. Men are now beyond the possibility of repentance and are entrenched in their unbelief and hatred of God. In spite of all these judgments, men “did not repent” of their idolatry or their deeds. In fact, they blasphemed the name of God. God’s judgments alone do not bring repentance; repentance is a gift bestowed sovereignly upon the elect (Acts 11: 18).

Verses 9 and 11 are repetitive, giving emphasis upon God’s justice in judging the world. Beale believes the blasphemy is a blatant denial that the plagues are controlled by the sovereign hand of God.³³¹ If he is correct, the interpretation fits perfectly with the modern scientific mindset which denies that any natural disaster comes from God as judgment upon sin. The personification of nature, “Mother Nature”, is sovereign. However, the scientific mind is out of context with the ancient world which attributed everything to divine cause. On the contrary, I believe that men blaspheme God because they **know** He is the cause of their suffering. This also fits well with the allusion to the Exodus plagues that Pharaoh knew to be at the hand of God (Ex. 8: 19).

The darkening of the beast’s throne (vv. 9-10) is related to the darkening of the sun by a locust swarm in Exodus 10. This was a direct attack on the sun god Ra and upon Pharaoh as the human incarnation of Ra. Here, the darkness signifies the total demise of the beast’s power which would also include its economic and political power. The pain experienced by those who worship the beast would include the psychological pain of financial ruin or famine. The gnawing of their tongues could be a reference to hunger (v. 10a), and their sores could be a world-wide epidemic of some sort. The bubonic plague (also known as the “black death”) reached the shores of Italy in 1348 and within three years spread to an estimated 25 to 50 per cent of Europe’s population, killing, by some estimates, one-third of Europe’s population. Victims generally died within three days to one week of the first appearance of symptoms—“buboes” the size of eggs or apples appearing on various parts of the body. The modern AIDS epidemic is a reminder that God would have no trouble at all destroying the entire world of men with one uncontrolled epidemic. Scientists and medical experts are now saving many lives with retrovirals for AIDS, but just recently, the Ebola virus, with a 65 percent death rate, has claimed the lives of more than 500 people in West Africa.

One’s interpretation depends on his approach to the book—literal, figurative, or a combination of both. It could be that this is a literal darkness (v. 10a) sweeping over the entire earth which would bring panic and gloom over all people except those who are kept by God’s grace. The darkness could be spiritual and psychological (my preference), but the spiritual malaise³³² could be caused by natural disasters (draught, floods) resulting in famine and hunger as well as epidemics. It has never been uncommon for people to become angry with God for withholding the rain or for sending too much of it, or for sickness. Sinners presume too much upon God’s goodness, as if they were entitled to it. The verse also reminds us of the repetitive mention of “weeping and gnashing of teeth” found in Jesus’ discourses (Matt. 8: 12; 13: 42 *passim*³³³). In those passages, desperate, hopeless sinners are alternately weeping or cursing God in their anger. God has granted all men goodness and kindness in one degree or another, but this **kindness** has

³³¹ Beale, p. 823

³³² Depression, melancholy

³³³ In other places

failed to bring them to repentance. Now we see that His **wrath** will also not bring them to repentance.

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?⁵ But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, (Romans 2:4-5 NASB)

¹²The **sixth angel**

poured out his bowl **on the great river,**
the Euphrates;
 and its water was dried up,
 so that the way would be prepared
for the kings from the east.

In the OT, drying the seas and the rivers was indicative of God's salvation of Israel and the destruction of her enemies. The Red Sea and the Jordan River were dried up for the crossing of Israel and the destruction of Egypt and the Canaanites respectively. During the reign of the wicked Babylonian king, Belshazzar, Cyrus of Persia diverted the Euphrates River running under the walls of Babylon to make a way for his troops to invade the city (Daniel 5, Heroditus³³⁴). The invasion was prophesied by Isaiah over 150 years before Babylon destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Confirming the word of His servant And performing the purpose of His messengers. *It is I* who says of Jerusalem, 'She shall be inhabited!' And of the cities of Judah, 'They shall be built.' And I will raise up her ruins *again*.²⁷ **"It is I who says to the depth of the sea, 'Be dried up!' And I will make your rivers dry."**²⁸ **"It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.'** And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.'" (Isaiah 44:26-28 NASB)

"May the violence *done* to me and to my flesh be upon Babylon," The inhabitant of Zion will say; And, "May my blood be upon the inhabitants of Chaldea," Jerusalem will say.³⁶ Therefore thus says the LORD, "Behold, I am going to plead your case And exact full vengeance for you; **And I will dry up her sea And make her fountain dry.** (Jeremiah 51:35-36 NASB)

It should also be noted that Cyrus comes "from the east" (Isa. 41: 2). Thus, the drying up of the Euphrates during Cyrus' day leading to the destruction of Babylon is a type of Babylon's destruction prophesied in Revelation. This destruction will occur when the kings of the world become disloyal to Babylon (17: 12-18).³³⁵

The parallel with the sixth trumpet should be noted.

Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,¹⁴ one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are **bound at the great river Euphrates.**"¹⁵ And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, **so that they would kill a third of mankind.**¹⁶ The

³³⁴ Cited in Beale, p. 827

³³⁵ Beale, p. 828

number of the **armies of the horsemen** was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. (Revelation 9:13-16 NASB)

The “armies of the horsemen” of Revelation 9 are the kings of the east and the kings of the earth. As I mentioned earlier, two hundred million is an army of fantastic proportions, especially in the first century. John is speaking of an apocalyptic battle not to be confused with a literal battle.³³⁶ The Euphrates River was the largest river in that part of the world and a natural barrier to invading armies. It served as the eastern boundary for the land given to Abraham (Gen. 15: 18; Deut. 1: 7-8—a boundary never occupied by Israel) and was also the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. Further east across the Euphrates were the Parthians and their expert horsemen-bowmen, one of the few peoples of the earth whom the Romans feared. Some commentators believe the kings from the east are separate from the kings of the whole world.³³⁷ However, it seems better to identify these eastern kings of v. 12 with the kings of the whole world in v. 14, and the two hundred million horsemen of Revelation 9 support this interpretation.³³⁸

One futurist interpretation is to take the drying up of the Euphrates as literal, thus making way for a coalition of eastern rulers to join the “kings of the whole earth”. This coalition, in turn, attacks the church. The preterist interpretation interprets the eastern kings as the Parthians who invade the Roman Empire, and the revived Nero myth fits this possibility. Another interpretation sees the eastern kings going to war with the kings of the whole world in preparation of the destruction of the Roman Empire (Rev. 17—18). However, out of the many references in Revelation to the “kings of the earth”, only one (21: 24) is positive while the rest are negative (6: 15; 17: 2, 18; 18: 3, 9; 19: 9). The kings of the earth are assembled to wage war with the King of Kings, the Lord Jesus Christ. Beale merges the kings of the east (including Cyrus) with the kings of the whole world who then escalate into Gog and Magog of Revelation 20: 8. In other words, Beale sees the kingdoms metaphorically **to include the kingdoms of the entire period** between the resurrection and return of Christ.³³⁹

It is unlikely that a dried-up river, even the Euphrates, would have much military and political significance in the modern world of warplanes and nuclear missiles,³⁴⁰ a fact seriously discrediting literal interpretation from the outset. The metaphorical approach of Beale and Osborne is supported by Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s symbolic use of the drying up of the Red Sea (see verses cited above), lending support to the idea that John is doing the same here in Revelation. Like Beale, Osborne sees the kings from the east joining the kings of the whole earth in opposition to God and His people at Armageddon (cf. Ezek. 38-39; Rev. 19: 17 and 20: 8).³⁴¹

¹³ **And I saw**

*coming out of the **mouth** of the dragon
and out of the **mouth** of the beast
and out of the **mouth** of the false prophet,*

³³⁶ See my earlier comments on Rev. 9.

³³⁷ Mounce, p. 298

³³⁸ Futurist interpreters will be tempted to identify the kings of the earth as an eastern coalition of forces led by China with its 100 million-man army. Yet, modern technology has negated many of the advantages of massive armies with advanced aircraft, missiles, nuclear warheads, and anti-missile defense.

³³⁹ Osborne, p. 590

³⁴⁰ So also Osborne, p. 590

³⁴¹ Osborne, p. 591

three unclean spirits like frogs;
¹⁴ for they are spirits of demons, performing signs,
 which go out to the **kings of the whole world**,
 to gather them together
 for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

Commented [D76]: Ex. 7: 11, 12; 8:7, 18

¹⁵ ("Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.")

¹⁶ And they **gathered them together**
 to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

Thus, "the kings from the east" are also "the kings of the whole world" who will be summoned to make war with God. The unholy trinity—the dragon, the beast of the sea, and the false prophet which is the beast of the earth—sends out **delusions** and **counterfeit signs** in the form of unclean spirits like frogs (another allusion to the false gods of Egypt), deceiving the nations into war with God, the battle of Armageddon (cf. Ps. 2). That the spirits represent deceiving spirits is evident from their source from the **mouth** of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The Egyptian goddess of resurrection, Heqt, was represented as a frog, and it is not without significance that the plague of frogs is one of two miracles duplicated by the Egyptian magicians with their deceptive arts. In Revelation 13, the fatal wound of the beast appears to be healed yielding a counterfeit resurrection that deceives the whole world.³⁴²

The deceptive spirits of v. 14 recalls Christ's warning to His disciples and Paul's warning to the Thessalonians.³⁴³

"Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He!' and will mislead many. (Mark 13:6 NASB)

...for false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order to lead astray, if possible, the elect. (Mark 13:22 NASB)

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,² that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.³ **Let no one in any way deceive you**, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 NASB)

Futurists tend to interpret these events in terms of a **final apostasy** at the end of the age. Remember that the false prophet operates within the church. Osborne says that "The early church believed that false teachers/prophets were harbingers^[344] of the final Antichrist and false prophet who would bring this age to a close." There probably will be an escalation of deception at the end of the church age which becomes world-wide and which dupes³⁴⁵ professing believers and unbelievers, but at least for now we can see the forerunners of this Antichrist and false prophet in

³⁴² Beale, pp. 831-833

³⁴³ Cited in Osborne, p. 591

³⁴⁴ Forerunners

³⁴⁵ Deceives by trickery

the religious charlatans³⁴⁶ of our day—men like Oral Roberts and Benny Hinn who have claimed to heal thousands with no verifiable proof of such healings.³⁴⁷ Hinn makes his appearance in Uganda from time to time charging 50,000 Ush (\$20 US) a half a month's wages for many people, to see him preach and heal, primarily the latter. There are other Hinn-wannabes³⁴⁸ who are following his methods to amass vast fortunes on the African continent.

However, as Mounce notes, the **targets** of the unclean spirits are “the kings of the earth”, not the common people who are flocking to false prophets like Hinn, Joel Osteen, Kenneth Copeland,³⁴⁹ and others.

The unclean spirits in Revelation work their spell **on world rulers rather than common men**. By deceit they gather the kings of the whole world for a great war against God and the hosts of heaven....Swete writes, “There have been times when nations have been seized by a passion for war which the historian can but imperfectly explain. It is such an epoch that the Seer foresees, but one which unlike any that has come before it, will involve the whole world in war”....This epoch is designated “the great day of God, the Almighty.” It is the day when God will reckon with the ungodly nations of the world.³⁵⁰

Moreover, when Satan is bound and cast into the abyss, he was no longer able to deceive the nations (Rev. 20: 1-3). We concluded from Revelation 12 and several Synoptic passages that Satan was bound when Christ died, rose, and ascended into heaven.³⁵¹ Therefore, the deceptive spirits coming out of the mouths of the dragon, beast, and false prophet here in Revelation 16 must come at the end of the age when Satan, the dragon, is released from the abyss. At this point, Satan gathers the nations for war against Christ.

Verse 15 is another parenthetical statement similar to 13: 10b, 18; and 14: 12—a warning which recalls Christ's metaphor at the end of Matthew's gospel and the parables encouraging readiness (Matt. 24: 43; cf. Lk. 12: 39; 1 Thes. 5: 2; Matt. 25). Staying awake and keeping one's clothes may be metaphors comparing readiness for the coming of Christ to a soldier's readiness for battle.³⁵² The good soldier keeps his clothes on in preparation for an unexpected attack; so the soldier of Christ keeps on the alert for the coming of Christ lest he be found “naked” and unprepared for His return.

The place of the battle is called Har-Magedon or “Mount of Megido”. The city Megiddo lies on the north side of the Carmel ridge with a commanding view of the strategic military pass between the Plain of Megiddo and the Esdraelon Valley.³⁵³ Many battles have been fought there including that of Barak and Deborah against the chariots of Sisera (Judges 4—5) and King Josiah's fated battle against Pharaoh Neco (2 Kings 23: 29). The coastal plain was an ideal place

³⁴⁶ Fakes or quacks

³⁴⁷ There are many others whom we could add to this list. I would highly recommend John MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, for a thorough examination of the health and wealth gospel as well as the tongues and healing movement among modern Charismatics.

³⁴⁸ People who “want-to-be” like Hinn, as Hinn wanted to be like Oral Roberts, who served as Hinn's mentor (cf. *Strange Fire*).

³⁴⁹ All three are alumni of Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, founded in 1963 (*Strange Fire*, p. 158).

³⁵⁰ Mounce, p. 300, emphasis mine

³⁵¹ See Revelation 12 and commentary above

³⁵² Mounce, p. 301

³⁵³ Mounce, p. 301

for open battles involving large forces. Here Har-Magedon represents the face-off between the forces of good and evil, but it is not likely that this battle will be literal. There can be no real contest between evil men (the kings of the east) and God, and it appears that the church is not involved in this final battle except as mere onlookers.

¹⁷ Then the **seventh angel**
poured out his bowl **upon the air**,
and a loud voice came out of the throne,
saying, "**It is done.**"

¹⁸ And there were
flashes of lightning
and sounds and peals of thunder;
and there was a great earthquake, |
such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth,
so great an earthquake *was it, and* so mighty.

¹⁹ The **great city**
was split into three parts,
and the cities of the nations fell.

Babylon the great
was remembered before God,
to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

²⁰ And every island
fled away,
and the mountains
were not found.

²¹ And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each,
came down from heaven upon men;
and men **blasphemed** God
because of the plague of the hail,
because its plague was extremely severe.

Once these armies are summoned to make war against the saints, their doom is certain; but the saints need not lift a finger to defend themselves. God does everything for them. The seventh angel pours out his bowl upon the **air**, possibly indicating total judgment reaching the ends of the earth through the atmosphere, or possibly a reference to the giant hailstones that come down from the air. The mention of large **hailstones** recalls the battle of Israel against the Amorites.

And the LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. ¹¹ As they fled from before Israel, *while* they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; *there were more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword.* (Joshua 10:10-11 NASB)

With the advent of Christ and the NT church, Christians are ordered to put away their swords (Matt. 26: 52). Even in the OT, God was teaching them the principle that the battle is the Lord's, and He alone must be trusted to protect His people and advance His kingdom. Earlier in Revelation, the church was discouraged from using physical violence against their persecutors.

Commented [D77]: Allusion to the giving of the law in Exodus

If anyone *is destined* for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the **perseverance** and the faith of the saints. (Revelation 13:10 NASB)

The church is no longer a national entity. It is the people of God **from all nations** who must recognize that their citizenship is in heaven, not on earth (Phil. 3: 20). Consequently, our warfare is not material but spiritual, waged not with metal swords or tanks but the word of God. Thus, when persecuted and facing what appears to be imminent destruction, the church looks to its only protection in the Lord Jesus Christ. This should not be interpreted as the loss of civil rights to protect ourselves from personal and corporate attack by using legitimate means; but it does eliminate the tactics of conventional warfare used by some Christians during the Reformation and even today in Nigeria and other places where Christians are being attacked and killed by Muslims. It does not further the cause of the gospel to use carnal weapons to fight spiritual battles, and such tactics blur the distinction between the people of God and their enemies. When the time is right, God Himself will destroy His enemies.

From the throne of God, a voice is heard saying, "It is done", that is, **judgment is complete**, mirroring 15: 1.

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is **finished**. (Revelation 15:1 NASB)

The declaration occurs before God's wrath is unleashed; the word of the Lord alone secures men's destruction. Thunder, lightning, and earthquake (Rev. 8: 5; 11: 19) remind us once again of the giving of the law and God's fierce wrath against law-breakers (Ex. 19: 16-19; 20: 18; Col. 3: 6).

Babylon the great, a city symbolic of man's economic and cultural achievements, is devastated by the earthquake. Along with Babylon other cities also fall. The cities of men represent their economic and cultural power (Gen. 11), but God will bring about an end to man's boasts. It is not by man's greatness but by God's common grace that he has been able to achieve great things. Nebuchadnezzar's boasting was the occasion of his humbling.

"The king reflected and said, 'Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?'³¹ "While the word *was* in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, *saying*, 'King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is declared: sovereignty has been removed from you, (Daniel 4:30-31 NASB)

Haggai also prophesies the shaking of the nations.

"For thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Once more in a little while, I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. ⁷ I will shake all the nations; and they will come with the wealth of all nations, **and I will fill this house with glory**,' says the LORD of hosts. ⁸ **'The silver is Mine and the gold is Mine**,' declares the LORD of hosts. ⁹ 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts, 'and in this place I will give peace,' declares the LORD of hosts." (Haggai 2:6-9 NASB)

"Speak to Zerubbabel governor of Judah, saying, 'I am going to shake the heavens and the earth. ²² **I will overthrow the thrones of kingdoms** and destroy the power of the kingdoms of the nations; and

I will overthrow the chariots and their riders, and the horses and their riders will go down, everyone by the sword of another.' (Haggai 2:21-22 NASB)

All the silver and gold—the wealth of man—belongs to God who allowed men to create wealth from the material resources He made available on earth and from the inquisitive mind He gave man. God will place this wealth in the temple-city of Jerusalem (the new heavens and earth). The wealth of the wicked is stored up for the righteous (Prov. 13: 22b).

The “house” that God will fill with glory is the temple-city, the “new Jerusalem”, the new heavens and earth that God will create. The wealth of the nations will be brought into this new city to manifest the glory of God.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea.² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, (Revelation 21:1-3 NASB)

I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb.²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. (Revelation 21:22-24 NAU)

The new heavens and earth will become the new temple of God, suited for His habitation with men.

The disappearance of islands and mountains (v. 20) recalls the similar scene from Revelation 6.

The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and **every mountain and island were moved** out of their places.¹⁵ Then the **kings of the earth** and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from **the wrath of the Lamb**;¹⁷ for the **great day** of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:14-17 NASB)

Many of the same elements are here in Revelation 16—*islands and mountains being moved, kings of the earth defeated by God, God's wrath, the great day, etc.* This demonstrates the cyclical nature of the book of Revelation and the recurrence of a “consummative” Day of Judgment throughout the book.³⁵⁴ It is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the finality of the judgment mentioned in Revelation 6 with the judgment of Revelation 16.

For the third time in this chapter, men blaspheme the name of God for their miseries, lending support to the interpretation that the gnashing of teeth in the Synoptic gospels refers to men's anger against God, not themselves. Unbelievers will never come to repentance and accuse themselves for their foolish unbelief. They will curse God instead.

³⁵⁴ Beale, p. 123

Revelation 17

Then **one of the seven angels**

who had the seven bowls

came and spoke with me, saying,

"Come here, I will show you the judgment of **the great harlot**

who sits on **many waters,**

² **with whom**

the **kings of the earth**

committed *acts of* immorality,

and those who dwell on the earth

were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."

³ And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness;

and I saw a **woman** sitting on a scarlet beast,

full of blasphemous names,

having **seven heads and ten horns.**

⁴ The woman

was clothed in purple and scarlet,

and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls,

having in her hand a gold cup

full of abominations

and of the unclean things of her immorality,

⁵ and on her forehead a name *was* written, a **mystery,**

"BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."

⁶ **And I saw the woman**

drunk

with the blood of the saints,

and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus.

When I saw her, I wondered greatly.

The judgment of Babylon at the end of the age echoes the prophecy of Jeremiah.

Flee from the midst of Babylon, And each of you save his life! Do not be destroyed in her punishment, For this is the LORD'S time of vengeance; He is going to render recompense to her.

⁷ Babylon has been a **golden cup** in the hand of the LORD, **Intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine;** Therefore the nations are going mad. ⁸ Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken; **Wail over her!** Bring balm for her pain; Perhaps she may be healed. ⁹ We applied healing to Babylon, but she was not healed; Forsake her and let us each go to his own country, For her judgment has reached to heaven And towers up to the very skies. ¹⁰ The LORD has brought about our **vindication;** Come and let us recount in Zion The work of the LORD our God! ¹¹ Sharpen the arrows, fill the quivers! The LORD has **aroused the spirit of the kings of the Medes,** Because His **purpose is against Babylon** to destroy it; For it is the vengeance of the LORD, **vengeance for His temple.** ¹² Lift up a signal against the walls of Babylon; Post a strong guard, Station sentries, Place men in ambush! For the LORD has both purposed and performed What He spoke concerning the inhabitants of Babylon. ¹³ **O you who dwell by many waters, Abundant in treasures,** Your end has come, The measure of your end. (Jeremiah 51:6-13 NASB)

Commented [D78]: Rev. 17: 15

Commented [D79]: Rev. 17: 18

Commented [D80]: Rev. 13: 1b the beast with seven heads and ten horns

Commented [D81]: symbols of ill-gotten wealth

Commented [D82]: mystery--something concealed in the OT and revealed in the NT

Commented [D83]: Continuing references to persecution

Several aspects of this prophecy have been highlighted for emphasis. The warning to “flee” from Babylon anticipates the warning of Revelation 18: 4.

I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "**Come out of her, my people**, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues (Revelation 18:4 NAU)

The “golden cup” full of intoxicating wine (v. 7) anticipates Rev. 17: 4b and 17: 2.

...having in her hand a **gold cup** full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality

² with whom the kings of the earth committed *acts of* immorality, and those who dwell on the earth were **made drunk with the wine of her immorality.**"

As the nations drank the intoxicating wine of Babylon’s abominations, so in John’s day the whole world drank the intoxicating wine of Roman affluence, debauchery, and idolatry. “**Wail over her**” anticipates the wailing of the kings of the earth and the merchants who gave their allegiance to Rome as well as those in any age, including the present age, who become intoxicated with the wealth, success, and immorality of the economic-religious system³⁵⁵ unrestrained by **Christian principles** of economics and morality. Nothing from this text can be marshaled against free-market economics in favor of socialism. In fact, the very opposite. It is Rome’s political system that has facilitated her economic extravagance and seduction.

"And the kings of the earth, who committed *acts of* immorality and lived sensuously with her, will **weep and lament** over her when they see the smoke of her burning,¹⁰ standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'¹¹ "And the **merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her**, because **no one buys their cargoes any more**—¹² cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every *kind of* citron wood and every article of ivory and every article *made* from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble, (Revelation 18:9-12 NASB)

The “**vindication**” of Jeremiah’s prophecy anticipates the vindication of the church in the destruction of Babylon and all antichristian economic/religious systems throughout the history of the world (Jer. 51: 11). As God judges Babylon for persecuting His people and destroying His temple, so God will also destroy Rome for the same reason, as well as **any other** economic/religious seductress who attempts to seduce His people (His new temple) away from the true worship of God and persecutes those who refuse to compromise. The Roman Empire was a murderous persecutor of the church, having Christians cut to pieces by gladiators and torn to pieces by wild animals in the arenas as entertainment for lustful Roman citizens.

It is clear that John interpreted the woman as Rome (the woman was sitting on **seven mountains** in v. 9; Rome was known by everyone as the city on seven hills). Nevertheless, the trans-temporal³⁵⁶ meaning of Babylon is any world-wide economic/religious system.

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. (Revelation 17:6 NASB)

³⁵⁵ Beale, p. 847

³⁵⁶ Transtemporal means spanning many historical periods

Arousing the Medo-Persian kings against Babylon (Jer. 51: 11) anticipates the “purpose” of God in Revelation 17 to arouse the kings and nations to forsake their alliance with Babylon and ultimately forsake her.

And he said to me, “The **waters** which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.¹⁶ “And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these **will hate the harlot** and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.¹⁷ “For **God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose** by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled. (Revelation 17:15-17 NASB)

The **many waters** of Jeremiah 51: 13 refer to the Euphrates River upon which Babylon was built in ancient times along with its many tributaries, thus allowing abundant trade with all its conquered nations. Likewise, Rome, situated on the Mediterranean Sea, was also situated for world trade; and all its conquered vassals were required to bring their wares into it. These are some of the many similarities between Babylon and Rome. Today, the “many waters” facilitating trade may correspond to any, or many, **world-class cities** which serve as the centers of world trade. One can think of New York, London, Tokyo, Singapore, or any city boasting world-class banks and stock exchanges. More than ever before in history the many nations of the world have become one huge, colossal economic market—each one affecting the others. The “kings of the earth”, the nations, have come together for mutual cooperation—and often mutual rebellion against God and His moral law. Yet, evil alliances never last; and in the end God turns the nations against Babylon whom they destroy.

The **abundance of treasures** (Jer. 51: 13) refers to the wealth and riches of ancient Babylon, anticipated in the Roman Empire (cf. Rev. 18: 12-13 and its list of rich cargos, including “slaves and human lives”).

The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality, (Revelation 17:4 NASB)

The acts of fornication with the harlot are not sexual in nature, but religious and economic. Kings and nations “fornicate” with her by yielding to her idolatrous seduction represented in Revelation 17 and 18 as the **unbridled** quest for money, luxury, and power. As the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet represent a counterfeit trinity, Babylon represents the counterfeit church or counterfeit religion enticing the world—and the true church—to give its loyalty to the counterfeit trinity. The beast serves the purpose of the harlot as it forces those with its mark into economic and religious fornication (alliance) with the harlot. As the beast persecutes the church outwardly with the power of the **sword**, Babylon attacks the church inwardly through **temptation**.³⁵⁷

...when we study the catalogue of goods found in Babylon, Rev. 18: 11 ff., it becomes evident that the symbol has reference to a great industrial and commercial metropolis. Babylon, therefore, must indicate **the world as a center of industry, commerce, art, culture**, etc., which by means of all these things seeks **to entice and seduce the believer**, that is, to turn him away from God. It symbolizes the concentration of the luxury, vice, and glamour of this world. It is the world viewed as the embodiment of “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the vainglory of life,” 1John 2: 16.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Poythress, p. 159-160

³⁵⁸ Hendriksen, p. 201, emphasis mine

It is the antitype of the typical culture of Cain's descendents to the seventh generation in Lamech—successful in building cities, developing animal husbandry, metallurgy, musical instruments, and writing poetry (about murder, Gen. 4). Cain's descendents nevertheless developed a **counterfeit culture**³⁵⁹ culminating in the tower of Babel and man's second major attempt to become his own god (Gen. 11).³⁶⁰ The main competitor to Christianity today is not Islam, but autonomy or self-worship. Autonomy, in turn, breeds the love of money which offers the apparent ability to become autonomous. Jesus knew this well when He warned of the impossibility of serving two masters, God and wealth (Matt. 6: 24). It is the seduction of wealth which lures the world into every form of sin and idolatry, including the idolatry of self (1 Tim. 6: 10, 17a).

Islam is deadly, especially in its radical expressions, but its deadliness does not come close to the love of money resulting in crimes and sins of all kinds both individually, corporately, nationally and internationally. The love of money causes Christians to compromise with non-Christian lifestyles and world-views. Islam will win a relatively small number of converts from materialistic, western nations, but it will not seduce the majority of money-worshipping, entertainment-crazed, celebrity-worshipping westerners whose god has become their appetite (Phil. 3: 19). It poses much more danger in poverty-stricken countries whose young men, having lost hope in political/economic systems, reach for meaning and purpose in a false religion that promises utopia in an afterlife for those willing to sacrifice the present.³⁶¹

Yet, we cannot completely rule out the explicit sexual connotations of the “harlot” Babylon. Christ has already warned the seven churches about sexual compromise in Revelation 1—3. Many Christians were being encouraged to participate in the cult religions of the various trade guilds, an idolatrous compromise which often resulted in cultic sexual immorality with prostitutes (see above). Others were tempted to participate in emperor worship to maintain their socio-political status. Some of the Corinthian Christians had even been convinced that sexual sin with prostitutes was not damaging to the soul, but Paul warns that the soul and the body are inextricably connected (1 Cor. 6).³⁶² As a general rule, the worship of money and power go hand in hand with the worship of sex. Counterfeit religion has its own counterfeit trinity.

Our modern cities, with their wealth, false religions, and sexual exploitation, are modern forms of Babylon. The media and their advertisements can bring into our homes and thoughts the seductions of money, sex, power, and pleasure....

Little Babylons also operate in the recesses of our heart.... The Beast controls his subjects through fear; the Prostitute seduces people by playing on their lusts with the enticements of illicit pleasures....Sex, wealth, fame, power, health, and beauty can all be objects of our lust.³⁶³

Despite her fine clothing (v. 4), the woman is still a whore. She stands in contradistinction from the mother in Revelation 12 whom God clothes with the sun and moon, who gives birth to the

³⁵⁹ For an extensive discussion about counterfeit culture, see *LifeWork*, Darrow Miller, as well as Francis Schaeffer, *How Shall We Then Live*

³⁶⁰ Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come*, on chapter 17

³⁶¹ In this limited sense, Islam is much like Christianity. It does not present utopia (an ideal life) as a possibility in this present world. Reward comes to those who are willing to sacrifice the present for the future.

³⁶² Poythress, p. 161

³⁶³ Poythress, pp. 162-163

church—legitimate offspring by the power of the Spirit. The whore, on the other hand, gives birth to illegitimate, idolatrous children through illicit intercourse with the kings of the earth. Her offspring attempt to destroy the church. There is no contradiction in the woman sitting on the waters and at the same time on the scarlet beast. The apocalyptic scenes move quickly and do not allow rigid application of its symbols.³⁶⁴ The beast from the sea and the harlot are ideologically connected—both are opposed to God and His church. Moreover, the beast uses this prostitute to lure the world to worship him. They are both trans-temporal, representing antichristian persecution (the beast) and worldly seduction (the harlot) throughout the history of the church.

⁷ And **the angel** said to me,

"Why do you wonder?"

I will tell you

the **mystery**

of the woman

and of the beast that carries her,

which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

Commented [D84]: Rev. 17: 8

Commented [D85]: Rev. 17: 5

The **mystery** of the harlot is seen not in the fact that a truth concealed in the OT is fully revealed in the new—the usually connotation of “mystery” in the NT—but in the ironic and unexpected twist of events surrounding the harlot’s fate. Although she rides the beast (indicative of being undergirded and supported by the beast, vv. 3 and 7 for emphasis), she will eventually be destroyed by the beast (v. 16). Non-Christian systems are **inherently self-destructive**. This self-destroying alliance is the **mystery** of the harlot, also mentioned twice for emphasis (vv. 5 and 7). The foreshadowing of this mystery is seen in the Roman Empire. The military conquests of Rome, followed by its vast commercial trade, spread its cultural and economic influence throughout the earth—the beast carried the woman. But eventually the oppressive, “beastly” powers of Roman government and military would destroy the woman—Rome’s very prosperity. Rome was destroyed by internal problems more than it was from external enemies.

...idolatrous states end up destroying the very powers, riches, privileges, and people they start out supporting....

Similarly today, **people put their hope in state power**, whenever it promises to deliver utopian^[365] peace and prosperity. Communist governments have engaged in all kinds of brutality, and yet have received people’s allegiance, because totalitarian power was supposedly a necessary means to achieve the utopian communist society.³⁶⁶

The **blasphemous names** on the beast represent the false claims of deity and sovereignty by antichristian governments, represented in the first century by Roman Caesars who called themselves “Lord and God”, “Divine Son,” and “Savior”. The pretensions of modern states or statist organizations are no less egregious.³⁶⁷ The United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, all have made veiled promises of ending world poverty and

³⁶⁴ Mounce, pp. 308-309

³⁶⁵ A utopia is an unreal, idealistic society where everything and everyone works for the best. In a word, it is man’s hope of heaven on earth without God.

³⁶⁶ Poythress, pp. 164-165, emphasis mine

³⁶⁷ Noted for bad qualities

ensuring world peace. International organizations have delusions of messianic power and attempt to build their towers into heaven (Gen. 11).

⁸ "The beast that you saw

was,

and is not,

and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction.

And those who dwell on the earth,

whose name has not been written

in the book of life from the foundation of the world,

will wonder when they see the beast,

that he was and is not and will come.

⁹ "Here is the mind which has wisdom.

The beast was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss (v. 8). This description is a parody of the Christ and God found earlier in Revelation 1: 4, 8 and 4: 8.³⁶⁸

John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, **from Him who is and who was and who is to come**, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, (Revelation 1:4 NASB)

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "**who is and who was and who is to come**, the Almighty." (Revelation 1:8 NASB)

And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *is* THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, **WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME**." (Revelation 4:8 NASB)

The description of the beast (v. 8) is a parody or mockery in that the beast can only imitate or mimic the sovereignty of Christ but **cannot actually attain it**.³⁶⁹ John's description also adds, "and go to destruction" (v. 8b). Yes, the beast will cause the world to marvel by rising from the abyss, but he will only do so a little while in order to be destroyed. The contrast between Christ and the beast is striking. **Christ rises in order to reign. The beast rises in order to be destroyed.** Hendriksen interprets this three-fold formula (was, is not, is to come) as the history of ancient civilizations up to the present time—Old Babylonia and the kingdom of Nimrod (Gen. 10), Assyria, New Babylonia of Nebuchadnezzar, the Medes and the Persians, the Greco-Macedonian Empire. Each of these empires existed ("was") but have perished ("is not") Yet, the beast keeps rearing its ugly head in the form of new world empires ("is about to come"), causing the world to marvel with respect and awe (v. 8b, they "will wonder when they see the beast"). They marvel at the resiliency of the beast which seems virtually to have risen from the dead (cf. Rev. 13: 3, 12, 14).

Thus, again and again the beast appears in a new embodiment. The forms change, the essence remains throughout this entire dispensation: yea, throughout the history of the world until the judgment day.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ Mounce, p. 312

³⁶⁹ Remember the number of the beast, 666, a trinity of failure short of the perfection of 777.

³⁷⁰ Hendriksen, p. 204

Commented [D86]: Rev. 13: 3 See comments on D41 Rev. 17: 11

Commented [D87]: Rev. 17: 7; Rev. 13: 3 This may be a reference to the beast which appeared to be slain and was resurrected.

Commented [D88]: Rev. 13: 10, 18; 14: 12; 17: 9

Down through history he repeatedly “comes up from the abyss” to harass and, if it were possible, to destroy the people of God. He is the little horn of Daniel 7 (Antiochus Epiphanes) who rises out of the fourth kingdom (the “exceeding terrible” fourth beast, Dan. 7: 19) to make war against the saints (Dan. 7: 21). He is Nero who instigates a persecution of the Christians to avert suspicion that he is responsible for the burning of Rome.³⁷¹

Beale interprets the marvel of the world as the **apparent lack of effect** which the resurrection of Christ had on the first century Roman world and continuing to our day.³⁷²

But the Satanic state (“the beast”) and culture in the first century appeared to be unaffected by Christ’s victory, since their prosperity continued and their persecution of God’s people continued unabated. This situation will continue until the final parousia, at which time the beast’s success over God’s people will seem even greater than before; directly preceding Christ’s parousia it will seem as if the beast is finally and decisively triumphant over the church. But this apparent success is short lived, as 17: 10 reveals: the success will last only “a little time”. Christ will return at this point and show decisively that the devil and his forces were defeated at the cross. He will demonstrate the reality of his spiritual victory at the cross by achieving physical victory over Satan’s forces at the end of time.³⁷³

That the beast “**is not**” may indicate a low point in the persecution of the church, but persecution will rise again in the future—“**is about to come**”. The church of the first century until the Edict of Milan in 313 AD suffered various high points and low points in Roman persecution, Domitian being one of the worst from 81-96 AD, one of three most plausible dates when Revelation was written.³⁷⁴

During the Roman persecution, with its ebbs and tides of severity, it appeared that the beast was rising time and again from the deaths of successive emperors. He continues in our day to persecute the church through different manifestations of oppressive governments which come and go—the Soviet Union, Communist China and North Korea, Idi Amin’s regime in Uganda, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the newly formed Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS), et al. John encourages the church with the fact that although the beast “is about to come” again, it is his **last time** to come before his utter destruction. Those who marvel at world power are those “whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.” On the other hand, those whose names are written in the book of life **will not be deceived** by the apparent success of antichristian powers. They know that Satan’s doom is sure because the real victory has already been secured by the death of Christ. They are not deceived by the apparent success of Satan, ungodly world governments, or oppressive individuals (Ps. 73). “**Here is the mind which has wisdom**” (v. 9a), for he is not deceived like “those who dwell on the earth”.

The seven heads are seven mountains

on which the woman sits,

¹⁰ and they are **seven kings**;

³⁷¹ Mounce, p. 312

³⁷² “Apparent” lack of effect since the Christian, with eyes of faith, can certainly see how the resurrection has changed the whole course of history for the better. The unbeliever does not understand this because he is blind to dramatic influence of Christianity.

³⁷³ Beale, p. 866

³⁷⁴ Poythress, pp. 165-167. Two other plausible dates are 54-68 (the reign of Nero) and 69-79 (the reign of Vespasian, the emperor who ordered the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD).

Commented [D89]: The seven heads, mountains, kings are all the same entity

five have fallen,
 one is,
 the other has not yet come;
 and when he comes, he **must remain a little while**.

The **seven heads** of the beast are also **seven mountains** and **seven kings**. The seven mountains are the seven hills of Rome, “the city on seven hills”. But who are the **seven kings**, five of whom **have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come**?³⁷⁵ Various attempts have been made to interpret the seven kings as the first seven emperors of Rome. The five who have fallen are Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero. The king “who is” is Vespasian and the one “not yet come” is Titus. This interpretation works if Revelation is written during the reign of Vespasian. One problem with this interpretation is that many Jewish and Roman historians regard Julius Caesar as the first Roman Emperor rather than Augustus. Another problem is that three short lived emperors—Galba, Otho, and Vitellious—are conveniently omitted from the list between Nero (54-68 AD) and Vespasian (69-79 AD).³⁷⁵ These three reigned for a total of two years between 68 and 69 AD.

If Revelation is written in 67 AD, the first five emperors may be Julius Caesar, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius, leaving the sixth place to Nero, the one who “**is**”. But this leaves us with the seventh, “the other who has not yet come” but **must remain a little while**, as Vespasian. Yet, the other three are omitted since there are three of them who reigned for a combined period of two years.

Another approach interprets the seven heads of v. 10 not as individual **kings**, but as **kingdoms**. Heading the list could be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece, all of which have “fallen”. Rome is the present kingdom in John’s day. The one that is to come is the “Christianized” Roman Empire of Constantine³⁷⁶ who was supposedly converted at the sign of the cross in the sky with the words, “In this sign, conquer”, an event with very doubtful historicity. Hendriksen opts for a list which is headed by Ancient Babylonia, followed by Assyria, New Babylonia, Medo-Persia, and Greco-Macedonia. Again, Rome is the obvious sixth empire which now “is”. The seventh kingdom (or king) **may** be a “collective title for all antichristian governments between the fall of Rome and the final empire of Antichrist that is going to oppress the church in the days just preceding Christ’s second coming”. Hendriksen draws upon Daniel 2 and 7 to guide his interpretation, reasoning that the **heads** of Daniel 7 do not speak of individual kings but seven antichristian world empires.³⁷⁷

Arguing similarly, Beale argues that Daniel 7 is the source of the seven heads in Revelation 13. While there were four beasts in Daniel 7, the leopard has four heads making a total of seven, there was only one beast in Revelation 13 which was a composite of the beasts of Daniel 7. As the fourth beast in Daniel 7: 7 had ten horns, the singular beast in Daniel 13 has ten horns. As the four beasts in Daniel 7: 3 come up from the sea, the singular beast of Revelation 13 comes up from the sea.

³⁷⁵ Mounce, p. 314

³⁷⁶ Mounce, p. 315

³⁷⁷ Hendriksen, pp. 204-205

And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast **coming up out of the sea**, having **ten horns and seven heads**, and on his horns *were* ten diadems, and on his heads *were* blasphemous names.² And the beast which I saw was like a **leopard**, and his feet were like *those* of a **bear**, and his mouth like the mouth of a **lion**. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. (Revelation 13:1-2 NASB)

Commenting on Revelation 13, Beale remarks,

Just as the four beastly kingdoms of Daniel 7 spanned hundreds of years, so the empire dominant in the first century A.D. has latent within itself **manifestations of other oppressive kingdoms** that may be manifested in the future, as 17: 10-11 shows. In the light of Daniel 7, **the Roman Empire transcends many centuries and represents all world powers who oppress God's people until the culmination of history...** '[John] sees Rome as the residual legatee of all the pagan empires of the past,' and the evil spirit inspiring Rome as potentially able to dominate other world empires after Rome. The dragon and the beast include world empires of the past and the present and potentially of the future.³⁷⁸

Beale notes the interchangeability between “kings” and “kingdoms” found in Daniel 7: 17 and 23 which implies that the heads/kings/mountains in Revelation 17 could represent **kingdoms** as well as **kings**. The emphasis of Daniel 17, therefore, is not the exact “quantity” of kings but the “quality of fullness or completeness”, as in Daniel 7—“the fullness of oppressive power” of antichristian governments throughout the ages until the very end of time which assume the prerogatives of God and persecute God's people when they refuse to submit to laws which violate their Christian beliefs. Confirmation of the interpretation of kingdoms rather than individual kings comes from the fact that the kingdoms of Daniel 7 span several centuries until the coming of Christ, not decades, as in the theory supporting the interpretation of seven Roman emperors. But it is further supported by the fact that Revelation 13 speaks of one composite beast rather than four individual beasts. This interpretation does not deny the obvious allusion to Rome with its seven hills (mountains), but it does deny the exclusive limitation to Rome or Roman emperors.

¹¹ "The beast **which was and is not,** is himself also an **eighth** and is *one* of the seven, and he goes to destruction.

Commented [D90]: Rev. 17: 8

The beast is also the **eighth** king but also **of the seven** (“one” does not occur in the Greek text). Therefore, he is not just another kingdom manifesting the evil of Satan; he is evil personified, the Antichrist at the close of history during the great tribulation before Christ's return.³⁷⁹ As the dragon (Satan) is bound in the abyss for a thousand years and released for a short time (Rev. 20: 3), the beast of Revelation 17 also comes up from the abyss and is afterwards judged.

And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;³ and he **threw him into the abyss**, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, so that he

³⁷⁸ Beale, p. 685, emphasis mine; also quoting Caird, *Language and Imagery*, p. 229

³⁷⁹ Mounce, p. 316, so also Hendriksen, p. 205

would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be **released for a short time.** (Revelation 20:2-3 NASB)

When the thousand years are completed, **Satan will be released from his prison,⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations** which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.⁹ And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.¹⁰ And the devil who deceived them was **thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also;** and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:7-10 NASB)

Beale also believes that this final, eighth manifestation of the beast will be more powerful than any of the previous seven manifestations.

Though in the future he [the beast] will rise again (vv. 8a-8b, 11) and will appear to conduct insurmountable opposition against the kingdom of the church on an **unprecedented** scale (11: 7; 20: 7-9), the fact of his past invisible defeat at the cross insures that “he will go to destruction, “ which all eyes will see...his selective deceiving and persecuting activity in the present will be greatly **heightened in the future, with respect to both its intensity and its universal magnitude.** Indeed, it is apparent that the dragon persecuted God’s people throughout history through its heads (see 12: 3 and 13: 1-2), yet the last head to appear in history will do so in a manner greater than ever before. If 13: 3b-18 depicts a **universal persecution at the very end of the age,** as some contend, then it depicts the same future existence of the beast as in 17: 8, 11.³⁸⁰

- ¹² "The **ten horns** which you saw are **ten kings** who have **not yet received a kingdom,** but they receive authority as kings with the beast **for one hour.**
- ¹³ "These have **one purpose,** and they give their power and authority to the beast.
- ¹⁴ "These **will wage war against the Lamb,** and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him *are the called and chosen and faithful."*

Commented [D91]: Distinct from the seven kings of whom five are fallen, one is and the other is yet to come. Rev. 17: 10

Commented [D92]: Rev. 18: 10,17,19; 17: 12

Commented [D93]: The one purpose of the ten kings is to give their authority to the beast, the red dragon

Commented [D94]: 17: 17

Commented [D95]: Rev. 19: 19

Commented [D96]: Christ will overcome His and our enemies. Nothing is said about the saints participating in this war except as spectators

The ten horns have been identified by **futurist interpreters** as a revived Roman empire. However, both seven and ten are numbers signifying perfection and completion. Ten kings therefore signify the great power of kings, nations, and cultures spanning the history of the world.³⁸¹ It is possible that they do not have to be strictly interpreted as governments, but could also include any entity in conflict with the kingdom of God. From this point of view, Hendriksen has interpreted the kings as “All the mighty ones of this earth in every realm: art, education, commerce, industry, government, insofar as they serve the central authority....”³⁸²

³⁸⁰ Beale, p. 877, emphasis mine

³⁸¹ Beale, p. 878

³⁸² Hendriksen, p. 205

In the West, secular education stripped of any belief in a supernatural God has done its share in opposing Christian values and its belief in the dignity of man made in the image of God. The consequences of two generations forcibly immersed in godless evolutionism has been rampant teen pregnancy, drug abuse, suicide as the second leading cause of death among teenagers, and random school shootings (evoking the naive question, “How could this happen?”). The worship of movie celebrities has led to narcissistic self-absorption and eating disorders among young women to avoid overweight. Art forms in the US have taken bizarre detours, including everything from a crucifix immersed in urine (named by the artist as “the pissed Christ”) to odd-shaped animal forms made from aluminum and sold to art collectors for millions of dollars. (What would Rembrandt think of us?) The secularists have pressed into service almost every cultural tool to convince us to abandon traditional values and definitions—from the word “art” to the word “family” which they now include as homosexual “families”. It seems more than incidental that education has been handed over to state funding and control for many decades in all western cultures, and art is increasingly funded through taxation. Through various means the nations wage war against the Lamb.

From John’s perspective, the ten kings are future, for they **have not yet received a kingdom**. They are identical to the **kings of the earth** of Revelation 6: 15-16 who hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb. They are also identical to **the kings of the whole world** who make war with Christ who sits on a white horse in Revelation 19: 19. This identification is confirmed when we compare Revelation 19: 19 with Revelation 17: 14 (“These **will wage war** against the Lamb”) and Revelation 16: 14.

...for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to **the kings of the whole world**, to gather them together for **the war of the great day of God**, the Almighty. (Revelation 16:14 NASB)

The confederation of kings hand over their power to the beast. This is their stated **purpose** which stands in complete but unintended cooperation with **God’s** purpose who wishes to demonstrate His power against all who oppose His kingdom and His people (Rom. 9: 17). Thus, in v. 17a, the kings **execute** God’s purpose through their **common purpose** of giving their power to the beast. The sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man are therefore demonstrated in the same purpose from two different perspectives. In the final analysis God is always in control of every event. There is no dualism in this world,³⁸³ as if God and Satan are fighting it out to see who wins. The victory of God was never in any doubt.

Their reign is short-lived, **one hour** (cf. Rev. 18: 10, 17, 19), indicating God’s overwhelming force at the Battle of Armageddon (v. 14). Present with Christ at the battle are the **called and chosen and faithful**, but their specific role in the war is left undetermined.³⁸⁴ As the type in Daniel 7, after the decisive victory is won, the kingdom is handed over to the saints. The conclusion of Revelation is predicted long before in Daniel.

"I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them ²² until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. (Daniel 7:21-22 NASB)

³⁸³ Mounce, pp. 319-320

³⁸⁴ Mounce, p. 318

¹⁵ And he said to me,
 "The waters **which you saw** where the harlot sits,
 are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues."
¹⁶ "And the ten horns **which you saw**,
 and the beast,
 these
 will hate the harlot
 and will make her desolate and naked,
 and will eat her flesh
 and will burn her up with fire.

¹⁷ "For God **has put it in their hearts**
 to execute His purpose
 by having a common purpose,
 and by **giving their kingdom to the beast**,
 until the words of God will be fulfilled.

¹⁸ "The **woman** whom you saw
 is the great city,
which reigns over the kings of the earth."

Commented [D97]: Rev. 17: 1

Commented [D98]: Therefore, Babylon represents all world powers

Commented [D99]: Rev. 17: 18 The kings of the earth who worship the harlot will turn against her and hate her. Thus, the political powers of the world will turn upon economic powers (?)

Commented [D100]: 17: 13

Commented [D101]: Rev. 17: 16 The harlot reigns over the same kings who later turn against her

The **waters** of v.15 represent the vast commercial avenues of Rome (and Babylon before it) situated on the Mediterranean Sea, giving Rome access to the whole world. God puts into the hearts of the beast and the **peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues** to hate the harlot who sits upon the beast in order to destroy her (vv. 16-17). As indicated earlier, this is the **mystery** of the harlot. Although allied with the beast and undergirded by the beast, she is destroyed by the beast and the ten kingdoms who give their allegiance to the beast.

This turning of the beast upon the woman who sits upon him speaks of "a terrible and mysterious law of political history, according to which every revolutionary power contains within itself the seed of self-destruction."...It describes the self-destroying power of evil. Morris notes that the wicked are not a happy band of brothers, but precisely because they are wicked they give way to jealousy and hatred, so that "at the climax their mutual hatreds will result in mutual destruction."³⁸⁵

The betrayal of Babylon involves the disloyalty of the political powers (the beast and its kings) toward the social-economic-religious system, the woman called Babylon. Babylon herself represents the pagan world socio-economic system as well as the **apostate church** that cooperates with this system.³⁸⁶

In Roman culture, we have already seen the existence of the emperor cult which demanded allegiance and worship from the citizens of Rome if they were allowed access to the economic benefits of society. The craftsman's guilds with their cult deities were similar in their demands from members who must participate in their heathen festivals. Eventually, the citizens of Roman culture and its government repudiated the old gods and goddesses and even emperor worship. But what will this look like in modern culture at the end of the world? The short answer is: I don't know. The long answer is: I can't find any commentators who venture a guess.

³⁸⁵ Mounce, p. 319, citing H. Lilje and Leon Morris

³⁸⁶ Beale, p. 885

Revelation 18

After these things I saw

another angel

coming down from heaven,
having great authority,
and the earth was illumined with his glory.

² And he cried out **with a mighty voice**,

saying,

"Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great!
She has become
a dwelling place of demons
and a prison of every unclean spirit,
and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.

The reader will notice the numerous references in the chapter to wealth and riches which come from the commercial activity of Babylon (vv. 3, 7, 9, 12, 14, 15-19). He will also notice the many references to **mourning** (vv. 8-11, 15-16, 19) from those who have profited from Babylon's commerce and sensuality—mourning that Babylon boasted that she would never see (v. 7b). By way of contrast, **heaven, saints, apostles, and prophets** are commanded to **rejoice** over the destruction of Babylon. Likewise, in Isaiah, Israel is commanded to rejoice over Babylon's future downfall.

Go forth from Babylon! Flee from the Chaldeans! **Declare with the sound of joyful shouting**, proclaim this, Send it out to the end of the earth; Say, "The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob." (Isaiah 48:20 NASB)

As always in the history of redemption, the salvation of God's people must be accomplished in the destruction of her enemies, who are also the enemies of God. It is the destruction of the evil city that facilitates the coming of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. This is clear when we see the structure of Revelation from chapters 18 through 22.

The fall of Babylon at the end of the age is the **antitype** of the fall of Neo-Babylon, the empire of Nebuchadnezzar, the **type**. Nebuchadnezzar's fall in Daniel 4 is a foreshadowing of Babylon's national destruction in Daniel 5, foretold in Isaiah and Jeremiah. I have already cited texts from Jeremiah 51. In Isaiah, we read,

And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, **the glory of the Chaldeans' pride**, Will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. ²⁰ It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation; Nor will the Arab pitch *his* tent there, Nor will shepherds make *their flocks* lie down there. ²¹ But desert creatures will lie down there, And their houses will be full of **owls**; **Ostriches** also will live there, and shaggy **goats** will frolic there. ²² **Hyenas** will howl in their fortified towers And **jackals** in their luxurious palaces. Her *fateful* time also will soon come And her days will not be prolonged. (Isaiah 13:19-22 NASB)

"Now behold, here comes a troop of riders, horsemen in pairs." And one said, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon; And all the images of her gods are shattered on the ground." (Isaiah 21:9 NASB)

Therefore, the once proud city of which Nebuchadnezzar boasted, “Is this not Babylon the Great?” will become a dwelling place of wild animals and unclean birds unfit for human habitation. Revelation 18 is primarily concerned with the destruction of man’s proud cities boasting world trade which often tramples upon the rights and needs of others. It should be remembered that Nebuchadnezzar ignored Daniel’s admonition to champion the rights of the poor (Dan. 4: 27), and many economic practices demonstrate no concern for the poor.

³ “For all the nations
 have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality,
 and **the kings of the earth**
 have committed *acts of* immorality with her,
 and **the merchants of the earth**
 have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.”

Babylon, which John interprets as present Rome, has entered into illicit relationships with all the nations of the earth which are initially forced into commercial relationships with Rome. Finally, the nations find that trade with Rome has also made them wealthy (although Rome always gets more than it gives). The wealth depicted in the chapter is opulent wealth based upon excessive luxury at the expense of other human beings.

⁴ I heard **another voice from heaven**,
 saying,
 “Come out of her, my people,
 so that you will not
 participate in her sins
 and receive of her plagues;
⁵ for her sins have piled up as high as heaven,
 and **God has remembered her iniquities**.”

The constant theme of the Bible is the sanctification of God’s people. God sets us apart to be a holy people zealous of good works and unstained by the predominant sins of society. God’s people live **in** the world but they are not **of** the world. “Come out of her, my people” recalls Isaiah 52: 11 and Paul’s quotation in 2 Corinthians 6: 17.

“Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord. “AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. (2 Corinthians 6:17 NASB)

“I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me **out of** the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. (John 17:6 NASB)

“I do not ask You to **take them out of** the world, but to keep them from the evil *one*.¹⁶ **They are not of the world**, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:15-16 NASB)

At the beginning of Revelation, the warning of Christ to the churches of Asia Minor was that they be distinct and separate from the idolatry and immorality of their age. The church must be in the world, but the world system must not be allowed to come into the church. The OT type was that Israel, by necessity, lived in Canaan, but no Canaanite would be allowed to become an Israelite without renouncing his allegiance to false gods and becoming circumcised. Today, Babylon is often allowed to come into the church, and the church adopts the world-view of

Babylon—sexual immorality, the worship of money and luxury (as this chapter vividly portrays), idolatry (worshipping a god of our own imagination rather than the true God).

Verse 6 of Revelation 18 indicates the just retribution of God against the sins of the world. Double may seem to indicate overpayment for sins rather than just retribution. However, an alternate translation is “duplicate”, thus indicating the righteous equivalent. The Bible teaches that God will repay the sinner according to his deeds (Matt. 16: 27). This interpretation seems supported by the parallel statements in v. 7, “To the degree...to the same degree”.

⁶ “Pay her back
 even as she has paid,
 and give back *to her* double
 according to her deeds;
 in the cup which she has mixed,
 mix twice as much for her.
⁷ “To the degree
 that she glorified herself and lived sensuously,
 to the same degree
 give her torment and mourning;
 for she says in her heart,
 ‘I SIT *as* A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW,
 and will never see mourning.’

Babylon sees herself as the world’s mistress who will always be in demand by her lovers.³⁸⁷ She is not like a widow who loses her one husband. The Empire of Rome lasted for many centuries, and it seemed as if she was invincible, but to the degree that Rome glorified herself and lived sensuously from the stolen spoils of war and upon the backs of slaves, God will repay her according to her deeds. It is the law of sowing and reaping which applies not only to individuals but nations and cultures.

⁸ “For this reason **in one day** her plagues will come,
 pestilence
 and mourning
 and famine,
 and she will be burned up with fire;
 for the Lord God who **judges her** is strong.

The fate of ancient Babylon will also be the fate of Rome. As Belshazzar was drinking wine from gold and silver vessels stolen from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, a hand comes out of nowhere and writes, “You have been weighed on the scales and found deficient.” That very night Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede took over his kingdom (Daniel 5). The **suddenness** of Babylon’s fall to Persia foreshadows the sudden fall of the future **eschatological Babylon**. The phrase, **for in one hour** is repeated twice in the chapter for emphasis (vv. 10, 17).

⁹ “And **the kings of the earth,**
 who committed *acts of* immorality
 and lived **sensuously** with her,

³⁸⁷ Mounce, p. 326

will weep and lament over her
 when they see the smoke of her burning,
¹⁰ **standing at a distance** because of the fear of her torment,
 saying,
 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city!
 For **in one hour** your judgment has come.'

Commented [D102]: Rev. 17: 12; 18: 10, 17,19

Who are the kings mourning over Babylon's fall? Are they the same kings who turn against Babylon in 17: 16? Mounce says they are not the same kings,³⁸⁸ requiring a distinction between the **ten kings** in Revelation 17: 12-17 who destroy Babylon and the **kings of the earth** in Revelation 17: 2 and 18: 3 who have committed fornication with Babylon by entering into economic and political alliance with her. It would also require a distinction between the mourning **merchants** of 18: 11 and **the peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues** of 17: 15 who cooperate with the **ten kings** in betraying Babylon and destroying her. Beale says that it is possible that the ten kings who **burn her up with fire** (17: 16) are the same as the **kings of the earth** who commit fornication with her. After turning against her and destroying her, they look back with longing upon the former glory days of economic prosperity that she had brought them. They then realize that they have cooked the golden goose that has laid their golden eggs for them.³⁸⁹

We know that the **ten kings** who turn upon Babylon eventually wage war against the Lamb.

"The ten horns which you saw are **ten kings** who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. ¹³ "These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him *are the* called and chosen and faithful." (Revelation 17:12-14 NASB)

"And the **ten horns** which you saw, and the beast, **these will hate the harlot** and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. (Revelation 17:16 NASB)

When we examine other passages, we also know that **the kings of the whole world** wage war against God. Are **the kings of the whole world** distinct from **the kings of the earth** and the **ten kings** who hate and destroy the harlot?

...for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to **the kings of the whole world**, to gather **them** together **for the war** of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 16:14 NASB)

As I understand the text, it is rather difficult to distinguish the **kings of the earth** with **the kings of the whole world** and the **ten kings** for the following reasons. First, it is clear that there is some kind of economic alliance or relationship between the woman and the **ten kings**, based upon the following passages.

³⁸⁸ Mounce, p. 328

³⁸⁹ Beale, pp. 883-884. (the golden goose metaphor is mine)

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of **the great harlot who sits on many waters**, (Revelation 17:1 NASB)

And he said to me, "**The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.**"¹⁶ "And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. (Revelation 17:15-16 NASB)

So then, Babylon is sitting upon the **waters** which consist of **peoples, multitudes**, etc. The waters refer to the **Euphrates** and its tributaries facilitating trade with the nations during the zenith of Babylon's power, as well as the **Mediterranean Sea** facilitating Rome's commerce. **Waters** refer to trade with nations. But this is the same trade also referred metaphorically as the **immorality of the kings of the earth** in Revelation 18: 3. Therefore, distinguishing the **kings of the earth** from the **ten kings** also requires a distinction between the **immorality** with Babylon and the **waters** upon which Babylon sits, a distinction which seems unlikely. For this reason, I believe Beale's theory is the likely interpretation, that the same kings and nations and peoples with whom Babylon has done business are the ones who eventually turn against her. The fall of Babylon marks the end of their benefits from Babylon and their ultimate downfall along with Babylon. The **kings of the earth** along with the **merchants, shipmasters, passengers, and sailors** (v. 17) who became rich from Babylon will mourn over her downfall.

Moreover, Revelation 19: 19 explicitly identifies **the kings of the earth** as those who wage war with Christ, thus identifying them with the **ten kings** who wage war with the Lamb (17: 12-14).

And I saw the beast and **the kings of the earth** and their armies assembled to **make war against Him** who sat on the horse and against His army. (Revelation 19:19 NASB)

"The ten horns which you saw are **ten kings** who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. ¹³ "These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ "**These will wage war against the Lamb**, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him *are the* called and chosen and faithful." (Revelation 17:12-14 NASB)

¹¹ "And **the merchants of the earth**
weep and mourn over her,

because no one buys their cargoes any more—

¹² cargoes of

gold and silver
and precious stones
and pearls and fine linen
and purple and silk and scarlet,
and every *kind of* citron wood
and every article of ivory
and every article *made*
from very costly wood
and bronze
and iron
and marble,

¹³ and cinnamon and spice
and incense and perfume and frankincense

and wine and olive oil
 and fine flour and wheat
 and cattle and sheep,
 and *cargoes* of horses and chariots
 and slaves and human lives.

This long list of commodities deserves special treatment. It has been said that Rome conquered the world as much by its commerce as by its vast legions (armies).³⁹⁰ As I have stated above, everything on the list seems legitimate except the cargoes of **slaves and human lives**. On the other hand, it is the very mention of slaves and human lives in descending order from gold, silver, and precious stones that makes the reader suspicious of the rest of the list. Human lives are mentioned **last** on the list, like so many **cattle or sheep**, as if they were the cheapest and least valuable commodities of all.³⁹¹ Therefore, to the Roman elite—to whom John is primarily referring—the lives of human beings other than Roman citizens were cheap. Their lives had the same function as all the other commodities: to make the status quo Roman life comfortable and pleasant. Moreover, the deaths of others were small sacrifice for the acquisition of all the other valuables mentioned on the list.

Therefore, the whole list is suspicious, not for its content, but for its extravagant and profligate³⁹² use among the rich while commoners survived on bare subsistence incomes. Rome made its wealth not just from slave labor but from heavy taxation and exploitation of goods from conquered nations. It was an excessively predatory empire with increasing addiction to wealth and debauchery.³⁹³ Quite naturally, the government officials, traders, merchants, and shippers of other nations (generally designated as **kings of the earth**) doubtless welcomed Roman trade as fellow exploiters, becoming increasingly dependent upon Rome and politically and economically tied to her like an unborn baby tied to his mother with an umbilical cord. This close relationship—which could not be achieved through the external coercion³⁹⁴ of Rome’s armies—was accomplished with the internal influence of Roman trade, something they welcomed rather than hated. As always, it’s about money, which is why the fall of Babylon is described in primarily economic terms rather than military terms. The burning of the city may well be a metaphor for the “crash and burn” of its economy. “Thus, chapter 18 focuses on the economic sins of Rome and the luxurious ostentation that brings about the wrath of God.”³⁹⁵

It would serve our purpose to give a sampling of Roman extravagance to which John’s Revelation alludes. From Roman sources, it has been discovered that Nero purchased the equivalent of \$100,000 worth of Egyptian roses for one of his banquets. Vitellius, following Nero, purchased the equivalent of \$20,000,000 on food during his short reign, including delicacies like peacock’s brains and nightingale’s tongues. An unnamed Roman committed suicide after squandering his immense fortune because he could not bear the thought of surviving on the minuscule³⁹⁶ \$300,000 that remained. Wealthy Roman women would bathe only in tubs made with silver, and Roman generals operating in the field during war insisted on eating from

³⁹⁰ Osborne, p. 637

³⁹¹ Beale, p. 910

³⁹² wasteful

³⁹³ Homosexuality was rampant in Rome among the elite.

³⁹⁴ External force

³⁹⁵ Osborne, pp. 637-638

³⁹⁶ tiny

silver dishes. Julius Caesar awarded Servilia a pearl costing more than \$18,000. The purple dye popular in Roman dress was extracted one drop at a time from a shellfish called the murex. Silk was imported from China making it very expensive, but not too expensive to clothe Vespasian's triumphant army after destroying Jerusalem in 70AD. Dark thyine wood with grain resembling the eyes of peacock's tails was imported from Northern Africa for building exotic furniture and inlay work. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, owned three hundred tables of citrus wood and ivory. Romans ate not only from silver but also from plates made of ivory. Cinnamon was imported from South China, wheat from Egypt.

Again, it is not so much that such things are evil in themselves. God made precious stones, roses, pearls, silver, and exotic wood; and everything God created is to be enjoyed within the confines of Biblical principles and prayerful use. Asceticism is not the answer to greed.

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;⁵ for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:4-5 NASB)

The real problem, as I have said, is elevating such things to the status of god and using such things without any concern for others. Roman culture was drunk with the blood of conquered nations and with stolen wealth. The nations existed for the sake of Rome, not for the sake of God. Revelation envisions a world drunk with the wine of material and sensual lusts as the end and purpose of everything, dulling one's sensitivities to the plight of others. There were as many as 60,000,000 slaves in the Roman Empire³⁹⁷ whose sole purpose was to make the lives of the Roman elite comfortable. More importantly, the false god of wealth and power dulls one's sensitivity to the worship of the only true and living God.

But do we not see the whore of Babylon throughout the pages of recorded history and in our own day? Certainly. One cannot help but remember the US slave trade of the early to mid 19th century in which slaves were shipped to the US from the western coast of Africa—sold by other African tribes. Possibly more than any other movie I have ever seen, *Amistad*, depicts the horrors of their torturous journey to the eastern coast of the US. Slaves were confined in small cubicles barely big enough to maintain adequate circulation to the extremities—imprisoned in their own filth, vomit, and excrement. Some of the women were raped. The sickly were chained to heavy weights and to each other and thrown off the ship en masse to drown—thus lightening the ship's load and insuring the fittest bodies in the slave markets. Half of all slaves died before they reached the US coast.

And for what? So that slave merchants and northern ship owners could become wealthy, and so that a few white Southern farmers—less than one out of 25 people in the Southern population (4 percent)—could become rich from slave labor on their vast plantations. Some plantation owners were actually good to their slaves who did not wish to leave their masters after the Emancipation Proclamation. Many slaves were also converted to the Christian faith sitting in the balconies of Southern churches built for this purpose. God used man's wickedness to bring good. But this is beside the point. Nothing can justify the kidnapping, torture, rape and murder that accompanied this trafficking in human lives. Both sides of the war paid dearly, losing 500,000 men during a time when the population of North and South was only about 30 million people.

³⁹⁷ Mounce, p. 331

Another movie (as you can see, I like movies) depicts the ruthlessness of the diamond trade in Africa, *Blood Diamond*. Western women love their diamonds, and Western men love to award their women lovers with diamonds. The problem is that we really don't know (how could we?) where these diamonds are coming from and how many are acquired through violent means. Noble efforts are made to insure that the diamonds we buy are not originally "conflict" diamonds acquired by violence and sold illegally by rebel armies to fund their wars, but I'm not convinced that loop holes cannot be found to get around the regulations. Africa is a very complex place. It is quite probable that the precious stones of Revelation 18: 12 were originally acquired with the same reckless disregard for human life as conflict diamonds of present-day Africa. We can only speculate.

While abhorring slavery, Westerners do not abhor cheap goods and services; and we would rather not know about the sweat-shop conditions in India, China, Bangladesh, et al of those who produce these goods and services. Many modern laborers in developing countries are working twelve or more hours a day in poor working conditions under abusive managers.³⁹⁸ I am aware that people in developing countries would not be working in these conditions if they had better options to choose from. They would take their labor elsewhere and get a better salary and working conditions. However, in developing economies, this is easier said than done. Employment options are few, and this is the reason they endure abuse by owners and managers of these industries. Are the recipients of these cheap goods (Westerners primarily) like those in James 2: 16 who say, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled"—without seeking alternative means of employing the poor and the oppressed?

Recently on international news was the story of a building in Bangladesh (or India, I don't remember) which had collapsed, killing over 100 workers who were earning only a few US dollars a day. The building had been condemned as unsafe a month before, but the factory owner had persisted in running his business there. (How? Probably through bribes to building inspectors who then looked the other way.) The factory made clothing marketed in Walmart, the largest retail outlet in the world. I personally prefer buying my T-shirts and underwear at bargain prices in Walmart, and I am sure that many people in the US who are financially worse off than me may find it inconvenient paying another fifty cents to a dollar more for their T-shirts. But I doubt their inconvenience and mine can compare with the 12 hour days with low pay and dangerous working conditions of those who make those T-shirts for our consumption. I would be happy to pay more to insure that Walmart makes regular inspections of all its garment producers, that they insure that buildings are properly and honestly inspected and workers treated as human beings. Something tells me that this desire is somewhat naïve in such a fallen world. How can the consumer, or even Walmart, guarantee working conditions in Bangladesh; and how can investors be knowledgeable about the business practices of companies on the New York Stock Exchange?

We no longer have slave ships sailing from the west coast of Africa to the eastern coast of the US. Slavery and economic oppression today are more subtle and out of sight, making them more difficult to deal with, including the trafficking of women and children literally all over the world.

³⁹⁸ Only in Western nations do we find strict regulations for factories under federal agencies like OSHA (the Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the US). While sometimes exerting abusive power and absurd regulations, OSHA has a legitimate governmental role in enforcing the sixth commandment, "Your shall not murder." Businessmen are sinful, and they will often disregard the lives of others to make more money. They need a certain level of governmental regulation to mitigate their abuses.

So what can we do? We can begin by dealing with ourselves and the many ways we allow our integrity to be compromised upon the altar of consumerism, potential wealth, and pleasure. If enough Christians in a given society are troubled by such things, it will eventually impact the laws of their own nation and the world. The command to believers is still relevant, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not **participate** in her sins and receive of her plagues” (Revelation 18:4 NASB). Having been told how the story ends, we do well to heed this warning. In the end, the whole economic/political/false religious system crashes and burns.

¹⁴ "The fruit you long for
has gone from you,
and all things that were luxurious and splendid
have passed away from you
and *men* will no longer find them.

This verse seems to indicate the complete and irreversible collapse of the world economic system. Again, John’s revelation, while alluding specifically to the Roman Empire, is not limited in its application to Rome, but to every evil empire or coalition of empires in the history of the world until the final judgment. The coming of Christ in Revelation 19 is right around the corner from the fall of Babylon in Revelation 18. The world of ill-gained and ill-used riches, luxurious living with apathetic contempt for the poor, sexual immorality, and oppressive power—all of which men worship—will be destroyed; and the kingdom of Christ will come with finality and consummation.

¹⁵ "The **merchants** of these things,
who became rich from her,
will stand at a distance
because of the fear of her torment,
weeping and mourning,

¹⁶ saying,
'Woe, woe, the great city,
she who was **clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet,**
and **adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls;**

¹⁷ for **in one hour** such **great wealth** has been laid waste!

And every **shipmaster**
and every **passenger**
and **sailor,**
and as many as **make their living by the sea,**
stood at a distance,
¹⁸ and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning,
saying,

'What *city* is like the great city?'

¹⁹ "And they
threw dust on their heads
and were crying out,
weeping and mourning,
saying,
'Woe, woe, the great city,
in which **all who had ships at sea**

Commented [D103]: Rev. 17: 12; 18: 19

became rich by her wealth,
for **in one hour** she has been laid waste!

Commented [D104]: Rev. 17: 12

All those who mourn over Babylon will be destroyed with Babylon; nevertheless, those who have profited from her exploitations and seductions (**became rich by her wealth**) will attempt to distance themselves from her when she is judged. They all **stand at a distance**, fearing her judgment (vv. 15, 17). Once more, I find it difficult to distinguish these former worshippers from the **ten kings, peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues** who eventually destroy the harlot. Evil is always self-destructive and disloyal to fallen allies.

The destruction of Babylon is swift. **In one hour she has been laid waste** (v. 19). Considering the continuation of destitution within Babylon described in the rest of the chapter, it is difficult if not impossible to determine the time-frame of her destruction. Life seems to continue, but devoid of everything enjoyable—weddings, music, normal economic activity.

The judgment of God against Babylon has been determined for various reasons. The emphasis thus far in chapter 18 has been her seductive influence throughout the world, her pride and arrogance, the same boastful spirit which was the occasion of Nebuchadnezzar's judgment of insanity (Dan. 4).

⁷ "To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning (Rev. 18: 7 NASB).

The description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21: 16-21 proves that God is the owner of all wealth, and He grants it lavishly to those who will inhabit the temple-city, the new heavens and earth. The sin of eschatological Babylon is the same as its OT types Old Babylonia and New Babylonia, which glorified themselves rather than God.

Possession of wealth is not the reason for God's judgment of Babylon. The cause lies, rather, in "the arrogant use of it" and trust in the security that it brings, which is tantamount to idolatry.³⁹⁹

The point is that the chief purpose of humanity, according to the Apocalypse, is to glorify God and to enjoy him, not to glorify oneself and enjoy one's own achievements (e.g. 4: 11; 5: 12-13; 7: 12; 15: 3-4; 16: 9; 19: 1, 7). Self-glorification necessitates judgment in which a forced humbling occurs. It is idolatrous for Babylon and her allies to call themselves "great" (11: 8; 14: 8; 16: 19; 17: 1, 5, 18; 18: 2, 10, 16, 19, 21, 23). This title is reserved only for the true God....To focus on humanity as the center of everything and to forget God is the greatest sin.⁴⁰⁰

²⁰ "Rejoice over her,
O heaven,
and you saints
and apostles
and prophets,
because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

³⁹⁹ Beale, p. 924

⁴⁰⁰ Beale, pp. 921-923

Yet, there are other reasons for Babylon's judgment. Revelation 17: 6 says that she is **drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus**—repeated for emphasis in Revelation 18: 24. In Revelation 6: 10, the martyrs are crying for justice against those who had shed their blood. They are now getting this justice and are commanded to **rejoice** (the verb is imperative) over the judgment pronounced against their enemies. The rejoicing is not occasioned by any delight in the death of the wicked, for God takes no delight in such (Ezekiel 33: 11). Rather, rejoicing is founded in the manifestation of the God's character in space and time before the watching world. For God to be just, He must set things right; He must judge wickedness and reward righteousness. Otherwise, God's claim to bless the righteous and curse the wicked is proven false by normal human experience (Ps. 1). Thus far in the history of the world, man's experience of justice has been mixed. Sometimes, the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous suffer, contrary to Psalm 1 (cf. Ps. 73, Job, and various passages in Ecclesiastes). The only perfectly righteous man in the history of the world was falsely accused and executed on a cross, thus demanding a final episode in which His righteousness and guiltlessness is avenged. The end of history climaxing in the final judgment will serve to prove without any doubt that God is truthful when He promises blessings for the righteous and curses for the wicked. Believers will rejoice that God's name is cleared of all accusations to the contrary.⁴⁰¹

²¹ Then a **strong angel**
 took up a stone
 like a great millstone
 and threw it into the sea,
 saying,
 "So will Babylon, the great city,
 be thrown down with violence,
 and will not be found any longer.

The millstone in question is not the ordinary grinding stone of the average household, but the huge millstone weighing several tons moved around in circles by donkeys. It was this kind of millstone Jesus had in mind when he warned false teachers who would lay stumbling stones in front of His "little ones" (Matt. 18: 6). John may be borrowing from both the passage in Matthew and Jeremiah 51: 63-64.

"And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates,⁶⁴ and say, 'Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted.'" Thus far are the words of Jeremiah. (Jeremiah 51:63-64 NASB)

The stone in Jeremiah's prophecy is a small stone appropriate for the watery burial of the scroll pronouncing Babylon's judgment. In Revelation, the size of the stone appropriately signifies the disappearance of the whole city from the scene of history as the final fulfillment of that prophecy. Babylon will fall, never to rise again. Like the stumbling blocks in Matthew's gospel, Babylon has been a stumbling stone to many Christians who have succumbed to her religious, sexual, and commercial temptations; and for this she will be punished.⁴⁰²

⁴⁰¹ So also Osborne, p. 655

⁴⁰² Cf. Beale, p. 919

²² "And the sound
of harpists
and musicians
and flute-players
and trumpeters
will not be heard in you any longer;
and no craftsman of any craft
will be found in you any longer;
and the sound
of a mill
will not be heard in you any longer;
²³ and the light
of a lamp
will not shine in you any longer;
and the voice
of the bridegroom and bride
will not be heard in you any longer;
for your merchants were the great men of the earth,
because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.

As the cultural and commercial capital of the world, Babylon will now be deprived of all the normal signs of commerce and culture. There will be no songs or music. There will be no artisans plying their trades, indicating the cessation of a normal economy. Even the normal lighting of homes at night with oil lamps will be absent, and the merry-making of weddings will be a thing of the past. The words, **will not...in you any longer** (or the equivalent) are repeated five times for emphasis. The picture is one of complete cessation. Christians who had not yielded to public pressure by participating in the idol worship of trade guilds suffered economically by losing their jobs or customers.⁴⁰³ Now they will be vindicated by Babylon's utter loss of economic viability. The world economic system will completely collapse. What this will mean literally is difficult to determine, but if the emphasis of economic cessation is any indication, Babylon and her admirers will be judged with starvation and deprivation of every kind. Again, what length of time this entail is impossible to determine. The collapse will be sudden, in **one hour** (not a literal hour), but the anguish and deprivation may be longer just before the final judgment.

Babylon is also judged for deception through sorcery (v. 23b). Whether this sorcery is literal or metaphorical (figurative) is subject to debate. I believe Mounce has the correct interpretation when he defines sorcery as "that art of deception by which Rome had bewitched the nations into a **false sense of security**, leading them to believe that she was in fact the eternal city".⁴⁰⁴ Consider how the leaders of modern nations lull their citizens to sleep with empty promises of cradle-to-grave security. The message is always, "We will take care of you." But the modern state cannot provide for its people other than by police protection, the rule of law, and access to markets through infrastructure. But during a complete economic and political crisis, all of these systems fail, as we have witnessed in Congo and Sudan. Left to itself with no means of taxing its citizens, the government produces no product or service which raises the level of prosperity. The jobs it provides are at the expense of the private sector, funded by taxpayers. It can only take

⁴⁰³ Beale, p. 919. See also earlier discussion.

⁴⁰⁴ Mounce, p. 335, emphasis mine, citing Caird

from producers to give to non-producers—provided there are enough productive people within the economy. God alone is the provider of every living thing (Ps. 104) through the instrumentality of hard work and thrift (Prov. 12: 24; 14: 23; 13: 22).

The modern state also deceives its populace into believing that it has the answers to all economic problems. Ben Bernanke, past chairman of the Federal Reserve in the US, successfully convinced the American public that Quantitative Easing (QE, printing money to purchase government bonds) was necessary to solve the economic crisis of 2008 (now called the Great Recession). Through QE, Bernanke and others have deceived us into believing that we can spend ourselves rich with an increasing money supply not backed by gold or an expanding economy. Through the manipulation of money and credit, the experts can ensure ongoing prosperity. But we have seen in the US that this manipulation of money and credit has benefitted only a small segment of the US population while leaving the middle and lower socio-economic classes worse off than before.

The modern state also deceives parents into believing that statist public education is the best way to equip their children for successful living. Education, it claims, is the exclusive domain of educational experts who have been trained in state schools with modern methods. The result of decades of propaganda has been multiple generations of adults who are functionally illiterate, atheistic or agnostic, and easily manipulated by statist experts and politicians.

²⁴ "And in her
 was found the blood of prophets
 and of saints
 and of all who have been slain on the earth."

The final reason for Babylon's fall, mentioned earlier, is her treatment of God's people. Throughout the history of the world, persecuted Christians have been called upon to patiently endure their persecutors. Their waiting is now over as they witness God's justice. As I write, Christians are being dispossessed from their cities and private land in Iraq which they have occupied and owned for more than a millennium. There will be a day of reckoning for such injustice when Christ returns.

Revelation 19

After these things **I heard**
 something like **a loud voice of a great multitude** in heaven,
 saying,
 "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;
 ² **BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS;**
 for He has judged the great harlot
 who was corrupting the earth with her immorality,
 and **HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD**
 OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER."

³ And a second time
 they said,
 "Hallelujah! **HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER."**

⁴ And **the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures**
fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne
saying,
"Amen. Hallelujah!"

The testimony of God's people in heaven is the opposite of those who worship the glory of man. "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power **belong to our God**". God alone is worthy of praise and adoration. As in Revelation 18: 20, the justice of God's judgment of Babylon is acknowledged. She has shed the blood of the saints; therefore, God has repaid her in kind. The two "hallelujahs" of the saints in heaven are echoed in the third "hallelujah" of the **twenty-four elders** and the **four living creatures** who are closest to the throne of God. The twenty-four elders represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles who are the foundation of the church. Thus, all of God's people from the OT and the NT are represented before the very throne of God. There is no separation between the remnant of Israel and the true church.

God is worshipped because He is a God of justice who carries out the curses of the covenant. Specifically, the sin of Babylon was that she corrupted the earth with her immorality (v. 2a) and shed the blood of the saints (v. 2b). By corrupting the earth, she rendered the earth unfit for God's habitation among men. God is holy and cannot look upon sin; thus, by eliminating Babylon God purifies the earth for His habitation with His redeemed people and vindicates the righteousness of His people.

The voice of **the great multitude in heaven** may include angels, but it is most likely a reference to the departed saints who are now in heaven. In Revelation 18: 20, they were commanded to rejoice, so now they respond obediently and thankfully by praising God for His justice upon His and their enemies and the vindication of His truth.⁴⁰⁵ This echoes the psalm of David.

The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.¹¹ And men will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely there is a God who judges on earth!" (Psalm 58:10-11 NASB).

Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?" Let there be known among the nations in our sight, Vengeance for the blood of Your servants which has been shed. (Psalm 79:10 NASB)

Therefore, God will forever shut the mouths of the wicked who say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?" (Psalm 73:11 NASB)

The smoke rising up from the city (v. 3b) is the certain indication of Babylon's destruction. When ancient cities were finally overcome by their enemies, they were set on fire. Babylon will never be rebuilt.

⁵ And a **voice came from the throne**,
saying,
"Give praise to our God,
all you His bond-servants,
you who fear Him,
the small and the great."

⁴⁰⁵ Beale, p. 926

⁶ Then I heard

something like **the voice of a great multitude**
and like the sound of many waters
and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder,
saying,

"Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.

⁷ "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him,
for the **marriage of the Lamb** has come
and **His bride has made herself ready.**"

⁸ **It was given to her**

to clothe herself
in fine linen,
bright *and* clean;
for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.

Another command to praise comes from the throne of God. Both **small and great** are instructed to give praise to God. All of God's people have fulfilled their purpose on earth according to the place He has given them, whether places of influence and power or the ordinary places of common people, including slaves. What we were on earth is irrelevant in heaven. What will matter is how well we have fulfilled God's purpose for us on earth, for we are all **bond-servants**. The **small and the great** of v. 5 echoes the **small and the great** of Revelation 13: 16 who receive the mark of the beast. There is no favoritism with God who judges not on the basis of social status or rank but upon the basis of faith. Contrary to the **liberation theology** once popular in Latin America, God is not "the God of the poor" any more than He is the God of the rich. Although the poor have the same access to God as the rich through faith in Christ, being poor gives no one special favors with God.

The **voice of a great multitude** is repeated for emphasis, like the sound of **many waters** and **mighty peals of thunder**. The multitudes of the saints in heaven comprise a mighty choir singing God's praise. I have heard some wonderful choirs in large churches with more than one hundred voices. Can we imagine a choir with millions of voices, sounding literally like peals of thunder and mighty waterfalls, all in harmony?

The fourth **hallelujah** introduces us to the **marriage of the Lamb** and the **bride** who is now ready for the groom (v. 6). The occasion for the groom receiving His bride is that He now reigns. He has defeated the forces of evil which He permitted until the consummation of His kingdom. This recalls the similar language of Revelation 11.

Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world **has become** *the kingdom* of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever." ¹⁶ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, ¹⁷ saying, "We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and **have begun to reign**. (Revelation 11:15-17 NASB)

The archenemy, Babylon, must be defeated to allow for the peaceful marriage and reign of the King. This is vividly portrayed in the last episode of the movie series, *The Lord of the Rings* when the rightful king Aragorn defeats the evil forces of Mordor and takes full possession of his kingdom, Middle Earth. The last scene is the king's joyful marriage to his queen, Arwen. But

how has the bride of Christ **made herself ready** for the marriage? The answer is found in 1 Peter.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,⁷ **so that the proof of your faith, being** more precious than gold which is perishable, **even though tested by fire**, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (1 Peter 1:3-7 NASB)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and **to purify for Himself** a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11-14 NASB)

God's people have never been given a bed of roses to sleep in. No matter how seemingly easy a person's life may seem to others, he goes through many trials and difficulties. Our faith is always **tested by fire and purified** of all alien elements which would hinder our journey toward the kingdom of God. Partly for this reason God's corporate people, as a general rule, do not appear as "successful" and prosperous as their non-Christian counterparts. Worldly success with relatively few failures can easily puff us up with pride and arrogance, thus hindering our sanctification and our realization that God himself is our most precious possession. Moreover, individual believers can easily be convinced that their success is based upon their performance rather than God's grace. Likewise, the corporate church can falsely conclude that its wealth and gifts may substitute for the power of the Holy Spirit working in His church and among sinners convicting them of sin and convincing them of the righteousness of God in Christ. At the end of his struggle over the prosperity of the wicked, Asaph came to the conclusion that God, not ease and prosperity, was His portion.

Whom have I in heaven *but You*? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth.²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. (Psalm 73:25-26 NASB)

Tribulation and suffering is a necessary part of the Christian life preparing us to enter into the Sabbath rest of our Savior.

The dynamic between active faith on our part and God's sanctifying, purifying work in us is seen in the two passages from 1 Peter and Titus, as well as from Revelation 19: 7b (**His bride has made herself ready**) and 19: 8a (**It was given to her**). The faith of the believer is a faith that perseveres and makes him **ready** for the marriage of the Lamb, while at the same time God **gives** the believer the kind of faith which perseveres. Moreover, the **righteous acts** of the believer are his—he acts—while at the same time it is the faith given to him which produces those righteous acts. God's sovereignty in salvation never bypasses the responsibility of the believer to exercise his faith. While he is **working out** his salvation, God is working **in him** to will and to do whatever is pleasing to Him (Phil. 2: 12-13). Every Christian on earth has work to do before his time on earth has come to an end, and these works were ordained by God before we were created.

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **for good works**, which God prepared **beforehand** so that we would walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10 NASB)

⁹ **Then he said to me,**

"Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to **the marriage supper of the Lamb.**'"

And he said to me,

"These are true words of God."

¹⁰ Then I fell at his feet to worship him.

But he said to me,

"Do not do that;

I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren

who hold the testimony of Jesus;

worship God.

For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The voice **from the throne** in v. 5 is now identified as **a fellow servant**, that is, an angel whom John mistakenly worships. The scene causes believers to guard against any form of worship given to anyone other than God, including angels. Hebrews explicitly instructs Christians against the worship of angels and identifies them as "ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14 NASB; see vv. 4-13 for context). The angel says so himself for he is **a fellow servant of yours and your brethren**.

The marriage supper of the Lamb must be understood within the context of the customary Hebrew marriage. First is the **betrothal**, more binding than modern day engagement (cf. Matt. 1: 18-19, in which Joseph is described as Mary's "husband" before "they came together" for sexual intercourse). Next is the **interval** between the betrothal and the wedding. During this interval, the dowry is paid, and the bride prepares herself for the actual wedding. Thirdly, the **procession** occurs at the close of the interval. The groom is dressed in His best clothes and, accompanied by friends, comes to the home of the betrothed. He then takes his bride to His own home for a **wedding feast** that may last seven days or more.

The relationship between God and Israel and Christ and the church is described as a marriage relationship (Hosea, Isaiah 50, Eph. 5). The dowry Christ has paid for His bride is His own life and blood. The interval between the betrothal and the wedding feast is the entire church age in which the church, the bride of Christ prepares herself for the wedding. The procession consists of Christ coming in glory accompanied by angels to receive His bride who meets Him in the clouds. This is followed by the wedding feast of Christ and His people which lasts eternally.⁴⁰⁶

The last phrase of v. 10 is difficult: **for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy**. The **for** is explanatory, which means that the angel is explaining why he tells John not to offer him worship. One possible interpretation is that the true servants of God bear witness to Jesus and not to themselves. Thus, the angel shuns any undue attention given him by John, as would any servant of Christ.⁴⁰⁷ Moreover, the true spirit of prophecy is produced by the Holy Spirit; and

⁴⁰⁶ Hendricksen, pp. 215-216

⁴⁰⁷ Beale, p. 947

given the fact that the Holy Spirit does not speak of Himself or glorify Himself, but rather, Christ, the angel could be saying that all true prophetic activity is the faithful witness to the work and person of Christ who alone deserves worship.

"But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.

¹⁴ "He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose *it* to you. (John 16:13-14 NASB)

¹¹ And I saw heaven opened, and behold,
a white horse,
and He who sat on it *is* called
Faithful and True,
and in righteousness
He judges and wages war.

¹² His eyes *are* a flame of fire,
and on His head *are* many diadems;
and He has a name written *on Him*
which no one knows except Himself.

¹³ *He is* clothed with a robe dipped in blood,
and His name is called The Word of God.

¹⁴ And the armies which are in heaven,
**clothed in fine linen,
white and clean,**
were following Him on white horses.

¹⁵ From His mouth comes a sharp sword,
so that with it He may strike down the nations,
and He will rule them with a rod of iron;
and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.

¹⁶ And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written,
"KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

The vision changes from the bride to Christ the Warrior whose judgment against the nations is **righteous**. His righteous judgment corresponds to His name, **Faithful and True**. In other words, His judgment against the nations is justified because He acts only in accordance with His nature which is faithful and true. He is faithful in **covenant blessing** by rescuing those who love Him and submit to His rule (Jn. 14: 15), but he is also faithful in **covenant curse** by coming in judgment upon rebellious sinners (Jn. 3: 18-19). By failing to bless covenant keepers (believers) and to curse covenant breakers (unbelievers), Christ would dishonor His own name and call into question His own truth and faithfulness.

It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; ¹² If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; ¹³ If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Timothy 2:11-13 NASB)

In v. 13, if we are faithless, Christ remains faithful to His covenant curse, for He cannot deny His own nature of justice and truth. The verse cannot mean that if we are **habitually** faithless and unbelieving (an important qualification) we will still inherit the promises.

His eyes are a flame of fire, indicating the ability to see into the hearts of men, weighing the motives and inclinations of the heart (1 Samuel 16: 7). The phrase recalls Christ's judgment of His church in Revelation 1—2.

His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and **His eyes were like a flame of fire**. (Revelation 1:14 NASB)

"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has **eyes like a flame of fire**, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this: (Revelation 2:18 NASB)

The all-seeing eyes of Christ in the early chapters reveal that His judgments of the churches of Asia Minor are according to His omniscience. He **knows** the deeds of the church (Rev. 2: 2, 19, 23; 3: 1, 8, 15). Likewise, He knows the deeds of all mankind. Nothing is hidden from Him, and He will recompense every person according to his deeds. Christ prophesies this day of reckoning during His earthly ministry, and the Apostle Paul acknowledges that all believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ who will judge them for their deeds, both good and bad.

"For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matthew 16:27 NASB)

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:9-10 NASB)

On his head are **many diadems** (crowns), symbols of legitimate authority contrasted with the illegitimate authority of the beast (Rev. 13: 1). Moreover, the number of these crowns is undefined, not like the limited number of crowns worn by the beast (Rev. 13: 1). His kingdom is therefore on a far "grander scale" than the illegitimate kingdom of the beast.⁴⁰⁸ Jesus who conquered sin and death is now coming to lay full claim to His kingdom in answer to the model prayer given to His saints, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). His declared will for His creatures—for angels and men—has always been done in heaven among the obedient, unfallen angels. Now it will be done **on earth** among His redeemed and glorified saints who delight perfectly to do His will. Satan offered his illegitimate kingdom to Christ at the beginning of His earthly ministry (Matt. 4). Christ refused, choosing instead to establish His kingdom according to the will of the Father who sent Him to redeem fallen man and the fallen universe, thus establishing the legitimate kingdom of God on earth. Satan, therefore, establishes his usurped kingdom among his willing accomplices, **those who dwell on the earth**. This kingdom finds its ultimate representation in the beast of Revelation 13, the composite kingdom of all the kingdoms of men (represented as beasts) who hate Christ and His people and attempt to destroy them (Rev. 12).

Christ's name is known by none but Himself (v. 12). This may mean that no man can **fully comprehend** the essence of Christ in His glorified and exalted state. He is God, and none other

⁴⁰⁸ Beale, p. 952

than God can know Him in His fullness except the Father and Spirit who share this fullness (Matt. 11: 27; Col. 1: 19). In the ancient world, to know a man's name implied that you had power over Him, perhaps explaining why the angel was not willing to tell Jacob his name (Gen. 32: 29; cf. Judges 13: 18). Adam named the animals and his own wife implying authority over them. But who among the human race can fully know the name of the conquering warrior who has authority over heaven and earth? Since none can challenge His sovereignty, then none can know His name.

Another possibility is that only Christ knows His name but also those whom He has chosen to reveal Himself. Returning once more to Matthew 11, we find Jesus denouncing the unbelief of Chorazin and Bethsaida where He had performed “most” of His miracles (Matt. 11: 20).

At that time Jesus said, "I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants.²⁶ "Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight."²⁷ "All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal *Him*. (Matthew 11:25-27 NASB)

In one sense, the name of Christ has been revealed to His elect to bring them to salvation. This revelation, as Matthew 11: 26-27 and 16: 17 indicate, is divinely given to the elect and concealed from the rest of the world. In the context of the final judgment in Revelation 19, the sovereignty of Christ over all mankind has been revealed to His saints who believe the testimony of Christ about Himself, but the world does not believe this testimony. They do not know the name of Christ unto salvation. Yet, Christ is now making His name known in the final judgment as **King of kings and Lord of lords** when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil. 2: 11). The sad reality is that many will know the name of Christ only in judgment.⁴⁰⁹

Verse 11 marks “the most expanded description of Christ’s defeat and judgment of the ungodly forces at the end of history”⁴¹⁰ found in Revelation. Babylon has been destroyed (Rev. 18), but the beast and the false prophet must also be destroyed to make this earth habitable for His people and suitable for God’s presence with them. One difference between the destruction of Babylon and the other two is that God uses the beast and the kings of the earth in destroying Babylon (Rev. 17: 12-18). The beast and the false prophet, together with their armies, will be destroyed by the sword coming from Christ’s mouth.

His robe is **dipped in blood**. This is not His own blood but the blood of His enemies as He goes forth conquering.⁴¹¹ The OT reference is Isaiah 63, the destruction of Edom as the archenemy of Israel and all who hated them.

Who is this who comes from Edom, With garments of glowing colors from Bozrah, This One who is majestic in His apparel, Marching in the greatness of His strength? "It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save."² Why is Your apparel red, And Your garments like the one who treads in the wine press?³ "I have trodden the wine trough alone, And from the peoples there was no

⁴⁰⁹ Beale, pp. 956-957

⁴¹⁰ Beale, p. 948

⁴¹¹ So also Beale, Osborne, Mounce, Hendricksen, Thomas, and Poythress

man with Me. I also trod them in My anger And trampled them in My wrath; **And their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments**, And I stained all My raiment. (Isaiah 63:1-3 NASB)

The wine press recalls the reaping of the earth with sickles with the blood of the slain reaching the horses bridles for 200 miles (Rev. 14: 20). The armies following Him could be the church which has been raptured into the clouds before the judgment and gathered into a mighty army (1 Thes. 4: 16-17). Their identity as the church can be supported by the description of their garments, **fine linen, white and clean**, the same description as that of the bride in v. 8. However, the coming of Christ is also described in Matthew 25: 31 with the accompaniment of angels (cf. Matt. 16: 27). Limiting our context to the book of Revelation, the weight of the evidence is on the side of interpreting the army of v. 14 as the saints. In Revelation 17:14, those who accompany Christ in the war are the **called and chosen and faithful**. The testimony of the saints about the identity of Christ (v. 10) is “the legal evidence condemning their oppressors” for their unbelief and persecution of those who told them the truth about Jesus. Beale cites Matthew 12: 41-42 in support.⁴¹²

“The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation **at the judgment**, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”⁴²
 “The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation **at the judgment** and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. (Matthew 12:41-42 NASB)

Using the analogy of Scripture to guide us, the army following on white horses is very likely **both** the saints and the angels. Their involvement in the battle is left in doubt, and the weight of the passage seems to indicate that they are mere spectators to the awesome and overwhelming power of the singular Victor, Christ Jesus, who annihilates His enemies simply with the breath of His mouth.

Out of Christ’s mouth comes a **sharp sword**, but this is not the invitation of the gospel. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God that contains not only the gospel but the curses of the covenant. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2: 8 that the Lord will slay the man of lawlessness with the breath of His mouth. God’s word comes in salvation for His people but in judgment for unrepentant sinners who refuse to hear the words of salvation. Since they will not listen to the gospel, they will be forced to hear the word of judgment.

So will My word be which goes forth from My mouth; It will not return to Me empty, Without accomplishing what I desire, And without succeeding *in the matter* for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11 NASB)

Both forensic⁴¹³ and physical judgment is in view here. The beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire while everyone else is killed with the sword coming out of Christ’s mouth.⁴¹⁴ Yet, we are surprised at the minimal description of the “battle”. The “battle of Armageddon” is hardly a battle. It is over before it ever begins.

⁴¹² Beale, p. 960

⁴¹³ legal

⁴¹⁴ Osborne, p. 685

¹⁷ **Then I saw an angel**

standing in the sun,
and he cried out with a loud voice,
saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven,
"Come, assemble for **the great supper of God,**

¹⁸ so that you may eat
the flesh of kings
and the flesh of commanders
and the flesh of mighty men
and the flesh of horses
and of those who sit on them
and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great."

The carrion birds⁴¹⁵ are invited by an angel to feast on the dead flesh of fallen armies even **before** the commencement of the battle. This is parallel with Revelation 18: 1-2 where an angel announces the certainty of Babylon's fall, also associated with the presence of **every unclean and hateful bird**. Carrion birds are associated in the OT with the curses of the covenant.

"But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: (Deuteronomy 28:15 NASB)

"The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be *an example of* terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ²⁶ "Your carcasses will be food **to all birds of the sky** and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten *them* away. (Deuteronomy 28:25-26 NASB)

The shepherd David applied this curse to Goliath as representative of all the Philistine infidels under God's curse.

"This day the LORD will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. **And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky** and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, (1 Samuel 17:46 NASB)

The irony of the angel's invitation to carrion birds is seen in its immediate literary context with the invitation to believers to come to the marriage supper of the Lamb (v. 9). As believers will feast eternally on the bounty of the new heavens and earth, unclean carrion birds will feast upon the fallen flesh of unbelievers—therefore, blessing and curse are juxtaposed⁴¹⁶ tightly together in this passage. There is also irony in the use of the word **assemble** (*sunago*) and the literary parallel of **the marriage supper of the Lamb** (v. 9) and **the great supper of God** (v. 17). In v. 19, the beast and the kings of the earth **assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army** while in v. 17 the carrion birds are invited to **assemble for the great supper of God** consisting in the flesh of **kings, commanders**, et al—**free men and slaves, and small and great**. The scene recalls the defeat of Gog in Ezekiel 39: 17-20.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁵ Birds which eat the decaying flesh of animals

⁴¹⁶ Placed side by side

⁴¹⁷ Cited by Osborne, p. 687

"And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal; (Ezekiel 39:1 NASB)

"And I will send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 39:6 NASB)

"As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Speak to **every kind of bird** and to every beast of the field, "Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, **that you may eat flesh and drink blood.**"¹⁸ "You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as *though they were* rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan."¹⁹ "So you will eat fat until you are gluttoned, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. (Ezekiel 39:17-19 NASB)

The battle of Gog may be an **eschatological battle not yet realized**. There is no conclusive evidence of this battle ever being fought in the history of Israel although Hendricksen maintains that Gog and Magog (in Ezekiel's prophecy) refer to the Seleucid kingdom of Antiochus Epiphanes IV. The center of this kingdom was in Northern Syria with Syrian Antioch as its capital. The northern part of the Seleucid kingdom included Meshech and Tubal. Revelation uses Gog and Magog as fit representatives of the final attack upon the church even as the forces of Antiochus Epiphanes were the final attack upon the OT people of God in the old dispensation (see also Daniel's prophecy).⁴¹⁸

Its future symbolical significance is confirmed by additional evidence from Ezekiel of the unrealized, **spiritual temple** of God from which streams of water flow from the altar in increasing quantity bringing with them healing power restoring a fallen creation.

Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. **And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar.**² He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gate by way of *the gate* that faces east. And behold, water was trickling from the south side.³ When the man went out toward the east with a line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he led me through the water, water *reaching* the ankles.⁴ Again he measured a thousand and led me through the water, water *reaching* the knees. Again he measured a thousand and led me through *the water*, water *reaching* the loins.⁵ Again he measured a thousand; *and it was* a river that I could not ford, for the water had risen, *enough* water to swim in, **a river** that could not be forded.

⁶ He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen *this*?" Then he brought me back to the bank of the river.⁷ Now when I had returned, behold, **on the bank of the river there were very many trees on the one side and on the other.**⁸ Then he said to me, "These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into the Arabah; then they go toward the sea, being made to flow into the sea, **and the waters of the sea become fresh.**"⁹ "It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and *the others* become fresh; **so everything will live where the river goes.** (Ezekiel 47:1-9 NASB)

Commenting on the picture in Ezekiel, Keil says,

In this way the thought is symbolized, that the salvation which the Lord causes to flow down to His

⁴¹⁸ Hendricksen, pp. 232-233

people from His throne will pour down from small beginnings in marvelously increasing fullness. The river flows on into the barren, desolate waste of the Ghor, and finally into the Dead Sea, and makes the waters thereof sound, so that it swarms with fishes. The waste is a figure denoting spiritual drought and desolation, and the Dead Sea a symbol of the death caused by sin...The healing and quickening of the salt waters of that sea, so fatal to all life, set forth the power of that divine salvation which conquers death, and the calling to life of the world sunk in spiritual death.⁴¹⁹

This passage may then be compared with Revelation 22: 1-2 and Psalm 1: 3, both of which depict the life-giving water of God and the tree of life yielding eternal fruit for God's people.

Then he showed me **a river of the water of life**, clear as crystal, **coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb**,² in the middle of its street. On **either side of the river** was the **tree of life**, bearing **twelve kinds of fruit**, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2 NASB)

He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:3 NASB)

As the references demonstrate, Gog and Magog, Rosh, Meshech and Tubal (although actual nations and places) represent the eschatological enemies of God's people at the end of the age, "the last hostile phase of the world-power opposed to God."⁴²⁰ The OT prophets describe the enemies of the NT church as the enemies of OT Israel, for this is the only way they could have described them for the comprehension of their audience.

¹⁹ And I saw

the beast
and **the kings of the earth**
and their armies
assembled to make war
against Him who sat on the horse
and against His army.

²⁰ And **the beast** was seized,

and with him **the false prophet**
who performed the signs in his presence,
by which he deceived
those who had received the mark of the beast
and those who worshiped his image;

these **two**

were thrown alive into **the lake of fire** which burns with brimstone.

²¹ And the **rest were killed with the sword**

which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse,

and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

⁴¹⁹ Keil, p. 360

⁴²⁰ Keil, pp. 432-433

The gathering together of **the kings of the earth** for war is the same scene in Revelation 16: 14, the battle of Har-Magedon, from a different perspective.

...for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to **the kings of the whole world**, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 16:14 NASB)

And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. (Revelation 16:16 NASB)

Yet, while the scene is dramatically set with the armies of God (vv. 11-16) pitched against the armies of the beast and the kings of the earth (v. 19), there is **no description** of the battle which follows. This omission has caused some commentators to conclude that there is no battle at all.⁴²¹ Therefore, the Battle of Armageddon is not a battle; it is merely a prelude to a battle that never takes place in the traditional sense. This agrees analogously to the judgment scene in Matthew 25: 31-46, a courtroom scene rather than a military scene.

"Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, **into the eternal fire** which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; (Matthew 25:41 NASB)

The sword coming from the mouth of Christ is a **sword of accusation** for condemning sinners, not a military sword for wacking off heads. It is the "decree of death" for all unbelievers, small and great.⁴²² Indeed, it would require a mental stretch to imagine the sovereign and omnipotent Christ cutting off heads, arms, and legs from His war horse or piloting an Apache helicopter with Gatlin guns. Rather, a single word from His mouth is sufficient—like a nuclear bomb that levels everything in its path for miles around.

And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. (Isa 11:4b NASB)

As the word of judgment comes, the beast and the false prophet are seized and thrown alive in the lake of fire while everyone else is killed. As predicted by the angel, the birds have their feast in men's flesh (v. 21b), a **conclusio**⁴²³ with vv. 17-18.

Revelation 20

¹Then I saw an angel
coming down from heaven,
holding
the key of the abyss
and a great chain in his hand.

² And he **laid hold of the dragon**,
the serpent of old,
who is the devil and Satan,
and **bound him**

Commented [D105]: And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Revelation 12:9 NAU)

⁴²¹ For a discussion of this topic, see Osborne, p. 689, who favors the idea that a real battle takes place, but its details are omitted.

⁴²² Beale, p. 970

⁴²³ Repetition of a word or phrase which directs the emphasis toward everything written between the two phrases.

for a thousand years;

³ and he **threw him**
into the **abyss**,

and **shut it**
and **sealed it** over him,
so that

he would not deceive the nations any longer,
until the thousand years were completed;
after these things
he must be released for a short time.

We have now come to a passage in Revelation which is most strenuously debated among scholars from different theological and eschatological persuasions. The heart of the debate revolves around the question of whether John is receiving a vision of events which follow Chapter 19 **chronologically**, or whether John is now **going back in time** when Satan was thrown from heaven to the earth after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ into heaven (Rev. 12). In other words, how do we read the words, **Then I saw** in verse 1? We have taken the position thus far (with Beale and others) that Revelation should not be read chronologically but as a series of **repetitive cycles** which describe the same events from different angles or perspectives.

Based upon this presupposition, when John says, **Then I saw**, in Revelation 20: 1, he is not seeing a **future event** which follows Revelation 19 chronologically, but a **new vision** which follows the vision in Revelation 19 sequentially. These different visions come to John in thematic sequence. They follow one another only in the sequence of time in which John sees them, but the **substance** of the visions—it is argued here—are not in chronological order. For example, we have shown that Revelation 6 records the final judgment, but clearly there are many other visions recorded later in Revelation concerning events which occur before the final judgment. Revelation as a whole is not chronologically arranged but **thematically** arranged. It deals with different themes which are revealed to John without any concern for chronological order. In the visual sequence of chapters 18—20, we have the destruction of Babylon in Revelation 18, the destruction of the beast from the sea, the false prophet, and the kings of the earth with their armies in Revelation 19. In Revelation 20, we witness the destruction of the last and most formidable enemy of God and the church, Satan, along with the deceived nations who follow him into battle. Yet, when we examine the parallel language in these chapters, we discover that the destruction of all five enemies is one glorious event.⁴²⁴

We concluded from Revelation 12 that Satan was bound when Christ rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, and that he is no longer able to deceive the nations on a world-wide scale, although he may, and does, deceive many (and perhaps most) individuals **within** the nations.⁴²⁵ Revelation 20 records the binding of Satan in more detail which means, if our interpretation has been correct so far, that the binding of Satan Revelation 20: 2-3 is a repetition of Revelation 12 and Michael's war in the heavens in which Michael and the angels prevail over Satan and the fallen angels, resulting in Satan's being cast down to earth and his being bound in the abyss for

⁴²⁴ At the same time

⁴²⁵ I'm still trying to hang on to the hope that there will be more people in heaven than in hell in the end, but Revelation doesn't give me much confidence in this hope.

Commented [D106]:

Commented [D107]: And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Revelation 12:9 NAU)

1000 years. After this period, he will be released to deceive the nations once more, but only for the purpose of being utterly destroyed and cast forever into the lake of fire.

The **premillennial** interpretation of this chapter uses the following chronological scheme:⁴²⁶

1. The second coming of Christ occurs (Rev. 19: 11-21) in which the church is raptured (taken from) from the world (cf. 1 Thes. 4: 13-18).
2. Satan is bound (Rev. 20: 1-3) **after** the **second** coming (not **after** the **first** coming, as in amillennialism) rendering him incapable of **any** kind of deceptive influence in the world. There is a cessation of all satanic activity for 1000 years, or a long period of time, depending on how literal one interprets 1000 years.
3. Christ inaugurates 1000 years (or an indefinitely long period) of world peace and prosperity **after** His second coming, called the Millennium. At the **beginning** of this Millennium, Christians receive their resurrection bodies and reign **with Christ** on earth (Rev. 20: 4b). The bodily resurrection of believers to **life** is called **the first resurrection** (v. 5b).
4. At the end of the Millennium there is a final rebellion led by Satan with the participation of all unbelievers to overthrow Christ and the church (Rev. 20: 7-9). These are unbelievers who were not destroyed along with the armies of the kings of the earth in Revelation 19. They are the multitudes who did not take part in the battle of Armagedon.⁴²⁷ The rebellion is squashed and Satan is thrown into the lake of fire (Rev. 20: 10).
5. The white throne of judgment comes after this final rebellion in which unbelievers are judged (Rev. 20: 11-15). Believers have, somehow, been judged and/or rewarded at the beginning of the Millennium.

The **postmillennial** interpretation:⁴²⁸

1. The kingdom of God represented in His church experiences phenomenal success on earth **before** the second coming of Christ.
2. The 1000 years of the Millennium is an indefinite period **before** the second coming of Christ which follows the triumph and **spread of the gospel recorded in Revelation 19: 11-21**. It is generally a time of world peace at the **end** of the church age resulting from the dramatic influence of the church in the world.
3. The second coming of Christ occurs **after** this period of peace and prosperity.
4. The Great White Throne of judgment.

[Note: As one can see, the postmillennial interpretation of 19: 11-21 as the spread of the gospel requires a radical departure from the amillennial interpretation I have accepted (see below). But it seems to me that only a brief reading of 19: 11-21 should convince the unbiased reader that the

⁴²⁶ Adapted from Poythress, pp. 177-178, emphasis mine

⁴²⁷ Osborne, p. 688, cf. Rev. 19: 19, 21

⁴²⁸ Adapted from Poythress, p. 178, emphasis mine

invitation to carrion birds to eat the flesh of men would be an inappropriate description of the missionary enterprise of the church!]

The **amillennial** interpretation, which I have used throughout this study, is as follows:⁴²⁹

1. The Millennium is occurring **now** in the present church age. Christ is presently reigning **in heaven** with the saints who have departed this life either as martyrs or as dissenters who have refused to accept the mark of the beast—that is, those who have not compromised their faith in Christ for a false religion or a non-Christian world-view.
2. Satan **has already been bound** in some sense through the victorious death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, leading the way for the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world in every nation. Therefore, the binding of Satan in Revelation 20 is the **same event** as the casting of Satan to the earth in Revelation 12. Satan is no longer able to deceive **whole nations** throughout the world as he did before the coming of Christ when only the Jewish nation had been given the truth about God (Rom. 9: 4-5; Eph. 2: 11-13).
3. Despite the proclamation of the gospel throughout the world, Satan is still able to deceive **individuals** within the nations. At the end of the church age, Satan will be released from his previous restriction in the abyss (not a literal abyss but a figurative one) to deceive the **nations** once more, leading to world-wide hatred and persecution of the true church (depicted in the death of the two witnesses in Revelation 11: 1-10 and the rejoicing of the earth-dwellers when they are killed).
4. The second coming of Christ occurs with overwhelming power, destroying the beast, the false prophet, Satan, and all who follow them.
5. The Great White Throne of judgment

Osborne summarizes the three major millennial positions as follows:

To take them in chronological order ^[430], premillennialism believes that Christ will return to earth, destroy the evil forces, and reign here for a thousand years. This period will end with the rebellion and final destruction of Satan followed by the final judgment and the beginning of the future age. Amillennialism holds that there will be no literal earthly reign of Christ following the parousia (they say his reign is now, during the church age). Rather, Rev. 20: 1-10 is symbolic and describes the situation during the church age between the advents [first and second coming] of Christ....Postmillennialism argues that the thousand-year period will be a time of triumph of the gospel and a period of peace that will precede the second coming of Christ.⁴³¹

Poythress observes that the structure of the book requires us to see Revelation 20: 1-5 as the seventh and last cycle of judgments, **each of which** leads up to the return of Christ at the end of

⁴²⁹ Adapted from Poythress, p. 178

⁴³⁰ Osborne argues that premillennialism was first held in the early church as a result of the teaching of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian.

⁴³¹ Osborne, pp. 696-697, explanation in brackets mine

the church age. He presents the following points to support this interpretation. I have supplied some of the texts with emphasis.⁴³²

- The final battle in 20: 7-10 seems to be the same as the final battle in 16: 14, 16; 17: 14; 19: 11-21.

When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,⁸ and will come out to deceive **the nations which are in the four corners of the earth**, Gog and Magog, **to gather them together for the war**; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. (Revelation 20:7-8 NASB)

¹⁴for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to **the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war** of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 16:14 NASB)

¹⁶And they **gathered them together** to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. (Revelation 16:16 NASB)

"**These will wage war** against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him *are the* called and chosen and faithful." (Revelation 17:14 NASB)

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it *is* called Faithful and True, and in righteousness **He judges and wages war**. (Revelation 19:11 NASB)

And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white *and* clean, were following Him on white horses.¹⁵ From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may **strike down the nations**, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and **He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath** of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 19:14-15 NASB)

And I saw the beast and **the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war** against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. (Revelation 19:19 NASB)
- The various descriptions of the final battle use language that is similar to that in Ezekiel 38—39.

"It will come about on that day, when **Gog** comes against the land of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "that My fury will mount up in My anger. (Ezekiel 38:18 NASB)

"With pestilence and with blood I will enter into judgment with him; and **I will rain on him** and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with **hailstones, fire and brimstone**. (Ezekiel 38:22 NASB)

"You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; **I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird** and beast of the field.⁵ "You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken," declares the Lord GOD.⁶ "**And I will send fire upon Magog** and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD. (Ezekiel 39:4-6 NASB)

And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, **and fire came down from heaven** and devoured them. (Revelation 20:9 NASB)

⁴³² Poythress, p. 179

"As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, '**Speak to every kind of bird** and to every beast of the field, "Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood.¹⁸ **You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth**, as *though they were* rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan.¹⁹ "So you will eat fat until you are glutted, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you.²⁰ "You will be glutted **at My table** with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war," declares the Lord GOD. (Ezekiel 39:17-20 NASB)

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, **saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven**, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God,¹⁸ **so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men** and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great." (Revelation 19:17-18 NASB)

When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,⁸ and will come out to deceive **the nations** which are in **the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war**; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. (Revelation 20:7-8 NASB)

- The judgment of Satan in 20: 10 parallels the judgments of Babylon (chapters 17—18) and of the Beast and the False Prophet (19: 11-21). These enemies of God all receive their doom, and the visions depicting their doom are thematically rather than chronologically arranged.

And **the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone**, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Revelation 20:10 NASB)

"For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and **she will be burned up with fire**; for the Lord God who judges her is strong. (Revelation 18:8 NASB)

And the **beast** was seized, and with him the **false prophet** who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; **these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone**. (Revelation 19:20 NASB)

- Certain features in 20: 11-15 correspond to earlier descriptions of the Second Coming (6: 14; 11: 18).

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, **from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them**.¹² And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; **and the dead were judged** from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.¹³ And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds.¹⁴ Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15 NASB)

The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and **every mountain and island were moved out of their places**. (Revelation 6:14 NASB)

"And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and **the time came for the dead to be judged**, and *the time* to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth." (Revelation 11:18 NASB)

- Most importantly, all of Christ's enemies are destroyed in 19: 11-21. If 20: 1-6 describes events later than 19: 11-21, there would be no one left for Satan to deceive in 20: 3.

³and he threw him into the abyss, and shut *it* and sealed *it* over him, **so that he would not deceive the nations any longer**, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time. (Revelation 20:3 NASB)

²⁰ And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.²¹ **And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.** (Revelation 19:11-21 NASB)

On this last point, Osborne argues that the multitude described in Revelation 19: 19 are only the **armies** of the kings of the earth but not "all the earth-dwellers" or "all peoples of the earth, for there must be some present to follow the dragon when he is released in 20: 7".⁴³³ Commenting on Revelation 20: 1-3, Osborne says,

It is **interesting** that there are still "nations" to be deceived in light of 19: 19, 21, which say the kings and their armies were destroyed. Yet it is important to realize that it is "the armies" and not "the nations" that are slaughtered. In the narrative...there are still "nations" around during the millennium. My view is that these are the earth-dwellers **who supported but were not part of the army**. They go through the millennium, and it is they who are ruled by the saints on the thrones in 20: 4, 6. They then form the group who flock after Satan when he is released (20: 7b).⁴³⁴

"Interesting", indeed, but Osborne's theory is based upon the unproven assumption that Revelation 19 and 20 are in chronological sequence. Against this theory is the universal description of **the rest** who are **killed** in Revelation 19: 18 and 19: 21, namely, "the flesh of **all men**, both **free men** and **slaves**, and **small and great**" who are distinguished from **the great men [mighty men] and the commanders**. We see the same universal language in Revelation 6: 15-16.

Then the **kings of the earth** and the **great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong** and **every slave and free man** hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;¹⁷ for **the great day of their wrath has come**, and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:15-17 NAU)

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God,¹⁸ **so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men** and the flesh of horses

⁴³³ Osborne, p. 688

⁴³⁴ Osborne, p. 702, emphasis mine

and of those who sit on them **and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.**" (Revelation 19:17-18 NASB)

And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and **all the birds were filled with their flesh.** (Revelation 19:21 NASB)

This comparison assumes, of course, that the same day—the **great day**—is in view in both Revelation 6 and 19, an assumption supported by the description of Har-Magedon in Revelation 16: 14, 16.

for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to **the kings of the whole world**, to **gather them together for the war of the great day of God**, the Almighty. (Revelation 16:14 NASB)
And they **gathered them together** to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. (Revelation 16:16 NASB)

But how could the battle of Har-Magedon, **the great day of God**, be anything other than the **great day of their wrath** in Revelation 6? Moreover, the **kings of the whole world** in Revelation 16: 14 must be the same **kings of the earth** in Revelation 19: 19 who assemble to make war with Christ. To reiterate the point, the descriptions of men in Revelation 6: 15 have the same categories as those in Revelation 19: 19, assembled for a war that must be identified as the battle of Har-Magedon. Both armies and those who are slave, free, small and great, perhaps not included in the armies, are destroyed. But we need not yield to a literalistic approach to these armies and other men who need not be distinguished as soldiers or civilians. All men are at war with God spiritually, and this is the implication of the text. Notice also the word phrases, **gather[ed] them together**. Exactly how many great days of wrath or great days of God can there be? How many times must armies be **gathered together**? How many great battles does Christ have to fight to defeat His foes? Only one is necessary, and this "battle" is virtually over before it ever begins because there can be no serious contest between the exalted, omnipotent Christ and His enemies. He defeats them with overwhelming, irresistible power. There comes a time in our interpretation when logic—including the *reductio ad absurdum*⁴³⁵—must be allowed to decide the most reasonable meaning. In this case, it would be rather absurd to argue that all these battles in Revelation are **different** battles or that all these armies are **different** armies. Christ is the omnipotent Lord who slays His enemies decisively and instantly with the breath of His mouth (Isa. 11: 4; 2 Thess. 2: 8).

Osborne's premillennial approach will not concede that the many descriptions of judgment (Rev. 16—19) are the same event as Revelation 20: 7-10, but must be **anticipations** of Satan's final judgment preceding the actual event. The earth-dwellers who are **not destroyed** with the armies in Revelation 19 experience the reign of Christ on earth for 1000 years exempt from the temptation of Satan and his demons. Upon Satan's release from the abyss, the multitudes of earth-dwellers immediately renew their allegiance to Satan in rebellion of Christ.

One of the purposes of this passage is to justify the necessity of eternal punishment. This book proves that even **the equivalent of fourteen lifetimes** (based on the current life expectancy of about seventy years divided into one thousand years) are not enough to overturn their allegiance to Satan. Therefore, the eternal lake of fire is a necessity.⁴³⁶

⁴³⁵ The logical argument which reduces an opposing argument to the absurd.

⁴³⁶ Osborne, pp. 697-698

One is led to conclude that Osborne holds that unbelievers will be capable of living **the whole duration of the thousand years**, “fourteen lifetimes”. But how is this possible unless something miraculous has happened to the bodies of unbelievers similar to the glorification of believers’ bodies at the return of Christ (1 Thess. 4: 14-17; 1Cor. 15: 39-50; cf. Acts 24: 15; Jn. 5: 28-29)? That this longevity throughout the Millennium is what Osborne means is further implied by a previous comment on Revelation 19: 19, 21 repeated below.

It is interesting that there are still “nations” to be deceived in light of 19: 19, 21, which say the kings and their armies were destroyed. Yet it is important to realize that it is “the armies” and not “the nations” that are slaughtered. In the narrative...**there are still “nations” around during the millennium**. My view is that **these are the earth-dwellers** who supported but were not part of the army. **They** go through the millennium, and it is **they** who are ruled by the saints on the thrones in 20: 4, 6. **They** then form the group who flock after Satan when he is released (20: 7b).⁴³⁷

Does Osborne mean that “they” who flock to Satan are the same “earth-dwellers who supported” the annihilated army before the Millennium started, or does he mean the physical **descendants** of these rebellious earth-dwellers? I’m not entirely clear what he means, but how we interpret the survivors of Christ’s overwhelming victory in Revelation 19 is important in determining the scenario of the Millennium. Will there be millenarians⁴³⁸ roaming around the earth ready to revolt against Christ’s reign at the end of the Millennium?

John 5: 28-29 can only support the simultaneous resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous (cf. Daniel 12: 2), not two separate physical resurrections of the righteous and unrighteous separated by 1000 years.

"Do not marvel at this; for **an hour** is coming, in which **all** who are in the tombs will hear His voice,²⁹ and **will come forth**; those who did the good *deeds* to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil *deeds* to a resurrection of judgment. (John 5:28-29 NASB)

"Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2 NASB)

Therefore, the Johanine and Daniel texts are consistent with 1 Thessalonians 4. Note the emphasized words in John—**an hour**, **all**, and **will come forth**. **An hour** and **all** indicate simultaneous physical resurrection for the saved and the lost. The eternal life of the righteous with imperishable bodies (1 Cor. 15: 42) is made possible by the restoration of the body in the likeness of the glorified body of Christ. This new body will be given both to believers who are now dead who will rise from their graves and to believers who are alive when Christ returns (1Thess. 4). But when do **unbelievers**—who are still alive at the beginning of the Millennium—receive reconstituted bodies capable of lasting a thousand years **before** their judgment (if, indeed, this is Osborne’s position). There is no scriptural support for this even in Revelation 20. And where is the scriptural support indicating that any physical life on earth continues for the **unbeliever** after Christ returns, other than what premillennialists may infer from Revelation 20? Where do we find the analogy of Scripture for an opportunity to repent after the visible and bodily return of Christ, an opportunity which must be allowed by the premillennial position? 1

⁴³⁷ Osborne, p. 702, emphasis mine

⁴³⁸ People who have lived a thousand years

Thessalonians 4—5 indicates that there is nothing left for the unbeliever after the parousia⁴³⁹ but destruction and judgment. “...the coming of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 4: 15 cannot be grammatically distinguished from “the day of the Lord” in 1 Thessalonians 5: 2. The only thing that separates them in the immediate context is the uninspired chapter division between chapters four and five.

Beale argues that the final judgment in Revelation 20: 7-15 “recapitulates the description of final judgment in 19: 11-21”. That is, Revelation 20 is repetitious, treating the same judgment from a different perspective. His arguments include the following:⁴⁴⁰

1. The allusions to Ezekiel. The prophecy of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel is interpreted by Beale (and others, including Keil⁴⁴¹) as a specific prophecy concerning the end times which has yet to be fulfilled (see discussion above). Moreover, the structure of the last chapters of Revelation has numerous similarities to the structure of Ezekiel.

...that John has in mind a specific prophecy-fulfillment connection with Ezekiel 38—39 is borne out by the broader context of Revelation 20—21, where a fourfold ending of the book reflects the ending of Ezekiel 37—48: resurrection of God’s people (Rev. 20: 4a; Ezek. 37: 1-14, messianic kingdom (Rev. 20: 4b-6; Ezek. 37: 15-28), final battle against God and Magog (Rev. 20: 7-10; Ezek. 38—39), and final vision of the new temple and new Jerusalem, described as a restored Eden and sitting on an exceedingly high mountain (21: 1—22: 5; Ezek. 40—48).⁴⁴²

2. The language beginning the battle in Revelation 19 is the same as that of Revelation 20.

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies **assembled to make war** against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. (Revelation 19:19 NASB)

When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, **to gather them together for the war**; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. (Revelation 20:7-8 NASB)

3. In Revelation 16: 12-16; 19: 19; and 20: 8, there is a gathering of world forces which have been **deceived** into waging war with God (see Rev. 20: 7-8 above).

And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;¹⁴ for they are spirits of demons, **performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world**, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 16:13-14 NASB)

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.²⁰ And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet **who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived** those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. (Revelation 19:19-20 NASB)

⁴³⁹ The second coming of Christ

⁴⁴⁰ Beale, pp. 972-982

⁴⁴¹ C.F. Keil, *Ezekiel*, chps. 37—48

⁴⁴² Beale, p. 977

4. In two passages mentioned, the gathering of the armies through deception is followed by the destruction of the world (Rev. 16: 17-21; Rev. 20: 10—21: 1).

5. After the seventh bowl plague of Rev. 16: 17-2, there can be no more of God's wrath upon the nations since in the seven bowls the wrath of God is **finished** (Rev. 15: 1).

6. If Revelation 20: 1-3 follows 19: 17-21 in chronological sequence, then the reader is faced with a logical contradiction. It makes no logical sense to speak of the binding of Satan to prevent him from deceiving the nations if they have **already** been deceived and destroyed in Rev. 16 and 19. Osborne's argument that only the armies are destroyed is not compelling and has been discussed earlier.

With the introduction above, we may now look at the text of Revelation 20: 1-3 in more detail. The binding of Satan does not take place at the **end** of the church age after the 1000 year millennial reign of Christ, but at the **inauguration**⁴⁴³ of the reign of Christ in the complex of events surrounding His birth, death, resurrection, and ascension (see Rev. 12). If we wish to be more precise, he was bound after the resurrection of Christ, His triumph over sin and death. The end of Satan's binding occurs in the **short time** (20: 3) before Christ returns in judgment. This binding does not imply the complete prevention of Satan's activities (2 Cor. 4: 3-4; 11: 14; Eph. 2: 2; 2 Tim. 2: 26; 1 Pet. 5: 8).⁴⁴⁴ The text itself, more than the literal description of being **bound** and thrown into the **abyss**, determines the extent of Satan's containment. He is no longer capable of deceiving the **nations**, thus preventing the world-wide expansion of the gospel and the growth of the church. We should avoid all wooden literalism in the interpretation of Satan's imprisonment. The abyss is not a literal pit with a cover over it, and Satan's chains are not forged from titanium used in the US space shuttles. Any material means of binding him would be useless. He is a fallen angel (a spirit) of great power, and the means of binding him must be a spiritual force of greater power—the atonement and resurrection of Christ.

But the question arises as to how Satan has deceived the nations. He began his nefarious (evil) work of deception at the very beginning of mankind in the Garden of Eden by deceiving Eve, leading to the fall of man. Experiencing spiritual death, man was no longer capable of performing the task of exercising dominion over the earth for the glory of God. Likewise, even the line of Seth was deceived into intermarriage with the line of Cain leading to the dilution of faith in the godly line and eventually to the corruption of the whole earth and the flood (Gen. 6). Israel was commissioned to be a light to the Gentiles, but by succumbing to the deceptive tactics of Satan, the nation utterly failed to bring the Gentiles into saving faith in Yahweh. The list of Satan's successes and the failures of God's people (not God) goes on.

But God sent Christ, the true Israel and the second Adam, into the world to accomplish what Adam and Israel failed to do. He obeyed God perfectly in thought and deed, and He was the light to the Gentiles that Israel never was (Luke 2: 32). By deceiving Judas, Satan believed he had defeated God's plan for mankind once again, but the crucifixion of Christ was the very instrument by which Satan was rendered ineffective in achieving his plan to wrest the kingdom of man away from God the Creator. Christ has now rendered Satan ineffective in deceiving the whole world since Christians are now taking the gospel to the ends of the earth and to every

⁴⁴³ Beginning

⁴⁴⁴ Beale. P. 985

nation. As Christ says, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to **all the nations**, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:14). Satan will be bound in the abyss until the end of the age when he is let out of the abyss for a **short time** ((20: 3b, however long this is, no one knows) and will once more deceive the nations into making war against the church on an unprecedented scale. During this brief period Satan will be able to curtail—if not stop altogether—the preaching of the gospel and the expansion of the church. The church will also be exposed to a time of persecution unmatched by anything she has ever experienced (Rev. 11: 1-9, the death of the two witnesses who represent the whole church). Without the intervention of Christ (Rev. 19), the church would be extinguished; and before this intervention, many Christians will perish.

I have taken the position that Satan was cast out of heaven to the earth and bound at the resurrection of Christ. I do not interpret Satan being cast out of heaven to the earth (Rev. 12: 7-9) as a separate event from his being bound (*deo*) and sealed in the abyss (Rev. 20: 1-3), but as the same event from two different perspectives.⁴⁴⁵ When Jesus heard the report of the seventy disciples that even the demons were subject to them in His name, He says, “I was watching Satan **fall from heaven** like lightning” (Luke 10:18 NASB). When He was accused of casting out demons by the power of Satan, he responded, “But no one can enter the strong man’s house and plunder his property unless he first **binds** [*deo*] the strong man, and then he will plunder his house” (Mark 3:27; cf. Matt. 12: 29, also using *deo*). The biblical authors use the same root word for **bound** and **binds** (*deo*). Christ had entered Satan’s (the strong man’s) house and plundered his property, the souls of men. Christ is now reclaiming what Satan had taken unlawfully; but Satan had to be bound first by the atonement of Christ and His victorious resurrection, thus defeating the power of sin and death. On the occasion of the Father’s voice from heaven at the third Passover of Jesus’ ministry, Jesus said,

“Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world **will be cast out**.³² “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all men** to Myself.” (John 12:31-32 NASB)

The context of this declaration is very important. On this same occasion, some Greeks (Gentiles) were coming to worship at the Passover, and they requested to see Jesus. Part of Jesus’ response to this request was His statement in John 12: 31-32: Satan will be **cast out** (*ekballo*) and Jesus will draw **all men** to Himself, even Gentiles who have lived in spiritual darkness. In Galilee of the Gentiles, the people sitting in darkness saw the light of the gospel in Jesus Christ (Mk. 4: 15-16), and Gentiles have been seeing this light ever since. The word **cast out** comes from the same root word used of the angel throwing (*ballo*) Satan into the abyss (Rev. 20: 3).

Therefore, the binding of Satan and Satan’s falling from heaven are the same event. We should allow the clear texts of Scripture in the gospels and epistles to govern our interpretation of the more obscure apocalyptic passages from Revelation. When the Apostle Paul interprets the effects of Christ’s death on the cross, he includes the disarming of heavenly principalities and rulers.

When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions,¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way,

⁴⁴⁵ So also Hendriksen, p. 226

having nailed it to the cross.¹⁵ When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Colossians 2:13-15 NASB)

Here, **public spectacle** (NIV) is a better translation because it better captures the intent for the modern reader. Public spectacle has a negative connotation (suggested meaning). The idea is that God stripped the cosmic, heavenly powers of their weapons and is now exhibiting them to the world in their conquered condition. The military term used (**triumphed**) indicates that Christ is now driving His conquered enemies through the streets in royal procession bound in chains (see 2 Cor. 2: 14). One of the ways these **rulers and authorities** have been disarmed is that they no longer have any grounds for accusing the people of God of their sin because their sin has been nailed to the cross of Christ. In Revelation 12: 10, a voice from heaven says that the authority of Christ has come because **the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down**. Satan no longer has legal grounds for his accusations against believers—as in the story of Job when Satan appeared before God’s throne **in heaven** to accuse Job of loving God only for the material benefits he received. At the end of the story, Job is vindicated as a type of Christ and as a type of all Christians united to Christ. Satan has been cast out of heaven at the resurrection of Christ, along with other fallen angels, and is no longer allowed to appear before God in heaven to accuse the saints. As Paul says,

Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies;³⁴ who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. (Romans 8:33-34 NASB)

In spite of all the possible objections to the idea of Satan being bound (see verses listed above including 2 Cor. 4: 1-4), the weight of exegetical proof lies on the side of commentators who interpret the binding of Satan at the resurrection of Christ. When we look at the question historically, it should be clear that before the coming of Christ the whole world lay in spiritual darkness. What nations were worshipping the true God before Christ appeared on the scene of human history—the Chinese (?), the Indians of Asia (?), the American Indians (?), the Europeans (?), the Egyptians (?), the Mongolians (?), thousands of African civilizations (?). The answer is: none but Israel and those precious few souls who came in contact with Israel. But now the Christian faith has spread all over the globe. Hendricksen vividly describes the situation.

Now, in order to arrive at the real meaning of the “binding and hurling into the abyss” of satan we must first ask the question: just what meaning or value did this passage have for the persecuted Christians in John’s day?

...Let us “transplant” ourselves to the world of John the apostle, and imagine that the slow finger of history’s clock is pointing to the first century A.D. Now, look round about you in every direction. What a picture of spiritual darkness and desolation! Try to count the many idols that disgrace the streets and sanctuaries of imperial Rome. The abominations, the filth and corruption attendant upon the celebration of pagan festivals, the superstitions, vices, etc., are truly staggering. Temples and shrines throughout the world are crowded with ignorant, half-despairing worshippers. We see a few scattered churches established through the efforts of Paul and others. For the rest, heathendom is everywhere triumphant.—Now move back the hand of history to that long period which preceded Christ’s ascension. Notice: *all* the nations—with the exception of the Jews—are under the thralldom of satan! Not, of course, in the absolute sense of the term, for God always reigns supreme but in the sense of Acts 14: 16: “*God...who in the past generations suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways.*” If during the present N.T. era the devil “blinds the minds of unbelievers,” II Cor. 4: 4, that was true even more emphatically during the old dispensation. With a sigh of horror we exclaim, “Is this

condition ever going to change? Will this (O.T.) era continue forever? Will the devil maintain his rule over the peoples of the earth? Will the light of the glorious Gospel never penetrate into the palaces and hovels of Asia and Europe? Will this intense moral and spiritual darkness continue forever? Has God in anger forgotten mercy?"

The answer is, "Rejoice!" Only listen: "I will tell of the decree: Jehovah said to me. Thou art my son; This day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession," Ps. 2: 8. Again, "He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, And from the river to the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; And his enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the ilses shall render tribute: The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before him; All nations shall serve him...His name shall endure forever. His name shall be continued as long as the sun: And men shall be blessed in him; *All nations* shall call him blessed!" Ps. 72: 8-11, 17. Cf. Gen. 12: 3; Am. 9:11; Mic. 4: 12.⁴⁴⁶

Even the OT church, Israel, had been throughout its long history a cesspool of spiritual decadence, deceit, and idolatry rendering it incapable and unwilling to be a light to the Gentiles. Jonah, the reluctant prophet, served as the individual example for a corporate nation who visualized itself as God's chosen nation irrespective of covenant faithfulness. During the time of Christ the office of high priest was sold to the highest bidder among the prominent, wealthy families of Israel.⁴⁴⁷ The Jews of Palestine were sheep with no shepherd (Mk. 6: 34).

Against the theory that Satan has already been bound since the resurrection, the premillennial position maintains that the binding of Satan does not occur until the millennial reign of Christ on earth for 1000 years.

For a thousand years, those among the nations who worshipped the beast will be under Jesus' sovereign control and ruled by the saints. They will not experience Satan or be deceived in any way by him. All they will experience is the benign rule of Jesus himself. Yet after fourteen lifetimes of enforced good...as soon as Satan is released, they allow themselves to be "deceived" all over again and follow him. The purpose is to prove the power of total depravity and demonstrate once and for all the necessity of eternal punishment. The millennium is the judicial evidence that will convict the earth-dwellers and prove that their eternal sin demands eternal punishment. In other words, 20: 3c and 20: 7-10 are the divine "must" of a just God.⁴⁴⁸

Mounce's position concurs with Osborne's that the thousand years is future, not present, and that there are still people living on earth after the destruction of **the kings of the earth** in Revelation 19.

The elaborate measures taken to insure his [Satan's] custody are most easily understood as implying the **complete cessation** of his influence on earth (rather than a curbing of his activities)...Satan's imprisonment is to last a thousand years....

In chapter 19 the kings of the earth and their armies were slain by the sword of Messiah (19: 19-21). Yet now in chapter 20 **the nations are pictured as still in existence**....Moffatt...adds that the reference in 20: 3 is probably to those outlying nations on the fringe of the empire **who had not shared in the campaign of the Antichrist**....It is probably best to understand the nations in 20: 3 as

⁴⁴⁶ Hendricksen, pp. 224-225

⁴⁴⁷ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 63, 67

⁴⁴⁸ Osborne, p. 703

the remnant from nations who opposed Messiah rather than as select nations, here and there who never entered the final battle. In either case, however, they are **no longer** under the seductive influence of Satan. No longer are they deceived into giving to the emperor the worship which belongs to God alone. Looking ahead to the close of the thousand-year period, John adds that for a little while Satan must be released again. **It is futile to speculate just why there needs to be yet another conflict.** Satan will gather a following from around the earth and march on the beloved city. He is to be devoured by fire from heaven and cast finally into the lake of fire. Apparently a thousand years of confinement does not alter Satan's plans, nor does a thousand years of freedom from the influence of wickedness change man's basic tendency to rebel against his creator.⁴⁴⁹

This interpretation encounters far more difficulties than any necessity of explaining why Satan, bound in the abyss, still exercises some limited influence in the world. By insisting on the chronological sequence from Revelation 19 to 20, interpreters must explain how anyone could have survived the onslaught of the omnipotent Christ in chapter 19 when v. 21 says that “the **rest** were killed with the sword.” Is there any compelling exegetical reason to exclude the rest of mankind from destruction when the universal descriptions of mankind (see above) include the small and great, free and slave (19: 18)? Their explanation also demands a wooden literalism of actual military battles—more than one—and literal **armies** from apocalyptic texts filled with symbols and metaphors. As I have asked before, just how many battles must Christ fight in order to defeat foes whom, by the testimony of Scripture, He can defeat with the breath of His mouth? Indeed, it is not “futile to speculate just why there needs to be yet another conflict.” It is an honest question that demands an answer.

While I respect the superb scholarship of premillennialists like Osborne and Mounce, I find this mode of interpretation illogical, even as I find it illogical and exegetically untenable to picture a world going about its business in stubborn unbelief after the rapture of the church (with people rising out of graves) when 1Thessalonians 4—5, Matthew, 24—25, and other perspicuous passages picture the return of Christ for His saints simultaneously with the destruction of His enemies. The simultaneous occurrence of salvation and judgment is also evident in the OT types—the Genesis flood with the salvation of Noah and his family but the drowning of the rest of mankind, the Passover Supper in Egypt with the deliverance of Israel and the death of the firstborn of Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea with the drowning of the Egyptian army, the OT wars of devotion with victory to Israel but death to its enemies, et al. Must we believe that Jesus reigns visibly and justly over the earth for 1000 years along with His glorified saints, bringing unprecedented peace and prosperity; but after this incredibly long and immaculate (spotless) reign, people can still be convinced of Satanic lies leading them to revolt against His kingdom?

I would agree with Osborne concerning the depth of man's depravity, but the earthly reign of Christ for 1000 years would seem to eliminate the need for faith in a crucified Savior who reportedly rose from the dead. Christians today believe in this Savior on the testimony of others in the pages of Scripture—by faith.⁴⁵⁰ But **sight alone** should convince the unbeliever living during the Millennium that Jesus is Lord, as Paul appears to suggest in Philippians 2: 10. Moreover, their guilt and the justice of God need not require an earthly reign of Christ and man's

⁴⁴⁹ Mounce, pp. 353-354, emphasis mine

⁴⁵⁰ Over five hundred witnesses at one time (1 Cor. 15: 6). While this was sufficient external evidence at the time, it happened 2000 years ago, and these 500 witnesses are long dead. Christians today must believe that the Scriptural testimony is true, a belief that requires faith. It is not blind faith since the Scriptures themselves have proven to be based on reliable textual evidence including over 5000 manuscripts or copies of the original texts (autographa).

revolt against this reign to justify eternal punishment. Man’s belligerent revolt in this present age is sufficient to prove man’s guilt and to justify his punishment (Rom. 1: 18-32). Summing up Revelation 20: 1-3, Hendricksen remarks,

The church, indeed, exerts a tremendous influence for good upon almost the entire complex of human life! In that sense—not in every sense—the devil is bound!⁴⁵¹

⁴ **Then I saw** thrones,
and they sat on them,
and judgment was given to them.

And I saw

the **souls**
of those
who had been **beheaded**
because of their testimony of Jesus
and because of the word of God,
and those
who **had not worshiped**
the beast
or his image,
and **had not received the mark**
on their forehead
and on their hand;

and they **came to life**
and **reigned with Christ**
for a thousand years.

Commented [D108]: That is, the souls of those who had been martyred during the church age reigning with Christ during this age.

Commented [D109]: The experience of believers in heaven without bodies

Commented [D110]: v. 3

⁵ **The rest of the dead**
did not come to life
until the thousand years were completed.

Commented [D111]: Is this soul sleep for the unbelieving dead during the church age? Does this mean they will not suffer spiritually before the second death?

Commented [D112]: v. 3

This is the **first resurrection**.

Those who are given **thrones** and to whom the right of judgment is bestowed (v. 4) consist of two categories. They are (1) believers who have been martyred for their faith and (2) believers who have not worshipped the beast or received the mark of the beast. They are the “overcomers” of Revelation 3: 21, referred to as **souls** because they have died. In v. 4 they **came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years**. The premillennial paradigm demands that these souls be given resurrected bodies enabling them to reign with Christ on earth for a thousand years. However, the text does not explicitly say that they receive **bodies** or that they reign with Christ **on earth**. It only says that they reign with Christ for a thousand years without any reference to bodily existence or place. I have not fully determined whether the premillennialist position demands the reconstituted bodies of **unbelievers** who have not yet died before the Millennium.⁴⁵² If not, then unbelievers during this period will be living a normal lifespan while resurrected believers will continue living forever, one less reason to believe that unbelievers

⁴⁵¹ Hendricksen, p. 228

⁴⁵² See comment above and Osborne, pp. 697-698

would rebel at the end of the Millennium—at least interpreted from the premillennial perspective.

Verse 5b says that **this is the first resurrection**, namely, coming to life and reigning with Christ for a thousand years. On the premillennial side of the argument, the word **resurrection** in the Bible almost invariably refers to a physical resurrection. There are too many references to list, but examples include Matt. 22: 23, 28, 30-31; 27: 53; Lu. 14: 14; Jn. 5: 29; 11: 24; Acts 1: 22; 4: 2; 17: 18, 32; Rom. 1: 4; 1 Cor. 15: 12-13, 42; Phil. 3: 10; 2 Tim. 2: 18; Heb. 6: 2; 1 Pet. 1: 3; *passim* [i.e. in other places]. How then can amillennialists claim that these **resurrected** believers reign with Christ as **disembodied** souls **in heaven** in an intermediate state between physical death and the general resurrection at the return of Christ? In other words, can the word **resurrection** refer to spiritual resurrection not accompanied by a bodily resurrection? Strong dissent against this view comes from Mounce who says,

If “they lived” in verse 4 means a spiritual resurrection to new life in Christ, then we are faced with the problem of discovering within the context some persuasive reason to interpret the same verb [in v. 5] differently within one concise unit. No such reason can be found. Alford’s much-quoted remark is worth repeating: “If, in a passage where *two resurrections* are mentioned...the first resurrection may be understood to mean *spiritual* rising with Christ, while the second means *literal* rising from the grave;—then there is an end of all significance in language, and Scripture is wiped out as a definite testimony to anything” (IV, p. 372).⁴⁵³

Evangelicals have correctly resisted any claims by liberal theologians to the effect that Christ experienced a spiritual resurrection but not a bodily resurrection. But is there any example of spiritual resurrection in the Bible which does not nullify the persistent claims of the biblical writers for the necessity of the bodily resurrection of Christ and of all believers? Yes, there is.

In Romans 6 Paul is laying out a detailed argument against the claim of antinomians that justification by grace through faith alone legitimizes **habitual** sin in the life of the believer. The question, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase?” calls forth the strongest negative response from Paul, “May it never be!” The remainder of his argument demonstrates the impossibility of a true believer living habitually in sin. The believer has died with Christ, has been buried with Christ, and has risen with Christ vicariously.⁴⁵⁴ It becomes evident from the analogy, however, that just as the death of the believer with Christ on the cross is a spiritual death and just as the burial with Christ in His tomb is a spiritual burial, so also is the resurrection of the believer with Christ to newness of life—it is a **spiritual** resurrection affecting a new life in Christ. At the same time, it is clear that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ are all physical. Paul predicates⁴⁵⁵ the spiritual reality of our death, burial, and resurrection upon the physical reality of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. I have emphasized some of the relevant texts below to support this point.

Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **so we too might walk in newness of life.**⁵ For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, **certainly we shall also be in the likeness**

⁴⁵³ Mounce, p. 356, emphasis his, explanation in brackets mine

⁴⁵⁴ Shared through the experience of another, in this case, believers have shared spiritually in the experience of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection through Christ’s actual death, burial, and resurrection.

⁴⁵⁵ Basing something upon given facts.

of His resurrection,⁶ knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that **our body of sin might be done away with**, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin;⁷ for **he who has died is freed from sin.**⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that **we shall also live with Him,**⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him.¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; **but the life that He lives, He lives to God.**¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but **alive to God** in Christ Jesus. (Romans 6:4-11 NASB)

That the believer should **walk in newness of life** and not in habitual sin is the practical burden of Paul's argument. This newness of life is accomplished through the believer's union with Christ in death, burial, and resurrection. Yet, just as the believer did not **physically** die with Christ, nor was he physically buried with Christ, it is also true that when Christ was raised from the dead, the believer did not physically participate with Him in that resurrection—at least, not yet. It is certainly true that the paradigm of Christ's physical resurrection is the guarantee of the believer's physical resurrection at Christ's second coming, as Paul so energetically argues in 1 Corinthians 15. But the certainty of the believer's physical resurrection is not relevant to Paul's purpose in Romans 6. What is relevant is the paradigm of Christ's resurrection as the paradigm, motive, and basis for the believer's sanctification and holiness. The certainty of the believer's vicarious **spiritual** death with Christ is the ground and basis for the certainty of his sanctification. There cannot be one without the other. "Certainly", Paul says, "we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection", a promise of continuing moral transformation, not physical resurrection.

The apostle is not dealing here with *our* physical death and resurrection; he is dealing with our death to sin and our resurrection to Spiritual life, as is apparent from the preceding context and will become even more apparent in the verses that follow. Hence it is necessary to introduce the principle of analogy. Our union with Christ in his death and resurrection must not be bereft of its intimacy, but with equal jealousy it must be interpreted in terms of Spiritual and mystical relationship. And the death and resurrection of Christ in their bearing upon us must likewise be construed in such terms....

The sum of verse 5 is, therefore, that if we have become identified with Christ in his death and if the ethical and Spiritual efficacy accruing from his death pertains to us, then we must also derive from his resurrection the ethical and Spiritual virtue which our being identified with him in his resurrection implies. These implications for us of union with Christ make impossible the inference that we may continue in sin that grace may abound.⁴⁵⁶

The remainder of the argument proves that Paul is not making a case for the certainty of the **physical** resurrection. "Our old self was crucified with *Him*..." and for what purpose? "...in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin" (v. 6). The doing away with the body of sin is not a distant hope realized in the resurrection of the body, but a present reality in the life of the believer. The believer's old self has been definitively put to death for the purpose of enabling him to present the members of his body as slaves to righteousness (Rom. 6: 19) rather than slaves to sin (6: 6). Believers must **no longer** be slaves to sin in this present life; for this is why Christ died, and this is why the Christian is united with Christ in His death. Paul is not speaking here of the completion of moral perfection at the general resurrection of believers in the second coming. Such hope was too distant and had no relevance to his argument that the true believer should not **now** sin habitually that grace would abound. No. The believer's death in Christ meant that he was **freed from sin** (v. 7) as a dominating power in his life. He didn't have to wait for this freedom until his **physical**

⁴⁵⁶ John Murray, *Romans*, pp.218-219. See also Beale, p. 1004.

resurrection; he was freed from sin's dominion **now** in his **spiritual** resurrection by virtue of his union with Christ in His **physical** resurrection. If he was not thus freed, by implication he was not a believer.

Continuing the analogy, Christ is no longer under the mastery of death because of our sin imputed to Him (v. 9). He **died to sin** [*not His own sin, but our sin*] **once for all**. Moreover, **the life that He lives he lives to God** (v. 10). **Even so** alerts the reader to the fact that Paul is now coming to the conclusion of his statement that Christ is no longer under the mastery of death, that he has vicariously died to sin's power once for all, and that He lives to God. He is now ready to state the necessary result of Christ's vicarious work. **Even so**, the Christian should also consider himself **dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus** by virtue of this reality in the vicarious atonement and resurrection of Christ. The Christian should no more consider himself as dying to sin's power over and over again as he should consider the repetition of Christ's dying on the cross. Christ died once to the dominating power of our sin, and He will not die again. Likewise, the Christian has died to sin's dominion once in the death of Christ, and this death need not be repeated but rather progressively realized in the mind, heart, and life of the believer. In this sense, he dies daily (1 Cor. 15: 31). The believer is not under sin's dominion, or else he is not a true believer. Sin shall not be master over him (6: 14).

It should be noted in the Romans passage that there is an interchange between the physical death of Christ and the spiritual death of the believer without specific indications of what kind of death is intended. Yet, the reader can clearly distinguish from the context which kind of death is implied. When Christ died to sin physically (since He could never die to sin **spiritually**) the believer died to sin spiritually as a dominating power. When Christ rose physically, the believer rose to newness of life spiritually, not physically. This interchange occurs within the **same** context thus answering the hermeneutical objections of Mounce and Alford quoted above.⁴⁵⁷

The **spiritual** resurrection of believers at conversion is not without Scriptural support in the analogy of faith. Other Pauline texts support the idea of a spiritual resurrection of all believers at conversion.

¹And you were dead in your trespasses and sins. . . .⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, (Ephesians 2:4-6 NASB)

Therefore **if you have been raised up with Christ**, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³For **you have died** and your life is **hidden with Christ** in God. (Colossians 3:1-3 NASB)

This spiritual resurrection at conversion is elevated to new heights when all remnants of sin are eliminated at the physical death of the believer. Although the soul never dies, the souls of believers are "resurrected"—as a manner of speaking—into a higher state of blessedness than ever experienced before physical death. It is for this reason that Paul considered physical death to be "gain" (Phil. 1: 21, 23) and preferred to be absent from his body so he could be at home with

⁴⁵⁷ Beale, p. 1005

the Lord (2 Cor. 5: 8).⁴⁵⁸ This is why Revelation 20: 4b speaks of deceased believers coming to life even though they already have life. No unholy person can exist in the presence of God in heaven; consequently, the **sanctification** of the believer begun at conversion will be completed at death in which the new spiritual life is consummated in perfect holiness (Heb. 12: 23). The **glorification** of the believer, on the other hand, is not accomplished until the second coming of Christ when the believer receives his new, glorified body suitable for occupation of the new heavens and earth (1 Cor. 15). The consummated state of the believer with body **and** soul—not merely spiritual holiness—is the end-goal of Scriptural eschatology.

If this part of our interpretation is correct, then **the rest of the dead** must be those who died in unbelief. Mounce says that the rest of the dead includes “all the faithful except the martyrs, plus the entire body of unbelievers.”⁴⁵⁹ but he leaves out of his consideration the two conjunctions in the middle of v. 4, **and those who had not worshiped the beast...and had not received the mark**. The **souls** v. 4a also include all those who have not worshipped the beast or received his mark—namely, every genuine believer who dies before the second coming. Why does Mounce exclude these people from the first resurrection and from the group of believers who reign with Christ a thousand years? Must we conclude that the believers among **the rest of the dead** who come to life after the Millennium are not **blessed and holy** (v. 6a) like those who are martyred? Will only the martyrs be **priests of God and of Christ** (v. 6b)? Are only martyrs exempt from the **second death**? Such questions demand negative answers.

When we examine vv. 4-6, we discover that the phrase, **and reign [will reign] with Christ for a thousand years**, is an *inclusio*, implying that everything pertaining to the **souls** in v. 4a is included within vv. 4b-6 with the obvious exception of v. 5a, **the rest**. In other words, the souls of those who have been martyred **and** the souls of those who have not worshipped the beast or received his mark (1) came to life, (2) have part in the first resurrection, (3) are blessed and holy, (4) are not subject to the power of the second death, (5) will be priests of God and of Christ, and (6) will reign with Christ during the Millennium. Only **the rest of the dead** who are unbelievers are excluded from these blessings.

The promise of being **priests of God and of Christ** (v. 6b) recalls the priestly role of the Levites in the Old Covenant. God’s revealed goal for Israel was that the entire nation would be a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**.

‘Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; ⁶ and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.” (Exodus 19:5-6 NASB)

However, this goal required covenant obedience which the Israelites refused to give and were unable to give because of their uncircumcised hearts. At any particular time in their long history, there was only a remnant of Israel according to faith (Rom. 9: 27; 11: 4-5). God’s new covenant people, the true children of Abraham by faith (Gal. 3: 29), are rendered capable of obeying God through the operation of the Holy Spirit in circumcising their hearts and serving as priests of God

⁴⁵⁸ Beale, p. 1011

⁴⁵⁹ Mounce, pp. 359-360

forever in the new heaven and earth. Moreover, we learn from the priestly activity of the Levites that Adam's work in the garden was a priestly function.

Thus, the sacredness of the Christian's labor on earth now and eternally in the new heavens and earth is supported by the biblical association between the Garden of Eden and the OT temple and tabernacle. Not only was Adam to rule the earth, he was appointed to rule it as a priest-king. G.K. Beale has suggested a comprehensive biblical theology of the Garden of Eden as the typical, arboreal⁴⁶⁰ temple of God and the new heavens and new earth as the antitype and fulfillment of the OT tabernacle and temple.⁴⁶¹ Beginning in Genesis, Beale demonstrates the similarity between the terminology of the cultural mandate of Genesis with the priestly duties found in the Pentateuch. All verses below are cited in Beale except where noted.

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate [*abad*] it and keep [*shamar*] it. (Genesis 2:15 NASB)

As Beale points out, the words "cultivate" and "keep", within a 15 word range in the OT, are also used of Israelites guarding God's word or keeping the service of the tabernacle.⁴⁶²

"They shall perform [*shamar*—"keep, watch, or preserve"] the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do [*abad*—"work, serve"] the service of the tabernacle.

⁸ "They shall also keep [*shamar*] all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do [*abad*] the service of the tabernacle. (Numbers 3:7-8 NASB)

"But at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work [*abad*] any more.

²⁶ "They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep [*shamar*] an obligation, but they *themselves* shall do [*abad*] no work. Thus you shall deal with the Levites concerning their obligations." (Numbers 8:25-26 NASB)

"So you shall attend [*shamar*] to the obligations of the sanctuary and the obligations of the altar, so that there will no longer be wrath on the sons of Israel. ⁶ "Behold, I Myself have taken your fellow Levites from among the sons of Israel; they are a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD, to perform [*abad*] the service for the tent of meeting. (Numbers 18:5-6 NASB)

Thus they are to keep [*shamar*] charge of the tent of meeting, and charge of the holy place, and charge of the sons of Aaron their relatives, for the service of the house of the LORD. (1 Chronicles 23:32 NASB)

"Yet I will appoint them to keep [*shamar*] charge of the house, of all its service and of all that shall be done in it. (Ezekiel 44:14 NASB)

Waltke also makes note of Adam's responsibility to guard [*shamar*] the garden. "Ironically, by his not driving Satan from the garden, Adam was expelled by Satan."⁴⁶³ "Keeping" and "serving" are also used in the OT context of keeping the commandments of God and serving Him only.

⁴⁶⁰ Consisting of trees

⁴⁶¹ G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*. I am indebted to Dr. Julian Zugg for directing my attention to Beale's work and the temple theme in Genesis.

⁴⁶² Beale, p. 68

⁴⁶³ Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 259

"But if you or your sons indeed turn away from following Me, and do not keep [*shamar*] My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, and go and serve [*abad*] other gods and worship them,⁷ then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them, and the house which I have consecrated for My name, I will cast out of My sight. So Israel will become a proverb and a byword among all peoples. (1 Kings 9:6-7 NASB)

"Only be very careful to observe the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God and walk in all His ways and keep [*shamar*] His commandments and hold fast to Him and serve [*abad*] Him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Joshua 22:5 NASB, not cited in Beale)

Although it has been argued by some theologians that the Adamic probation was not a covenant in the strict sense of the word,⁴⁶⁴ the reference in 1 Kings 9 supports the view that Israel's disobedience and its consequences is a repetition of Adam's failure. Israel was cut off from the land of promise due to disobedience to the covenant. Adam's expulsion from the garden was likewise the result of disobedience.⁴⁶⁵ Moreover, as Adam failed to serve [*abad*] God with a whole heart, Israel also failed by serving [*abad*] other gods. In fact, Adam's fall was a foreshadowing for Israel that she would not be able to keep the terms of the Mosaic Covenant, as Moses had prophesied (Deut. 30: 1-3). If a perfect man in the perfect environment becomes a rebel, how can faithless Israel keep the Law in a land racked by debauchery?⁴⁶⁶

In 1 Kings 6, descriptions of Solomon's temple replicate the garden images of Genesis.

Then he carved all the walls of the house round about with carved engravings of **cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers**, inner and outer *sanctuaries*. (1 Kings 6:29 NASB)

So *he made* two doors of olive wood, and he carved on them carvings of **cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers**, and overlaid them with gold; and he spread the gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees.³³ So also he made for the entrance of the nave four-sided doorposts of olive wood³⁴ and two doors of cypress wood; the two leaves of the one door turned on pivots, and the two leaves of the other door turned on pivots.³⁵ He carved *on it* cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers; and he overlaid *them* with gold evenly applied on the engraved work. (1 Kings 6:32-35 NASB)

The garden images of Genesis are also repeated in Ezekiel and Revelation in association with the temple.

Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. (Genesis 2:10 NASB)

Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,² in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1-2 NASB)

⁴⁶⁴ John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. Beale, pp. 68-69

⁴⁶⁶ Waltke, p. 255

Then he brought me back to the door of the house; and behold, water was flowing from under the threshold of the house toward the east, for the house faced east. And the water was flowing down from under, from the right side of the house, from south of the altar. (Ezekiel 47:1 NASB)

Thus, the restored heavens and earth will be the fulfillment of God's intention to dwell with His people in intimate communion who serve Him as priests day and night in His cosmic temple. As Adam was expelled from the original garden temple because of disobedience, the new covenant people will be allowed entrance into the temple-city eternally because of Christ's obedience. In the Mosaic economy this communion was typified by the entrance of the high priest once a year into the holy of holies, and by the entrance of the greater High Priest, Jesus Christ, into the heavenly tabernacle with His sacrificial blood. When Christ entered the heavenly holy of holies, the veil separating God from His people was torn, thus allowing all those who believe in Christ into eternal intimate communion with God. The whole earth will serve as the eschatological temple of God with God's people serving him and keeping His commandments. However, as no unclean person was allowed into the OT temple, so also no unbeliever defiled by sin will be permitted into the heavenly temple-city.

He stationed the gatekeepers of the house of the LORD, so that no one would enter *who was* in any way unclean. (2 Chronicles 23:19 NASB)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea.² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:1-2 NASB)

²⁷and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Revelation 21:27 NASB)

The temple-city (also a garden-city with a river and trees) is the archetype⁴⁶⁷ of harmonious existence enjoyed between God, man, and creation unmarred by human sin.

The garden of Eden represents a territorial space within creation that is qualitatively better than the rest of creation, a unique blessed place. In this special space, God invites human beings to enjoy a state of bliss consisting of harmony with God, with one another, with animals, and with the land. It is peace and wholeness, "the celestial city" with the wide expanse reserved for humanity. Human beings sense they were designed to belong in the garden; it is their home in the ultimate sense.

The garden, by extension, is a temple—God is uniquely present in a way he is not elsewhere. In this garden people meet God and walk and talk with him. As a temple, it is the axis between heaven and earth.⁴⁶⁸

Adam...has no mandate to expand the garden, for he lives in the in-between time....God purposes the garden to cover the earth when darkness and sea are no more (Rev. 21-22).⁴⁶⁹

⁵The **rest of the dead**

did not come to life
until the thousand years were completed.

This is the **first resurrection**.

Commented [D113]: Is this soul sleep for the unbelieving dead during the church age? Does this mean they will not suffer spiritually before the second death?

Commented [D114]: v. 3

⁴⁶⁷ The original type

⁴⁶⁸ Waltke, p. 255

⁴⁶⁹ Waltke, p. 259

⁶ Blessed and holy
 is the one who has a part
 in the **first resurrection**;
 over these
 the **second death** has no power,
 but they will be priests of God and of Christ
and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

We must consider the fact that if there is a **first** resurrection, a second resurrection is implied, although not specifically stated; otherwise, the designation, **first**, is meaningless.⁴⁷⁰ What could the second resurrection be but the physical resurrection from the dead? But if the first resurrection is physical, and if there is no other kind of resurrection in Revelation, what is the purpose of saying that it is first? Moreover, the **second death** implies a first death which also is not explicitly stated in the text but certainly implied in the words **souls** and **beheaded**. We can reasonably conclude that the first death is **physical death** and that the **second death** is eternal death in hell, **spiritual death** which has no power over the believer. Believers succumb to the power of the first death but **over these the second death has no power**.

"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28 NASB)

The second resurrection is physical resurrection, implying that the **first resurrection** is not a **physical** resurrection but a **spiritual** resurrection excluding the beheaded bodies of martyrs. The word **souls** is used to emphasize the spiritual nature of this resurrection. Moreover, unbelievers also take part in the second resurrection, a physical resurrection, but the second resurrection for the unbeliever turns out to be the **second death**, spiritual death. Their physical resurrection results not in resurrection to life but in resurrection to judgment and eternal death, while the believer's physical death results in spiritual resurrection to life.

"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice,
²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good **deeds** to a **resurrection of life**, those who committed the evil **deeds** to a **resurrection of judgment**. (John 5:28-29 NASB)

If, indeed, the premillennialists are correct in calling the first resurrection a physical resurrection of believers at the **beginning** of the 1000 years, they must also affirm a second physical resurrection of believers at the **end** of the 1000 years who have been converted during the Millennium. There is no analogy of faith⁴⁷¹ for a separate physical resurrection of believers, but only the "second" physical resurrection for both believers **and** unbelievers—either resurrection to life or resurrection to judgment (Jn. 5: 28-29).

But what does verse 5 mean? If **came to life** means spiritual resurrection for believers who are now reigning with Christ in heaven, then what does **did not come to life until the thousand years were completed** imply for unbelievers? Does this mean that all dead unbelievers will experience a kind of unconscious "soul sleep" during the Millennium (the present church age) which will end at Christ's return in judgment? This is what Osborne proposes. He agrees with Beale and others (contra Mounce) that the **rest of the dead** must refer to deceased unbelievers

⁴⁷⁰ Poythress, p. 180

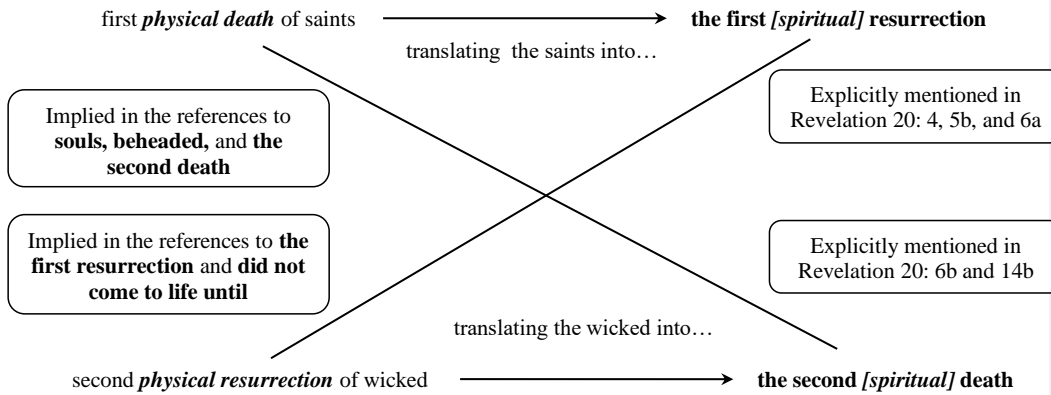
⁴⁷¹ No Scriptural support elsewhere

Commented [D115]: Rev. 5: 9-10

Commented [D116]: Notice that those who reign with Christ 1000 years are the same as those who have part in the first resurrection, the same people who came to life in v. 4. Therefore, the rest of the dead in v. 4 cannot be believers since they do not reign with Christ for 1000 years, but come to life after the 1000 years.

and that the **first resurrection** must refer to all believers, not just martyrs.⁴⁷² Following from his interpretation of both resurrections in Revelation 20: 4-5 being physical resurrections separated by 1000 years (or an indefinitely long time), Osborne says that unbelievers dying before the Millennium are not physically resurrected until the end of the Millennium while deceased believers are physically resurrected before the Millennium. Moreover, during their intermediate state between physical death and the second coming of Christ, unbelievers are **not conscious**. By implication, this must mean that the unbelieving dead experience no judgment—physical or spiritual—until the coming of Christ.

Beale suggests the following structure of Revelation 20 which I have slightly modified.⁴⁷³



This means that for unbelievers who die [before the Millennium], **their next conscious moment** will be when they face God at the great white throne judgment (the **one passage** that talks of consciousness for the wicked during this time, Luke 16: 19-31, is a parable, and the plot line is local color rather than **theological statement**).⁴⁷⁴

The Bible says very little even about the intermediate period of the believer when his soul is separated from his body. The emphasis in Scripture is on the consummated, resurrected (bodily) state of the believer. However, it says quite enough about the intermediate state of the believer to give us reasonable confidence in the immediate transition of the believer’s spirit from earth to heaven (see below). I would agree with Osborne that the Bible does not say anything explicitly about the intermediate state of the **unbeliever** other than the parable he has mentioned—which may not qualify as “explicit”. Grudem cites Hebrews 9: 27 to prove a “close sequence” between death and the consequence of judgment.⁴⁷⁵

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and **after this comes** judgment, (Hebrews 9:27 NASB)

⁴⁷² Osborne, p. 708

⁴⁷³ Beale, p. 1005

⁴⁷⁴ Osborne, p. 708, emphasis and explanation in brackets mine

⁴⁷⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 823

However, the words **after this**, although indicating chronological sequence, do not prove “close” chronological sequence. **After this** could be interpreted as a long interval of time between the unbeliever’s death and the white throne of judgment. The words do prove that physical death marks the end of any opportunity for acquittal before God’s bar of justice. There are no “second chances” to believe in Christ after one’s death.

It remains a question as to how much we can infer theologically from Jesus’ parable about the consciousness of deceased believers or unbelievers. But can we infer nothing? The rich man was not allowed to cross the gulf from **Hades to Abraham’s bosom** (heaven), nor could Lazarus go to him (Lk 16: 26). Hodge inferred from this that there could be no crossing over from one spiritual state to another after death. “The destiny of the soul is decided at death.” He also deduced from the parable that the “transition [of Lazarus’ soul] was immediate from earth to heaven.”⁴⁷⁶ Thus, Hodge deduced some “theological statement” from this parable (contra Osborne). I think we may infer from Jesus’ parable that just as the souls of believers reside in perfect peace and bliss (like Lazarus), the opposite is true of the souls of unbelievers at death (like the rich man). This is much more plausible exegetically and theologically than soul sleep for unbelievers.

However, it is true that the biblical writers do not concern themselves about the intermediate state of unbelievers. While Paul extols the privilege of being with Christ as “much better” than remaining in the body, he makes no comments (that I know of) concerning deceased unbelievers.⁴⁷⁷

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.²² But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose.²³ But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire **to depart and be with Christ**, for *that* is very much better; ²⁴ yet to **remain on in the flesh** is more necessary for your sake. (Philippians 1:21-24 NASB)

The two present alternatives for Paul are **to live *on* in the flesh** or **to depart and be with Christ**. In the intermediate state before the second coming of Christ, he could not have both.

For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.⁵ Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that **while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord**—⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight—⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and **prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord**. (2 Corinthians 5:4-8 NASB)

Thus, Paul’s preference was to be without his physical body in the intermediate state but **at home with the Lord**. The believer should prefer what Paul preferred, to be separated from his physical, perishable body and spiritually in the presence of Christ awaiting the general resurrection at the second coming. Believers are conscious during the intermediate state of bodiless existence in heaven; otherwise, why would Paul prefer it to conscious, productive life in

⁴⁷⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 725, 727.

⁴⁷⁷ In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man was in “agony” in the flames of Hades (Luke 16: 24), but in agreement with Osborne, I am not convinced Jesus was establishing the theological doctrine of the intermediate state of believers or unbelievers with this parable.

the present world? But the passage says nothing about the consciousness of **unbelievers** during the intermediate state.

Paul's optimistic view of the intermediate state of believers is consistent with the Revelation of John; but, like Paul, John says nothing about the intermediate state of unbelievers.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they **may rest** from their labors, for their deeds follow with them." (Revelation 14:13 NASB)

On the other hand, if the intermediate state of the believer is one of spiritual blessedness with Christ, by good and necessary inference we may assume—although we cannot definitively prove—the opposite condition of spiritual misery for the soul of the deceased unbeliever during the intermediate state. This, of course, presupposes the lack of foundational theological evidence from the parable of the rich man and Lazarus—a presupposition which is subject to debate. From the amillennial position I have taken, coming to life for the unbeliever at the end of the Millennium must mean coming to life physically, giving the words **come to life** (v. 5) a different meaning from **came to life** in v. 4b. This is exegetically tenable since the Romans 6 passage has demonstrated Paul's fluid use of "death" and "life", "burial" and "resurrection". Unbelievers at the end of the Millennium **cannot** come to life **spiritually**. For them the second resurrection involves no spiritual transformation, only confirmation and consummation of the spiritual death in which they have always existed (Eph. 2: 1-10).

We should not leave this section without commenting on the pastoral concerns of the Apostle John which lend support to the interpretation of **come to life** as spiritual resurrection. In the political and spiritual environment in which he wrote, Christians were a weak minority dwarfed by the edifice of colossal Roman power and oppression. From a purely objective observation, the church didn't have a chance to survive. The loved ones and relatives of those who were being put to death were asking serious questions: What happens to our fellow believers and family members who were torn to pieces in the arenas by wild animals and beheaded by executioners? What happens to those who have refused to compromise with idolatrous and immoral cultic practices in the trade guilds, have lost their businesses, and are now dead? The answer is found here. They are immediately ushered into the first resurrection in which they are placed on thrones of authority and power to reign with Christ until He returns in overwhelming power and wrath to avenge their deaths and the deaths of all believers who refuse to take the mark of the beast. Christians are following the same path as their Savior before them who seemed to die in weakness and shame. And although Pontius Pilate, Herod, and the Jewish authorities appeared to have their victory, they only served the predetermined purpose of God in establishing His kingdom on earth (Acts 2: 23).⁴⁷⁸

⁷ When the thousand years are completed,
Satan will be released

from his prison,

⁸ and will come out

to deceive

the nations which are in the four corners of the earth,

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Poythress, p. 181

Gog and Magog,
 to gather them together for the war;
 the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.

⁹ And they came up
 on the broad plain of the earth
 and surrounded
 the camp of the saints
 and the beloved city,
 and fire came down from heaven
 and devoured them.

¹⁰ And the devil who deceived them
 was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone,
 where the beast and the false prophet are also;
 and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Once more we see the marshalling of armies to wage war with Christ and His people—something mentioned repetitively throughout the book (Rev. 12:7; 11:7; 13:7; 16:14; 17:14; 19:11, 19). But Revelation 20: 8 is the **last** mention of war. After this chapter, the futile resistance to the kingdom of God is silenced, and the temple-city, the New Jerusalem, appears out of heaven. The main difference here from the other references is that Satan himself is defeated rather than Babylon, the beast from the sea, or the false prophet. As we have said, it is the same war (or battle) from different perspectives. **All** of God’s enemies and **all** the enemies of the church must be defeated, and it appears that they are defeated one by one rather than all at once. However, the parallelism indicates that this is one and the same battle, the battle of Armageddon when Christ appears suddenly and unexpectedly to vanquish all His enemies and receive His bride to Himself.

The first thing we see in this section is that Satan is released from his prison, the abyss, thus allowing him to deceive the nations for one last time. He has not been allowed to deceive the nations since the resurrection of Christ in the first century AD. As a result, Satan has not been allowed to prevent the phenomenal spread of Christianity throughout the world, even in countries controlled by Islamic governments and governed by Sharia law. But for a **short time** Satan will be released to continue his deceptive work among the nations, thus halting the spread of the gospel and inciting the persecution of the church throughout the world. During this time, the saints will be **overcome** (Rev. 11: 7; 13: 7; Dan. 7: 21). This will take place at the end of the Millennial reign of Christ who is reigning with the deceased but spiritually resurrected saints in heaven. That Christ is reigning **in heaven** and not physically and visibly **on earth** is the reason, the only possible reason, that Satan will once more be able to deceive the nations into opposing Christ’s kingdom on earth. Deceiving the nations would be a difficult task—I would argue, an impossible task—with Christ reigning in Israel for the whole world to see with the capability of modern media technology. The righteous man **will live by his faith** (Hab. 2: 4; Gal. 3: 11), but the unrighteous man will die by his lack of faith and the evil deeds that flow from his faithlessness.

What will this post-Millennial⁴⁷⁹ opposition look like? No one knows for sure, but I do not believe we should visualize Army M-1 tanks, Apache gunship helicopters, air force jets and

Commented [D117]: Then these nations were not destroyed with the beast and false prophet of Rev. 19. Everyone is not destroyed in the battle of Armageddon. Yet, Armageddon is mentioned in 20: 9, the broad plain. But 19 and 20 are not chronological but simultaneous—written from two perspectives

Commented [D118]: And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies **assembled to make war** against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. (Revelation 19:19 NAU) And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;¹⁴ for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, **to gather them together for the war** of the great day of God, the Almighty. (Revelation 16:13-14 NAU)

Commented [D119]: And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. (Revelation 16:16 NAU)

Commented [D120]: And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh. (Revelation 19:21 NAU)

⁴⁷⁹ That is, after the Millennium

submarines shooting nuclear missiles—any more than we should visualize Christ occupying the oval office of the World Government White House during the Millennium. What good would nuclear missiles serve against Christ; or for that matter, what good would the same weapons serve against Satan? This is one reason that it seems futile to interpret **armies** as literal armies. This is also the reason I reject the theory that those who take part in the battle against Christ in Revelation 19 are the armies but not the civilian populations. There is no civilian population in the spiritual battle against Christ. Every person on earth is allied either with Christ or Satan (Lk. 11: 23).

Jesus said the coming of the Son of man—i.e. His coming in salvation **and** judgment—would be like the days of Noah with everyone going about their business until the flood took them away (Matt. 24: 37-38). How do we reconcile the suddenness and surprise of His coming (Rev. 19; 20: 8-9) with the gathering of the nations for war as if they are **initiating** the battle? Whatever the **gathering** of the nations for war will look like, I believe we should expect a “war” resembling (1) the fierce persecution of Christians during the Roman persecution, elevated to a level far more deadly than ever before, and (2) the philosophical, social, educational, political, etc. war against Christ and His church going on right now. Such non-military opposition—but nevertheless, still a war—to Christ and His church will intensify at the end of the church age. The world of men is, even now, at war with God on a moral, sociological, spiritual, and political level. When Christ returns in judgment, this war (battle) will come to a sudden and dramatic end not expected by unbelievers. Every unbelieving mouth must then confess that they are fools and the Christ they have rejected is Lord, indeed (Rom. 14: 10-11). In other words, while the nations are persecuting the church on an elevated scale never before experienced in the history of the world, they are hastening the coming of Christ in judgment (Matt. 24: 21). The fierce persecution from Rome was probably the reason that the apostles expected Christ’s return even in their own lifetimes.

The night is almost gone, and **the day is near**. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:12 NASB)

Let your gentle *spirit* be known to all men. **The Lord is near**. (Philippians 4:5 NASB)

You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for **the coming of the Lord is near**. (James 5:8 NASB)

The end of all things is near; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober *spirit* for the purpose of prayer. (1 Peter 4:7 NASB)

Coupled with this belief were Christ’s own words in Matthew’s gospel weaving together the events of the second coming with the destruction of temple, making it difficult for the disciples—as well as any interpreter—to distinguish between these two events (Matt. 24; esp. v. 34).

"Truly I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until all these things take place. (Matthew 24:34 NASB)

Indeed, preterists adamantly maintain that **all** the events of Matthew 24 and Revelation occurred either by 70 AD in the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, or by the end of the Roman

Empire.⁴⁸⁰ Supportive of their position are the very words of Christ, **I am coming quickly**, four times in Revelation, three of which occur in His final address (Rev. 3: 11; 22: 7, 12, 20). What else were the 1st century Christians to think, given the support of this imminent coming from Peter, Paul, and James? Yet, I believe it is erroneous to accept their **expectations** as normative for our **interpretation**. Christ never promised to give anyone the date of His coming. He said even He didn't know (Matt. 24: 36; Mk. 13: 32). God omitted this valuable piece of information for good reason. He wanted the church to be ever vigilant and watchful, as the parables of Christ in Matthew 24: 42—Matthew 25 demonstrate. Every millennial position encounters exegetical difficulty, but I believe Amillennialism has much less difficulty than all the others.

The number of Christ's enemies is like **the sand of the seashore**, enumerable (v. 8b). The people of God throughout the history of the church have always been outnumbered (cf. Judges 7: 12; 1 Sam. 13: 5). The **broad plain of the earth** (v. 9) is another reference to the plain of Megiddo (see comments on 16: 16), but this is not to be taken as a literal place for a literal battle. At the end of the age, God's people are surrounded by overwhelming forces (v. 9a) throughout the earth, even as they are now. Christ shows up, and it is over (v. 9b) for anyone opposed to Him or His people. Instead of a sword from His mouth smiting the nations (19: 15), fire comes down from heaven and devours them. Satan is thrown, not back into the abyss (his temporary prison), but into his permanent place of punishment, **the lake of fire**, along with the beast and the false prophet. I don't believe that the beast and the false prophet have been in the lake of fire previously to Satan. John is arranging his material thematically and not chronologically. Simultaneously, the beast, false prophet, Satan, and the masses of earth-dwellers who receive the mark of the beast are thrown into the lake of fire where they will be tormented day and night. The analogy of faith in Scripture favors a single judgment, not several judgments in chronological sequence.

Although there are degrees of punishment in hell according to the works one has done (20: 12b), the similarity of the punishment for all the enemies of God indicates that the world of earth-dwellers are fully aligned with Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If **anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand**,¹⁰ he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; **and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone** in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.¹¹ "And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; **they have no rest day and night**, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." (Revelation 14:9-11 NASB)

And the devil who deceived them **was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone**, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and **they will be tormented day and night forever and ever**. (Revelation 20:10 NASB)

⁴⁸⁰ In this commentary, I have not given the preterist or postmillennial positions due comment; but Beale and Osborne, I believe, have adequately demonstrated the preterist position to be untenable. Exegetically, the likenesses between the second coming of Christ with the world-wide Genesis flood and the cataclysmic descriptions of the final judgment in 2 Pet. 3: 3-13, also likened to the flood, leave the preterist interpretation challenged with insurmountable obstacles negotiated with very questionable solutions. For just one of many examples, see Chilton's interpretation of the marriage supper of the lamb and Osborne's analysis on p. 694.

And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he **was thrown into the lake of fire.**
(Revelation 20:15 NASB)

Excursus: Reconciliation between Amillennial “Pessimism” and Postmillennial “Optimism” about the Success of the Church during the Millennium

Amillennialists have often been accused of being pessimistic about the success of the church during the Millennium. The postmillennial position maintains that the church will fulfill its mission prior to the coming of Christ, with the majority of the world having been won to Christ through the comprehensive discipling of the nations—making disciples, not merely nominal Christians, by teaching them all things that Jesus commanded us. Therefore, the church will be properly educated during the Millennium in the skill of making relevant applications of the Bible to every area of life—education, art, science, government, economics, etc. Consequently, Christians will be disciplined and rendered capable of transforming whole cultures into obedient service to Christ.

Amillennialists, on the other hand, present a situation in which the evil of this world grows proportionately along with the good. At the end of the age, evil has grown stronger than the church—at least in some sense—so that the church is overcome and would be completely exterminated were it not for the immediate intervention of Christ. On the other hand, although the amillennial position admits a very dismal scenario **at the end** of the age, it does not necessarily preclude⁴⁸¹ the possibility of phenomenal success by the church **during** the Millennium leading up to the **short time** in which Satan's forces overwhelm the church (see Hendricksen's positive assessment above). Indeed, through the power of the Holy Spirit, hundreds of millions of Christians have already sacrificed their time, abilities, money, and even their very lives for the successful proclamation of the gospel and the cultural transformation of whole societies. Although she exhibits weakness in many ways, the missionary and culture-changing endeavors of the church are “successful” to all but biased observation?⁴⁸² Naturally, unbelievers are presuppositionally biased. They cannot “see” the kingdom of God (Jn. 3: 3).

Moreover, what will God allow the church to accomplish in the next 100 years, 250 years, or 2,000 years (however many) before the end of the age? Could it be that after 500 more years there will be such an overpowering presence of the church that it may be difficult to find a single nation in existence without a strong and vibrant church?

Now, fast-forward to the end of the church age and Satan's **short time** of overcoming the saints. How can we account for Satan's success in deceiving the nations if—as I have suggested—the church has been successful in its mission during **most** of the Millennium? It is quite simple, really. How long does it take for the church to fall into apostasy? Ten generations? Five generations? The book of Judges has demonstrated that it only took one generation for the Israelites to fall into unbelief.

The people served the LORD **all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua**, who had seen all the great work of the LORD which He had done for Israel. ⁸ Then Joshua

⁴⁸¹ Rule out

⁴⁸² For documentation of this fact, see Alvin Schmidt, *How Christianity Changed the World*, D. James Kennedy, *What If Jesus Had Never Lived*, and David Noebel, *Understanding the Times*

the son of Nun, the servant of the LORD, died at the age of one hundred and ten.⁹ And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash.¹⁰ **All that generation** also were gathered to their fathers; **and there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD**, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. (Judges 2:7-10 NASB)

How long did it take the churches in Asia Minor to fall into apostasy? One generation before the Apostle John died around 100 AD. How long did it take some of the elders in the church of Ephesus to become false prophets speaking “perverse things” drawing away unwary Christians? One generation.

“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;³⁰ and **from among your own selves** men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. (Acts 20:29-30 NASB)

Thus, it is not an unlikely scenario that within several generations (100, 200, 300 years?) before the end of the church age, there will be a general apostasy away from biblical truth in colossal proportion allowing a systematic degeneration of the nations culturally and religiously until finally only a small minority of believers are left in isolated places. But this is not defeat considering the success of the kingdom of God in all the centuries **preceding** the short time in which Satan is able to repeat his program of deceiving the nations. There may be several hundred years or a thousand years of the church’s expansion before the nations are once more deceived. Of course, we just don’t know the time frame.

¹¹ **Then I saw**

a great white throne
and Him who sat upon it,
from whose presence
earth and heaven fled away,
and no place was found for them.

¹² **And I saw**

the dead,
the great and the small,
standing before the throne,
and **books** were opened;
and **another book** was opened,
which is *the book of life*;
and the dead were judged
from the things which were written in the books,
according to their deeds.

¹³ And the sea

gave up the dead
which were in it,
and death and Hades
gave up the dead
which were in them;

and they were judged,

every one *of them*
according to their deeds.

Commented [D121]: Jn. 5: 28-29

Commented [D122]: Jn. 5: 28-29

¹⁴ Then death and Hades
were thrown into the lake of fire.

This is the **second death**, the lake of fire.

¹⁵ And if **anyone's name was not found written in the book of life**,
he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The **great white throne** of judgment is the judgment for all men, believers and unbelievers. This is made clear by the reference to the **books** and **another book... the book of life**.⁴⁸³ The **books** are records of everyone's deeds, both good and bad (2 Cor. 5: 10; Matt. 16: 27; 25: 31-46). The OT reference is found in Daniel.

"A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And **the books** were opened. (Daniel 7:10 NASB)

"Now at that time Michael, the great prince who stands *guard* over the sons of your people, will arise. And there will be a time of distress such as never occurred since there was a nation until that time; and at that time your people, **everyone who is found written in the book**, will be rescued."² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace *and* everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:1-2 NASB)

It is clear from Matthew 25: 31-46 that the criterion of judgment is a person's deeds. In this particular passage, believers have proven genuine faith by their deeds of commission while unbelievers have been judged for their sins of omission—things they failed to do. While a person's profession of faith may be empty, his deeds generally reveal the true state of his heart.⁴⁸⁴ Paul warns the wayward Corinthian believers that **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**. Believers are not exempt from the judgment **according to their deeds**.

The **book of life** is the book which contains the names of all who are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 4). Our deeds are not sufficient unto salvation, but the fact that our names are written in the book of life more than compensates for our deficiency in deeds. We will be rewarded for good deeds (Rev. 22: 12), but what the punishment will be for our bad deeds is more difficult to determine (cf. 1 Cor. 3: 14-15); Scripture does not say. Possibly, we will be faced with the shame of our evil deeds of commission and omission,⁴⁸⁵ demonstrating our utter unworthiness of salvation, and then pardoned on the basis of our faith in Christ. We are saved not because our deeds are exemplary, but because of Christ's exemplary deeds of active obedience during life and His exemplary deed of passive obedience on the cross.

God's judgment will not be founded on the professions, or the relations of men, or on the appearance or reputation which they sustain among their fellows: but on their real character and on their acts, however secret and covered from the sight of men those acts may have been. God will not be mocked and cannot be deceived; the character of every man will be clearly revealed. (1.) In the sight of God. (2.) In the sight of man himself. All self deception will be banished. Every man will see himself as he appears in the sight of God. His memory will probably prove an indelible register of all his sinful acts

⁴⁸³ The words, *the book* do not occur in the Greek text of v. 12 but they do occur in v. 15 and Rev. 17: 8).

⁴⁸⁴ Although deeds alone do not reveal the motives or goals. See John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*.

⁴⁸⁵ Osborne, p. 722

and thoughts and feelings. His conscience will be so enlightened as to recognize the justice of the sentence which the righteous judge shall pronounce upon him. All whom Christ condemns will be self-condemned. (3.) There will be such a revelation of the character of every man to all around him, or to all who know him, as shall render the justice of the sentence of condemnation or acquittal apparent.⁴⁸⁶

It is point “(2.)... His memory will probably prove an indelible register of all his sinful acts and thoughts and feelings. His conscience will be so enlightened as to **recognize the justice of the sentence** which the righteous judge shall pronounce upon him” that provides part of the foundation for my belief that **all infants** (not exclusively infants of believing parents) dying in infancy go to heaven and are therefore, elect. What memory or guilt of sinful acts, thoughts, and feelings would infants experience in hell? None. Webb is correct when he says,

Penal suffering, to be strictly penalty, must be recognized as such in the consciousness of the sufferer, else it would be to him unmeaning and causeless pain. The element of awareness is an essential ingredient in rational punishment.

An infant, being a sentient creature, is capable of suffering; but being an unconscious creature, with faculties too immature to understand and appreciate the reason for suffering, it is incapable of being punished, strictly and truly speaking. Its only guilt is Adamic and federal; guilt, therefore, of which it is not aware, and of which it can become conscious only by growing to the years of maturity, and expressing its sinfulness in its own voluntary and conscious acts of transgression.

If it were sent to hell on no other account than that of original sin, there would be good reason to the divine mind for the judgment, but the child’s mind would be a perfect blank as to the reason of its suffering. Under such circumstances, it would know suffering, but it would have no understanding of the *reason* for its suffering. It could not tell its neighbor—it could not tell itself—why it was so awfully smitten; and consequently the whole meaning and significance of its sufferings, being to it a conscious enigma [mystery], the very essence of penalty would be absent, and justice would be disappointed of its vindication.

Such an infant could feel that it was in hell, but it could not explain, to its own conscience, why it was there. If another should inform the child of the crime for which it was suffering the pangs of hell, it might believe on testimony and accept the truth by faith in the informer, but it would still be destitute of any fact on its consciousness or conscience, of any deed in its own history, upon which it could rest an experimental conviction of its ill-desert and damnation. It would be experimentally, blankly ignorant.

For suffering to be truly penal there are two necessary conditions: (1) there must be a reason satisfying the conscience of him [in this case, God] who inflicts it, and (2) there must be a reason certifying guilt to the conscience of him [the infant] who experiences the suffering.

Adamic guilt—original sin—is a reason which satisfies the divine conscience, because he perceives it; and because of it, he passes a sentence of condemnation, and therefore judges the unborn posterity of Adam to be damnable. That is a righteous condemnation; but Adamic sin, not being in the consciousness of the infant, the *execution* of the divine judgment prior to the child’s maturity, would leave the child’s mind unacquainted with the reason for its assignation [meeting with] to hell-torments, and without the power to appreciate the cause therefor; and then the divine being would know, that the child does not know, why it has been so terribly afflicted, and that it suffers in conscious ignorance of its offence; and that would leave his [God’s] justice unsatisfied, and defeat the very purpose of the divine being in sending any person to hell.

Let it be understood that God does not send any human being to woe just for the sake of suffering, but in order to inflict *penalty*, and vindicate law and justice....

⁴⁸⁶ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 849

To execute the death-penalty upon the unconscious infant would be, for God to defeat the only motive he has for sending any human being to an endless hell. Hence the child which, on account its federal guilt is punishable *de jure* [by right or legal establishment], is not, as such punishable *de facto* [in actual fact]. The sentence of condemnation for original sin was just; but the *execution* of that sentence, expediency demands, shall be delayed until the child, through actual sinning can be made aware....

...Providence must delay the death of the reprobate infant until he comes to maturity, and translates his original sin into conscious actual sin, so there may be a basis, not simply in law and truth, but in consciousness and conscience and experience for penalty.

Consequently a reprobate infant cannot die in infancy: such a result would defeat the ends of justice. Consequently and conversely, all infants dying in infancy are elect, redeemed, regenerated and glorified.⁴⁸⁷

In another place (pp. 39-40), Webb rejects the position that infants of Christian parents are saved on the basis of their being “brought” for baptism (cf. Matt. 19: 13-15)—associating this position with the errors sacramentarianism and baptismal regeneration.⁴⁸⁸ Throughout the Bible, men are always judged on the basis of their deeds (e.g. Matt. 16: 27; Rom. 2: 5-8). The pollution of Adamic sin is the evidence and reason that men are born sinners and liable to damnation, but not the evidence and reason committing them to actual judgment.

The names of believers were recorded in the book of life **from the foundation of the world** before they had done any good works or bad works (cf. Rom. 9: 10-16). The foundation of the world is the beginning of creation (Jn. 17: 24).⁴⁸⁹ The names of unbelievers were **never** recorded in the book of life since this record of names was established before creation. The verb **has not been written** in Revelation 13: 8 and 17: 8 is perfect indicative.

The force of the perfect tense is simply that it describes an event that, **completed in the past** (we are speaking of the perfect indicative here), **has results existing in the present time** (i.e., in relation to the time of the speaker). Or, as Zerwick puts it, the perfect tense is used for “indicating not the past action as such but **the present ‘state of affairs’ resulting from the past action.**”⁴⁹⁰

According to the Greek verbs, the names of unbelievers are not found in the book of life at the time of judgment, resulting from the fact that they had never been written therein before the world began. Consequently, their names have not been **erased** from a book in which they never existed (Rev. 3: 5). The recording of names in the book of life took place before the world began. Those whose names are not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world will worship the beast; all whose names are written therein will not worship the beast. This is just another way of saying that all who are given to the Son by the Father will come to Him while those who are not given to the Son will not come to Him (Jn. 6: 37-40). Our response to the beast is sovereignly determined by God, but our responsibility is not thereby eliminated. Those who worship the beast choose to do so voluntarily. In the book of Revelation, the earth-dwellers (unbelievers) **did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts** (Revelation 9:21 NASB; cf. 9: 20; 16: 9, 11). Believers, on the other hand,

⁴⁸⁷ R.A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, pp. 288-291, emphasis his, words in brackets mine

⁴⁸⁸ For further reading, see my *Synoptic Gospels* on Matthew 19: 13-15 and Lk. 18: 15-17

⁴⁸⁹ Therefore, according to this verse, love existed before there were any humans to love.

⁴⁹⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, p. 573, emphasis mine; quoted from *BibleWorks*.

overcame him [the dragon] by the blood of the lamb and because of the word of their testimony (Rev. 12: 11).

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

"The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And **those who dwell on the earth**, whose name **has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world**, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. (Revelation 17:8 NASB)

...just as He **chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.... (Ephesians 1:4 NASB)

Beale has argued that the erasure of the names (Rev. 3: 5) of those who do not “overcome” is not a logical necessity. First, the threat of Revelation 3: 5 is unique in that none of the other promises to “overcomers” in Revelation 2—3 contain the threat of losing one’s salvation. “In somewhat unusual fashion the positive guarantee of this inheritance is expressed negatively....” Second, there is never any positive association between the names of unbelievers with the book of life but only with the books of judgment distinguished from **another book**, the book of life (20: 12). Their only association with the book of life is negative—**whose name has not been written**.⁴⁹¹

As always, the more perspicuous⁴⁹² passages of Scripture must be employed to interpret the less perspicuous. I know a missionary who appeals to Revelation 3: 5 to prove that true believers can lose their salvation. In doing so he must ignore the preponderance⁴⁹³ of Scriptural evidence indicating the impossibility of this occurring (Jn. 6: 37-40; 10: 14-16, 26-30; Rom. 8: 26-29). From Romans 8: 26, are we to presume that the Spirit **fails** in His intercession for a believer who is eventually lost? What then is the point of Paul’s argument that nothing, not even the devil himself (vv. 38-39), can separate us from the love of God in Christ?

Hades is the abode of dead unbelievers (Lu. 16: 23). Why the **sea** is mentioned as a separate place is unclear except that it may be included (1) to assure believers that even the bodies of those lost at sea will be resurrected, or (2) to counter the belief that there is any place to hide from the wrath of God, or (3) the OT association of the sea with danger and seemingly unconquerable enemies (see discussion below on Rev. 21: 1). **Death and Hades** must give up their dead bodies for the dead to be judged in the body. After Hades and the sea give up their dead bodies, **death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire**. That is, neither death nor Hades, the temporary abode of dead unbelievers and believers, has any further function. At the return of Christ, all men will be placed before the throne of judgment and will no longer be subject to physical death. Or, the reference could mean that **death** as the temporary abiding place for the bodies of believers will be annihilated and will give place to the permanent abode of the new heavens and earth. Hades, the temporary abode of unbelievers will give place to the permanent abode in **the lake of fire**.⁴⁹⁴ Death is personified as the last enemy of God’s people.

⁴⁹¹ Beale, pp. 279-280

⁴⁹² Clearly stated

⁴⁹³ Prevalence

⁴⁹⁴ See Beale, pp. 1034-1035 for further consideration.

For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.²⁶ The **last enemy** that will be abolished is death. (1 Corinthians 15:25-26 NASB)

But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory."⁵⁵ "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55 NASB)

It has been argued that punishment in the lake of fire is spiritual only, based upon the spirit-being of the devil and his angels who cannot suffer physically.⁴⁹⁵ But what is true of Satan's punishment need not be paradigmatic⁴⁹⁶ for the unbeliever's punishment. Although punishment in hell is primarily spiritual—what Jesus consistently calls "weeping and gnashing of teeth"—there could be physical suffering as well. The agony of the rich man in the flames of Hades (Lk. 16) may be nothing more than a metaphor for spiritual anguish. Certainly there is a sense of lost blessing in hell, and there is no sense of psychological and spiritual rest (Rev. 14: 11). The unbeliever may be knowledgeable about the blessings of the new heavens and earth he has missed—as the rich man in Jesus' parable was aware of Lazarus' joy in Abraham's company. He will miss all the past joys he has experienced living on earth, e.g. the companionship of friends and loved ones, especially since he has neglected others who needed his companionship (Matt. 25: 43). He will also miss the joy of good food and drink. Theologians consider such blessings as God's common grace to sinners (Matt. 5: 45). But will unbelievers also experience the pangs of physical hunger, thirst, and sickness, especially since they have been apathetic about others who suffer these things (Matt. 25: 42-43)? While the unbeliever in hell cannot starve to death, how can we be sure that he will not endure perpetual hunger and thirst (Lk. 16: 24)?

Whatever the punishment, we can be confident that God will not judge anyone unjustly but will judge everyone individually appropriate to what he has done, both good and bad. Although the good deeds of the wicked are not done with proper motives or goals—particularly the love and glory of God—God mitigates (lessens) their judgment on the basis of the proper standards (cf. 1 Kings 21: 29). Moreover, it is incorrect to think that there are no degrees of hell or suffering. That there are degrees of suffering is based explicitly on the statement, **and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds**. If judgment is **according to deeds**, then all of a person's **deeds** will be considered in his judgment. Do human judges who sentence men to prison for theft or to death for murder have a keener sense of justice than God? If a man steals a cow, does he deserve the same sentence as a serial murderer? In a court of law, a serial murderer would get a life sentence for **each** murder. A simple understanding of justice would require different sentences for different crimes. Yet, there are those who say there is insufficient evidence in Scripture to justify the belief in different degrees of hell. (See also Matt. 10: 15; 11: 22, 24; Luk. 10: 12, 14; Rom. 2: 5-8, with an emphasis upon "storing up wrath").

Revelation 21

Then I saw

a new heaven and a new earth;

⁴⁹⁵ Beale, p. 1036

⁴⁹⁶ A model

for the first heaven and the first earth
 passed away,
 and there is no longer *any* sea.

² **And I saw** the holy city, new Jerusalem,
 coming down out of heaven from God,
 made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

³ **And I heard**
 a loud voice from the throne,
 saying,
 "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men,
 and He will dwell among them,
 and they shall be His people,
 and God Himself will be among them,

In Revelation 21, we come to the climax and goal of history, God dwelling among His sinless people in peace, security, and perfect fellowship (v. 3b). Revelation 21 is the ultimate and consummate fulfillment of the tabernacle principle in the OT when God dwelled in the midst of Israel. Further progression of God's dwelling among men is found in the building of Solomon's temple and the second temple in Haggai. **Dwelling among** His people is heightened with the incarnation of Christ in the first advent when Joseph is informed of Jesus' impending birth to Mary. The child would be called Immanuel, which means "God with us" (Matt. 1: 23). Jesus died, was resurrected, and ascended to God, leaving His church physically but not leaving them as orphans; rather, He sent the Holy Spirit, who continues the progression of the tabernacle principle. This **in-dwelling** of the Holy Spirit will continue eternally along with the final installment of God's promise to dwell with us, the second coming of Christ in the flesh who will rule physically and visibly in the new creation.

Before the fall, God "walked" among Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3: 8), but this fellowship was interrupted by the sin of man and would have been suspended permanently were it not for God's intervention in putting enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen. 3: 15). The **new heaven and new earth** are now coming from heaven to replace the corrupted heaven and earth subjected not of its own will to futility but by the will of God because of man's sin (Rom. 8: 18-25). The old has passed away. In this passage the Apostle Paul personifies⁴⁹⁷ the inanimate, non-rational creation as a pregnant woman who groans and suffers the pains of childbirth awaiting the birth of a new baby, the revealing of the sons of God (vv. 22, 19), a revealing that Paul elsewhere in this passage calls the redemption of our body (v. 23). In other words, creation is waiting anxiously for the consummation of our salvation signaled by the glorified bodies of believers rising from the grave.

With the coming of Christ and the consummation of the kingdom of God, the creation itself will be **set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God** (v. 21). It will be placed under new management—redeemed humanity who capably and flawlessly subdues the creation benevolently without exploitation for the glory of God. The freedom of living in the new creation with resurrected bodies suitable for this purpose (1 Cor. 15: 50, 53) will complete (consummate) the salvation promised to God's people. Moreover,

⁴⁹⁷ To treat as a person

glorification—as the consummation of salvation—is something enjoyed corporately by the believer in conjunction with the whole body of Christ. As Murray has noted,

This truth that glorification must wait for the resurrection of the body advises us that glorification is something upon which all the people of God will enter *together* at the same identical point in time. There is no priority for one above another...Each saint of God who dies has his own appointed season and therefore his own time to depart and be with Christ. We can see that this event is highly individualized. But it is not so with glorification. One will not have any advantage over another—all together will be glorified with Christ....

There is much for our instruction in this fact that the final act of the application of redemption is one that affects all alike at the same moment of time in the final accomplishment of God's redemptive design. It is as a body that the whole company of the redeemed will be glorified....It is union with Christ that binds together all the phases of redemptive love and grace. It was in Christ the people of God were chosen before the foundation of the world. It was in Christ they were redeemed by his blood—he loved the church and gave himself for it.⁴⁹⁸

Glorification is also seen to be inseparably connected with the renewal of creation. Not only are believers delivered from the weakness of our perishable bodies beset with remaining sin, but creation itself is released simultaneously from the **slavery to corruption** (v. 21) occasioned by our sin. Creation is anxiously waiting for believers to receive their glorified bodies. It now suffers from the mismanagement of sinful man who seeks to establish his own kingdom through exploitation of other men and creation itself.

The **sea** was symbolic of danger, mystery, and the birth-place of chaotic, seemingly unconquerable powers challenging God's world order (Dan. 7: 3; Isa. 27: 1; Rev. 13: 1).⁴⁹⁹ As such, the sea no longer exists in the new heaven and new earth, a place of peace and order. But the sea as originally created by God as “good” continues (Gen. 1: 10). Ocean-lovers, take heart! The sea will no longer be a place of danger, and the entire earth will be a place of marvelous wonder and complete freedom of exploration. No one will die from climbing mountains or swimming in the oceans (no shark attacks!).

The new creation is described as **the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God**. Once more we see the continuity between the OT people of God and the NT church. Jerusalem was the city where God placed His name. It was to be His dwelling place (1 Kings 11: 36). As the old creation proceeded from the **word of God**, the new creation comes down **out of heaven from God**. It is not man-made (Dan. 2: 34, 45), and therefore, unflawed and uncorrupted, **the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God** (Heb. 11: 10). Throughout history to the present day, men have sought hopelessly to build their own lasting kingdoms independently of God on foundations of sand (Matt. 7: 26). Daniel and Revelation present these kingdoms as kingdoms of beasts devouring and being devoured, while Jesus likens them to crumbling houses unable to stand against the floods and wind.

But the city of God will stand. It is personified as a woman **made ready as a bride adorned for her husband**, Jesus Christ. She is made ready through the trials and testing she has endured as God's people, purified through suffering. This new Jerusalem is parallel to the new heaven and

⁴⁹⁸ John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 175-176

⁴⁹⁹ Poythress, p. 185

new earth replacing the old creation which is passing away. What will this passing away entail? According to Peter, the old creation will melt away with intense heat.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (2 Peter 3:10 NASB)

However, this description is not necessarily one of annihilation or total destruction. Intense heat is used in the process of **purification**, burning up every foreign element inconsistent with the final product desired. The renewal of the earth is analogous to the renewal of the body of every believer at the resurrection. The believer's body is not annihilated but reconstituted into an indestructible body (1 Cor. 15: 35-57).⁵⁰⁰ Scripture presents the final destruction by fire as analogous to the first destruction of the world by water (2 Pet. 3: 5-7). In the first destruction, the world was washed of all evil but not annihilated. Analogously, the world at the end of this age will be purified of all evil by fire but not annihilated. The destruction of the world is elsewhere called **regeneration**, the renewal or "beginning again" (*palligenesia*) of creation (Mat. 19: 28).⁵⁰¹ As we have seen from Romans 8: 18-25, creation eagerly awaits the revealing of the sons of God, the redemption of their bodies. Creation does not eagerly await its own complete annihilation, but its renewal and purification from the destructive effects of man's sin. Everything God made at creation was **good**. It was not complete in the sense of being fully developed. God left its completion to man's ingenuity and creativity reflective of God's creativity. Nevertheless, there was no flaw in the original creation calling for its destruction.⁵⁰²

The "purification" view of the passing away of the present heavens and earth is consistent not only with **regeneration** in Matthew's gospel but also the prophetic descriptions of Isaiah who envisions the reversal of the effects of the fall upon the original creation when man dwelled harmoniously with the animal world and when the "tooth and claw" violence of the animal kingdom had not begun.⁵⁰³

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little boy will lead them. ⁷ Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰ Then in that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious. (Isaiah 11:6-10 NASB)

As the animal world in Genesis is literal, I take this prophecy as literally fulfilled in the new creation.⁵⁰⁴ But this does not eliminate the symbolic significance, particularly the reversal of

⁵⁰⁰ Poythress, p. 185

⁵⁰¹ Hodge, p. 852

⁵⁰² Yet another reason I disagree with a reading of Genesis demanding billions of years of geological cataclysm, death, and decay. Where is the evidence from Genesis? There is only evolutionary presuppositionalism?

⁵⁰³ I totally reject any interpretation of Genesis which pays more attention to evolutionary and geological theories—not scientific "facts"—than it does the express statements of Scripture written in historical narrative. I see no evidence in the Genesis account of violence, death, decay and destruction before the entrance of man's sin.

⁵⁰⁴ So also E.J. Young and Delitzsch

enmity between man and the serpent which was employed by Satan to do his deceptive work. Even this archetypal enmity will be removed when the knowledge of God fills the earth. The relevant issue is that the passing away of the old order of creation will give place to the restoration of relationships between man and man and between man and beast reflecting the original, unmarred creation.

⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes;
and there will no longer be *any* death;
there will no longer be
 any mourning,
 or crying,
 or pain;
 the first things have passed away."

The voice from the throne (v. 3a) heralds God's pastoral concern for His persecuted people. The new creation will be devoid of the sorrow, tears, pain, and death consequent to living in a fallen world, particularly one like the ancient Roman Empire which oppressed all humanity, especially Christians who refused to acknowledge Caesar as Lord. But the herald's comfort is timeless; it is intended for all believers who have endured the entire gamut⁵⁰⁵ of pain and sorrow in this fallen world, including pain similar to that endured by Christians in the 1st century AD. (Think of Christians in Rwanda, South Sudan, Iraq, Pakistan, et al.) Believers experience the pain of loved ones who are lost in sin, the rebellion of children, the death of friends and family, the sorrow of leaving loved ones behind at death after a prolonged terminal illness. Christians live in a fallen world of pain and suffering, but God **will wipe away every tear from their eyes**. We may perhaps initially mourn over loved ones who followed the deceptions of Satan, but our mourning will be turned to joy at the overwhelming sight of the new creation. Mourning has no place there.

If the skeptics wish to ridicule this hope as "pie-in-the-sky" fantasy, let them mock. Many of the skeptics have not suffered as much as many believers throughout the history of man—men and women of whom the world is not worthy (Heb. 11: 38). The Christian hope will be realized, nevertheless; and there is something deeply rooted in the human psyche that longs for a new, better world. Qohelet's cry of "meaningless" has anticipated the malaise⁵⁰⁶ of the old creation's occupants.⁵⁰⁷ However, earth-dwellers desire a better world without judgment upon the old one. But they cannot have their cake and eat it, too. The new world order will not come without judgment upon the old world and its idolatry.

⁵ And **He who sits on the throne said**,
 "Behold, I am making all things new."
And **He said**,

 "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

⁶ Then **He said** to me,
 "It is done.

 I am the Alpha and the Omega,
 the beginning and the end.

⁵⁰⁵ Range or breadth

⁵⁰⁶ Melancholy dissatisfaction

⁵⁰⁷ Qohelet is "the preacher" in Ecclesiastes

The divine declarations of vv. 5-6a recall Genesis 1. God speaks and **it is done**. As God speaks into existence the first creation, so He speaks into existence the new creation. The words of God are **faithful and true** in contrast to the deceptive words of the false trinity: the beast, the false prophet, and Satan. The false trinity offers a kingdom free from God, but fails. God promises the kingdom to the saints and delivers on His promises (Dan. 7: 18).

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. (Luke 12:32 NASB)

God promised the new heavens and the new earth through Isaiah the prophet, the promise John is remembering here (Isa. 65: 17).⁵⁰⁸ God is able to keep His promises because He is **the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end**—the Creator and the “Consummator”, the one who brings His original purpose for creation into realization in the new heaven and new earth.⁵⁰⁹ He declares the end from the beginning and, consequently, everything in between, saying “My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure” (Isa 46:10). His good pleasure was to hand over the kingdom to His redeemed people who joyfully and willingly submit to the rule of His Son, another fulfillment of OT promises.

"I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them ²² until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived **when the saints took possession of the kingdom**. (Daniel 7:21-22 NASB)

^{6b}I will give to **the one who thirsts**
from the spring of the water of life without cost.

⁷ **He who overcomes**
will inherit these things,
and I will be his God
and he will be My son.

⁸ **But for**
the cowardly
and unbelieving
and abominable
and murderers
and immoral persons
and sorcerers
and idolaters
and all liars,

their part
will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone,
which is the second death."

Verse 6b recalls the words of Isaiah.

"Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost. (Isaiah 55:1 NASB)

⁵⁰⁸ Beale, p. 1053

⁵⁰⁹ Poythress, p. 184

The invitation is limited to **the one who thirsts** (v. 6b), none else. The water of life is **without cost** to the one who thirsts and drinks, but not without cost to the One who freely gives it. At this point in Revelation, it would seem that those who do not thirst have been judged already (20: 15), but we must not put strict chronological limits upon John's visions. The visions move back and forth between the conclusion of the final judgment and its commencement. Thirsting also recalls the beatitude of Matthew's gospel, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (Matthew 5:6 NASB). This promise, partially fulfilled at conversion, is now consummately fulfilled: **He who overcomes will inherit these things**, an inheritance believed by faith through "the eyes of your heart" (Eph. 1: 18) but now confirmed by physical eyes. Those who have walked by faith and not by sight (2 Cor. 5: 7) may now see the confirmation of their hope with physical eyes. They are fully satisfied.

While earth-dwellers are seeking first what they shall eat, what they shall drink, and what they shall wear, the over-comer is seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6: 31-34). True to His promise, everything the over-comer needs is provided in abundance plus much more (v. 33). In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6), Jesus was speaking primarily to a poor audience who had only a few changes of clothes, but what would Jesus have to say to the Hollywood crowd and the modern fashion industry in the West now slowly creeping into Africa's modern economic elite? Could this be the most egregious⁵¹⁰ expression of earthlings seeking **what we will wear for clothing** (v. 31). I have watched (very briefly, mind you) the male and female models strutting down the isle showing off the latest styles created by designers who actually make their living (and a very good one) creating the most eccentric⁵¹¹ and absurd apparel the mind is capable of imagining. Meanwhile, fashion clothing retailers on the sidelines are eagerly glued to their seats taking it all in, as if the fashion show was really serious and actually made a difference in this troubled world. Satan laughs, but Babylon will fall. And good riddance.

The familiar theme of blessing and curse recurs in vv. 7-8. The blessing contains one of the clearest expressions of adoption in the NT. God's direct address to John confirms the reality of adoption introduced in the OT and reiterated in the Pauline epistles.

"Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, "Israel is My son, My firstborn. (Exodus 4:22 NASB)

For You are our Father, though Abraham does not know us And Israel does not recognize us. You, O LORD, are our Father, Our Redeemer from of old is Your name. (Isaiah 63:16 NASB)

For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.¹⁵ For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!"¹⁶ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, (Romans 8:14-16 NASB)

Those who inherit the blessing of adoption are those who are over-comers, once more indicating that there is no contradiction between salvation by grace through faith and the "overcoming" of

⁵¹⁰ Outstanding for undesirable characteristics

⁵¹¹ Odd

the saints whose faith perseveres in the midst of trial and temptation. Faith without works is dead. “But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved” (Matthew 24:13 NASB).

On the other side are those who are cursed (v. 8). Heading the vice-list of the damned are the **cowardly and unbelieving**. **Their part** is the curse standing in contrast to **these things**, the blessings of the new heavens and new earth wherein there is no sorrow. John may be warning professing believers who were not willing to face danger, ostracism, and economic hardship because of their professed allegiance to Christ. **Immoral persons** may be a reference to participants in cultic prostitution, and **liars** to false teachers (see Rev. 2—3).⁵¹² The **lake of fire and brimstone** is the **second death** in contrast to the first death. Every believer who dies before the second coming of Christ will experience the first death. Jesus tells us not to fear the first death but to fear the second death.

“Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28 NASB)

The **second death** will not hurt the believer (Rev. 2: 11) and has no power over him (Rev. 20: 6). The first death is a temporary death while the second death is eternal. Life belongs only to the Son, Jesus Christ, and those who are united to Him.

Jesus said to her [*Martha*], “I am the resurrection and **the life**; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, (John 11:25 NASB)

On the other hand, unbelievers are **dead** in their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). The second resurrection will introduce them into an eternal conscious death. One of the greatest ironies in the history of mankind is that men fear the first death more than the second, illustrated by religious commitment to physical health, wrinkle-removing cosmetics, steroid drugs, and the health and wealth prosperity gospel—exported to Africa courtesy of Western religious heretics and their oxymoronic⁵¹³ TBN, the Trinity Broadcasting Network. “There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom. 3: 18).

⁹ **Then** one of the seven angels
 who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues
 came and spoke with me, saying,
 “Come here,
 I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit
 to a great and high mountain,
 and showed me **the holy city, Jerusalem**,
 coming down out of heaven from God,
 ¹¹ having the glory of God.
 Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.

¹² It had a great and high wall,

⁵¹² Beale, pp. 1059-1060

⁵¹³ An oxymoron is a contradiction in terms. Trinity Broadcasting Network often features people like Benny Hinn who believes in nine persons of the Holy Trinity (John MacArthur, *Strange Fire*, p. 175).

with twelve gates,
and at the gates twelve angels;
and names *were* written on them,
which are *the names* of the **twelve tribes** of the sons of Israel.

¹³ *There were* three gates
on the east
and three gates
on the north
and three gates
on the south
and three gates
on the west.

¹⁴ And the wall of the city
had twelve foundation stones,
and on them
were the twelve names
of the **twelve apostles** of the Lamb.

¹⁵ The one who spoke with me
had a gold measuring rod
to measure the city,
and its gates
and its wall.

¹⁶ The **city** is laid out as a square,
and its length is as great as the width;

and he measured the city with the rod,
fifteen hundred miles;
its length and width and height are equal.

¹⁷ And he measured its **wall**,
seventy-two yards,
according to human measurements,
which are *also* **angelic measurements**.

¹⁸ The material of the **wall**
was jasper;
and the **city** was pure gold,
like clear glass.

¹⁹ The **foundation stones** of the city wall
were adorned with every kind of precious stone.
The first foundation stone was **jasper**;
the second, **sapphire**;
the third, chalcedony;
the fourth, **emerald**;
²⁰ the fifth, **sardonyx**;
the sixth, sardius;
the seventh, chrysolite;
the eighth, **beryl**;

"You shall take two **onyx stones** and **engrave on them the names** of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ **six of their names on the one stone and the names of the remaining six on the other stone**, according to their birth. ¹¹ "As a **jeweler** engraves a signet, you shall engrave the two stones according to the names of the sons of Israel; you shall **set them** in filigree *settings* of **gold**. ¹² "You shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, *as* stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and **Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD** on his two shoulders for a memorial. ¹³ "You shall make filigree *settings* of gold, ¹⁴ and two chains of pure gold; you shall make them of twisted cordage work, and you shall put the corded chains on the filigree *settings*. (Exodus 28:9-14 NASB)

¹⁵ "You shall make a **breastpiece** of judgment, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet *material* and fine twisted linen you shall make it. ¹⁶ "It shall be square and folded double, a span in length and a span in width. ¹⁷ "You shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row *shall be* a row of ruby, **topaz** and **emerald**; ¹⁸ and the second row a turquoise, a **sapphire** and a diamond; ¹⁹ and the third row a **jacinth**, an agate and an **amethyst**; ²⁰ and the fourth row a **beryl** and an **onyx** and a **jasper**; they shall be set in gold filigree. ²¹ "The stones shall be **according to the names of the sons of Israel**: twelve, according to their names; they shall be *like* the **engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes**. (Exodus 28:15-21 NASB)

the ninth, **topaz**;
 the tenth, chrysoptase;
 the eleventh, **jacinth**;
 the twelfth, **amethyst**.

²¹ And the **twelve gates**
 were twelve pearls;
 each one of the gates
 was a single pearl.

And **the street of the city** was pure gold,
 like transparent glass.

Having caught the first glimpse of the new Jerusalem in vv. 1-2, John's attention is distracted away from this vision by the voice of the angel in vv. 3-4 and the voice of God in vv. 5-8, both describing the blessings of the new creation and the curses of the second death. **One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls** now redirects John's attention back to **the holy city, new Jerusalem** (v. 2) coming down from heaven. The identification of this angel, along with his address to John, **Come here, I will show you**, recalls the same description in Revelation 17: 1 where one of these angels shows John the destruction of Babylon.⁵¹⁴

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "**Come here, I will show you** the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, (Revelation 17:1 NASB)

The parallel is intentional ridicule of the whore, Babylon, lying in ruins and abandoned by her lovers, in contrast to the temple-city personified as **the bride, the wife of the Lamb**, the bride of Christ. The city and the bride are one and the same as indicated by the two phrases, **I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb** (v. 9b), and **he...showed me the holy city, Jerusalem** (v. 10). In the bride imagery, the emphasis falls upon the intimacy of the church with Christ; in the city imagery, the emphasis falls upon the structure and harmonious community of God's people.⁵¹⁵ Following this is a detailed description of a glorious city which we may interpret metaphorically as the glory of the bride who lives there as well as the glory of the new dwelling place, the garden-city God has provided for her to live in. As for the bride imagery, we are reminded of Paul's description of Jesus' bride in Ephesians.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her,²⁶ so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,²⁷ **that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory**, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25-27 NASB)

The city, the bride of Christ, has the glory of God (v. 11); but this does not imply **equality with but reflection of** God's glory. Every Christian, and the church corporately, is pictured as having been completely transformed into the perfect image of Christ (Rom. 8: 29; Col. 3: 10). The church perfected in glory is quite a contrast with the church compromised by sin in Revelation

⁵¹⁴ Beale, p. 1064

⁵¹⁵ Poythress, p. 189

1—3,⁵¹⁶ but we must not think that the perfection of the church is entirely limited to its final glorification. The church is even now being “washed” and sanctified by the word of God.⁵¹⁷ This vision of the perfected church is given at the end of Revelation to encourage the present and future community of the saints to live up to their potential. We should not be satisfied with our present imperfect state, but should ambitiously pursue the image depicted here.⁵¹⁸

The multiples of twelve highlight the description of the city’s architecture. On the **twelve gates** are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel (v. 12). Since gates are entrances to cities, perhaps this symbolizes the fact that salvation is of the Jews. The introduction of true religion came through the elect Jewish nation. But the gates point in every direction—east, north, south, and west (v. 14)—indicating that every people and nation on earth from all directions will flow into the new Jerusalem (Isa. 2: 2-3). There has been abundant opportunity throughout the church age to enter this city through any one of the twelve gates by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.⁵¹⁹ The east gates are named first. The Garden of Eden was planted toward the east (Gen. 2: 8), and Christ will return from the east (Matt. 24: 27). The foundation stones (v. 14) represent the twelve apostles who, along with the NT prophets, form the foundation of the church (Eph. 2: 20; 1 Cor. 3: 10). Moreover, eight of the twelve stones adorning the breastpiece of the high priest are used to **adorn** the twelve foundation stones representing the twelve apostles, and the other four are equivalent to those in Exodus 28⁵²⁰ (see above). Therefore, although the twelve tribes of Israel are first in existence, they are not equally “foundational” for the temple-city as are the twelve NT apostles.

The emphasis upon **names** symbolizes that God’s people are known by name—in contrast to the wicked whose names are not “known” by God (Matt. 7: 23; 25: 12). The names of six tribes of Israel were engraved on each of the two onyx stones on shoulder pieces of Aaron’s ephod and one tribe on each of the twelve stones of Aaron’s breastpiece, like the work of a skillful **jeweler**. Thus, God sees His people not as the world sees them—unnamed tribes of an insignificant nation or nameless commoners who foolishly believe in a crucified Jew named Jesus. He sees them as precious jewels set into gold by a skilled craftsmen. Aaron bore the names of the tribes of Israel into the Holy of Holies once a year to make atonement for their sins, and Christ bore the names of all His people, Jew and Gentile, upon His heart as He entered **the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands** (Heb. 9: 11-12). Once more we note the continuity of the people of God from age to age. The church consists of both Jews and Gentiles who have believed with father Abraham. There is one purpose for Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, not an earthly purpose for Israel and a heavenly purpose for the church as taught by traditional dispensational theology.

The measuring of the city (cf. Ezek. 40 and 45) is equivalent to the **numbering** and **sealing** of the saints in Revelation 7, in which 144,000 were numbered. This number, as indicated, is symbolic of the completed number of God’s people (12x12x10x10x10; cf. Eph. 1: 13; 4: 30 for “sealing”).⁵²¹ The **gold measuring rod** indicates the perfect standard of measurement according

⁵¹⁶ Beale, p. 1039

⁵¹⁷ Hendriksen, p. 242

⁵¹⁸ Beale, p. 1120

⁵¹⁹ Hendriksen, pp. 246-247; so also Mounce, p. 379

⁵²⁰ Beale, p. 1080

⁵²¹ Beale, p. 1072

to God's omniscience.⁵²² There can be no mistakes in God's judgment: "The Lord knows those who are His" (2 Tim. 2: 19). Of those the Father has given Him, Jesus will "lose nothing...but will raise him up on the last day" (Jn. 6: 39-40).

The city is laid out as a cube like the "inner sanctuary" (Holy of Holies) of Solomon's temple—its length and width and height are equal (20: 16; cf. 1 Kings 6: 20). While only the high priest was allowed into the Holy of Holies once a year, the veil separating it was torn in two (Mk. 15: 38), making way for all of God's people to enter His presence continually. As God characteristically walked in the garden in the cool of the evening (Gen. 3: 8), He will once more walk freely among His redeemed people, all priests, in the new temple-city, a cubic Holy of Holies of hyperbolic⁵²³ dimensions.

The cube signifies perfection, so the dwelling place Jesus prepares for His people lacks nothing for their security and well-being (Jn. 14: 2). Given the unusual measurements of the city, especially its height, it should be obvious that the measurements are not literal (**fifteen hundred miles**, NASB, or **12,000 stadia** x approximately 600 feet per stadia = 7, 200, 000 feet / 5,280 feet per mile = 1364 miles, NIV and ESV). The **seventy-two yards** (144 cubits x 1 ½ feet = 216 feet or 72 yards, the equivalent of 72 meters) is interpreted by some as the thickness of the walls, but this could be its height (the number itself corresponds to the 144,000 in Revelation 7). But even if this number refers to the height of the walls, the proportions do not lend themselves to literal interpretation since a city wall of 72 meters is still dwarfed by a city 1500 miles high. The length of 1500 miles is as long as the Roman Empire stretching from Spain to the Euphrates River, plenty large to contain all of God's people,⁵²⁴ but the measurements point symbolically to the idea that the new city encompasses the entire earth. These **human measurements** are also said to be **angelic**, that is, they point to the non-literal, spiritual and symbolic signification of the measurements. They could symbolize the impregnability⁵²⁵ of the city which provides perfect, eternal safety for the saints in the presence of God.⁵²⁶ Can anyone imagine attacking a city 1500 miles long, wide, and high? Osborne notes that at this point there are no enemies to fear, anyway.⁵²⁷ Yet, we must still think symbolically. There is separation between the saints whose names are in the book of life and the wicked whose names are not there and between those who are permitted to occupy the city and those who are banned from it.

Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. ¹⁵ **Outside [the city]** are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. (Revelation 22:14-15 NASB)

Given the parallelism between the vice-list⁵²⁸ of Revelation 22: 15 and that of Revelation 21: 8, we may infer that **outside** the city is equivalent to **the lake of fire**; but again, strict literal interpretations of spatial⁵²⁹ language in Revelation should be avoided.

⁵²² Complete and perfect knowledge

⁵²³ Exaggerated

⁵²⁴ Osborne, p. 753; Beale, p. 1076

⁵²⁵ Incapable of being overtaken

⁵²⁶ Beale, pp. 1077-1079; also Hendriksen, p. 246

⁵²⁷ Osborne, p. 754

⁵²⁸ A list or catalog of sins

⁵²⁹ Referring to physical space

The mention of **one** outside wall is significant. In Solomon’s temple, the court of the Jews was separated from the court of the Gentiles by an inside wall. Over the entrance from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the Jews was a warning sign, “Any Gentile entering this court will do so upon pain of death” (or something similar). But the temple-city has but one wall symbolically separating the chosen people of God from the wicked who may not enter the city gates. But **inside** the city there is perfect unity among all nationalities of God’s people.⁵³⁰

As the conclusion to his description of the city, John returns to the gates which serve as an *inclusio* for the entire description. The partial intent of the whole section is to inspire the reader’s awe at the almost indescribable brilliance and proportions of the entire city. He has taken the reader on a circular tour, so to speak, including the gates, perimeter wall, measurements, building materials—along with OT temple allusions—and is now bringing us back to the starting point. **The twelve gates** are described as **twelve pearls**—consisting not of millions of pearls each but **each gate** consisting of a **single pearl**. This is further confirmation of the symbolical description throughout Revelation 21. Could this be a hyperbolic allusion to Christ’s metaphor of the kingdom of heaven, the pearl of great price (Matt. 13: 46)? What is the worth of a pearl as big as a gate serving a wall that is 216 feet high? Such a pearl would be 250 feet in diameter.⁵³¹

The transparent gold (v. 21b) of the main street of the city is unlike any other gold known to man. It recalls the sea of glass in the throne room scene of Rev. 4: 6.

The reason both the city and its street are constructed of transparent gold is probably the same theme as the sea of glass in 4: 6: its own glory is insufficient, and it can only radiate through its transparency the incomparably greater glory of God himself. The splendor of earthly gold is inadequate; it must be transparent so God’s glory can shine through it.⁵³²

²² I saw **no temple** in it,
for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb
are its temple.

The OT temple symbolized the Immanuel principle of God’s presence with His people. Since God is now actually walking among them, there is no need of a temple. In fact, this has been true since the destruction of Herod’s reconstructed temple in 70 AD. God ordained its destruction with no intention of ever rebuilding it. Jesus referred to Himself as the true temple (Jn. 2: 19), and the Apostle Paul extended the meaning to include all believers united to Christ both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 6: 19; Eph. 2: 21). It is not as though the new Jerusalem has no temple **at all**, but its temple is not material, but spiritual, consisting of the triune God. The **Lord God the Almighty** should not be limited to God the Father only, but would include the Holy Spirit. Although OT prophecy (e.g. Ezekiel 40-43; Haggai 2: 9) foresaw the rebuilding of a physical temple of greater grandeur than any previous temple, they did not foresee the replacement of the physical temple in the person of Christ and His Jewish and Gentile church.⁵³³

²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it,

⁵³⁰ Beale, p. 1078

⁵³¹ Osborne, p. 758

⁵³² Osborne, p. 755

⁵³³ Beale, pp. 1090-1091

for the glory of God has illumined it,
and its lamp *is* the Lamb.

Verse 23 is an allusion to the original creation in Genesis when there was light at the spoken word of God before the creation of the heavenly bodies (sun, moon, stars) to govern day and night. John's theme of Jesus as the light of the world shining in the darkness is evident here (Jn. 1: 5; 9: 5, *passim*⁵³⁴). In God there is no darkness at all (1 Jn. 1: 5) because His glory illumines the darkness. For this reason, there will be **no night** (v. 25) in the new heavens and earth—probably not to be taken literally but figuratively for the presence of sin (see below).

²⁴The nations
will walk by its light,
and the kings of the earth
will bring their glory into it.

²⁵In the daytime (for there will be no night there)
its gates will never be closed;

²⁶**and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it;**

The nations will walk by its light refers to the light of the city as it emits the glory of God. As in Isaiah 2: 3 the nations will walk in the **ways** of God's law and follow the **paths** of righteousness. The reference to **the kings of the earth** is the first time in Revelation that this phrase has a demonstrably positive meaning. The kings of the earth have committed immoral acts with the whore, Babylon (17: 2, 18; 18: 3, 9), and they have formed a coalition with the beast to destroy Christ and His church (19: 19). Here, we have the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, partially fulfilled in the missionary outreach of the church. Some of the kings of the earth will be converted to Christ in obedient response to the warning of Psalm 2.

Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it. ³ And many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, To the house of the God of Jacob; That He may teach us concerning His ways And that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ⁴ And He will judge between the nations, And will render decisions for many peoples; And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they learn war. (Isaiah 2:2-4 NASB)

[Ironically, the quotation of Isaiah 2: 4b, "they will hammer their swords into plowshares", is used by the United Nations as the caption⁵³⁵ of a metal sculpture outside the UN building in New York City. Apparently the UN was established with messianic pretensions of establishing world peace. They conveniently omit the first part of the verse referring to Christ, the true Messiah without whom there can be no peace. Although the UN has done many good things for humanity (with some abuses), its humanistic⁵³⁶ roots render it incapable of producing long-term fruit. It is

⁵³⁴ In many places

⁵³⁵ Explanation of the sculpture

⁵³⁶ Philosophical humanism teaches that man is the center of all things and has the solution to all problems within himself apart from a Creator.

a government-funded, long-term relief agency and colossal bureaucracy, gobbling up billions of dollars every year which private relief agencies could have used more efficiently. The question remains whether private donors would have given generously to private agencies without the coercion of taxation.]

Getting back to the text, the kings of the earth **bring their glory** into the temple-city (v. 24). This glory is the richness of diverse cultures throughout the world reflecting God's glory in His image-bearers. Revelation 7: 9 indicates that people from every nation, tribe, and tongue will worship the Lamb. All of these diverse people groups will bring their glory into the new temple-city, the new heaven and new earth. Verse 26 adds the word **honor**, supporting the idea that the glory mentioned in v. 24 is positive glory, not vain-glory. The context of v. 24 makes this clear; moreover, *doxa* (glory), used 17 times in Revelation, always has a positive connotation. The word means something "heavy" or substantial as opposed to light-weight or unsubstantial. Nothing sinful is allowed entrance into the city (v. 27). The glory being brought into the temple-city stands in contrast to the "glory" of Babylon the great built by Necuchadnezzar (Dan. 4: 30; Isa. 13: 19). John envisions the conversion of some of **the kings of the earth** as well as the transformation of some cultures through the influence of the gospel in fulfillment of Isaiah 60: 3, "Nations will come to your light, And kings to the brightness of your rising" (Isaiah 60:3).⁵³⁷ Because of God's common grace to all men, we should expect that there is much about human cultures that is worth preserving. Whenever people conform consciously or unconsciously to the laws of God—either moral, economic, socio-political, or physical laws—they create "kingdom culture". Culture created in opposition to these laws is "counterfeit culture" originating from Satan and his lies about what is "true, just, and beautiful".⁵³⁸ As Isaiah says,

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!²¹ Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes And clever in their own sight! (Isaiah 5:20-21 NASB)

As we have said previously, the destruction of the world at the second coming of Christ is not annihilation but purification. It stands to reason that since all truth is God's truth, all the knowledge of this world employed in the development of true science and technology, true art and music, true history (not revisionist history), true literature (not cheap, erotic romance novels sold in grocery stores) comes originally from the mind of God. The word "true" must be used to qualify each of these areas of cultural development. Not all science and technology is true; some is counterfeit. Some "science" is false, and therefore does not qualify as science. I personally believe that evolution is not science although the majority of academics world-wide (including many genuine Christians) swear allegiance to its factuality.⁵³⁹ My opinion is that many Christian academics have succumbed to the pressures of academic conformity while non-Christian academics are religiously committed to evolution despite the facts.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁷ Beale, p. 1097, including citation from Isaiah

⁵³⁸ Darrow L. Miller with Marit Newton, *LifeWork—a Biblical Theology of What You Do Every Day*, pp. 96-98. Isa. 5: 20 also cited by Miller.

⁵³⁹ A "theory" has to pass various tests of verification to become scientific law. Evolution has never passed the tests of verification, but has **by-passed** these tests by academic consent to become a "law". But academic consent is not scientific verification. By popular academic consent, Adolf Hitler—working from an evolutionary model—exterminated six million Jews in his quest to purify the Arian race, but this consent did not produce a scientific fact.

⁵⁴⁰ Two very helpful documentaries exposing religious commitment to evolution are *The Truth Project* by Dale Tackett and *Expelled* by a well-known comedian, Ben Stein.

Some art is not true art, and some music is not true music, only noise. There is much room for disagreement among Christians as to what defines true art and music, but since God is the standard of everything, only He can ultimately decide how everything should be defined. In our sinful state, we can only attempt to approximate this standard, but we cannot say that God is neutral or apathetic about the various expressions of culture. He either approves or disapproves. Nevertheless, since all “true truth”⁵⁴¹ belongs to God, there is no reason why He should destroy the true scientific and cultural achievements of men (even sinful men) derived from His own mind. Everything He made was **good** and every true thought is good.

Verse 25 says that the city’s **gates will never be closed** and in v. 26, there is a repetition of the idea that the city will be filled with **glory**. In other words, not only will kingdom culture produced in the past be preserved, but the culture-making activities of redeemed humanity will continue eternally in the new heaven and new earth. The gates of the city represent its commercial and cultural activity; moreover, the gates of the temple-city are **always open** for “business”, although this business will be far different from the competitive, dog-eat-dog economic markets of the present world. By way of contrast, “heaven on earth” is depicted in modern advertising as perpetual leisure—strolling on a remote beach, basking in the sun beside an exotic pool, or gambling in Atlantic City. Do not be fooled. If someone doesn’t enjoy at least some kind of productive labor, he will not enjoy heaven; and I seriously doubt that he will go there.⁵⁴²

For there will be no night there may refer to the fact that nighttime is generally the cover for man’s sinful activity or counterfeit culture. Several passages in the NT lend support to this theory.

Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. ¹² **The night is almost gone, and the day is near.** Therefore let us lay aside **the deeds of darkness** and put on the armor of light. (Romans 13:11-12 NASB)

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief;⁵ for you are all **sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness;**⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.⁷ For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk **get drunk at night.**⁸ But **since we are of the day,** let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. (1 Thessalonians 5:4-8 NASB)

But in the temple-city, there is perpetual daylight for legitimate commercial and cultural expression. Redeemed humanity will have nothing to hide, no shameful deeds to conceal under the cover of darkness. (No trafficking in human flesh, no shady business deals, no “too-big-to-fail banking bailouts for unscrupulous”⁵⁴³ investors.) For this reason, I believe the words, **there will be no night there**, should be interpreted metaphorically, not literally. (How else will we see the moon and stars which are also **good**.)

²⁷ and nothing unclean,

⁵⁴¹ An expression coined by Francis Schaeffer

⁵⁴² You cannot be faulted for not enjoying **every** form of labor in this sin-tossed, ground-cursed world, but people who are chronically lazy, and who despise anything but leisure, have no understanding of the Bible or the gospel.

⁵⁴³ Crooked

and no one who practices abomination and lying,
 shall ever come into it,
 but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Verse 27 reinforces the interpretation of the exclusive entrance of positive glory into the temple-city. Mega-cities around the world have often become cesspools of greed, murder, immorality, rape, poverty and every form of injustice. Seeking a better life in the city, many people often encounter more difficulty there than ever before. Most assuredly, John was contrasting the city of light with ancient Rome, the city of darkness. While nothing **clean** could find refuge in Rome, nothing **unclean** will find even temporary entrance into the temple-city. Moreover, the guarding of the city from anything or anyone unclean is an allusion to the guarding of the tree of life from fallen man. Verse 27 forms an *inclusio* with Revelation 20: 15, “And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.” The lake of fire, therefore, is symbolically located **outside** the new city (Rev. 22: 15). Spatial language is used to depict the spiritual separation between the redeemed and lost.

“Bringing glory” into the city in vv 24 and 26 is spatial language, but it conveys a nonspatial notion. This is supported by recalling that the dimensions of the city in vv 15-17 are spatial though the meaning conveyed is nonspatial. Consequently, it would be incorrect to infer that the picture of people making a pilgrimage into the new Jerusalem refers to a literal pilgrimage from outer spaces into the city's inner space, “just as it is false to infer that the city covers 144,000 square stadia of earth, but not the whole earth.”

Therefore the perpetually opened gates and the apparent ceaseless pilgrimage of Gentiles into the city throughout eternity are not intended to be understood literally, since it would not take a finite number of Gentiles an infinite eternity to enter the new Jerusalem. Neither can the image imply that unsaved Gentiles wander for a long time outside the city after Christ's coming and then enter it at various times when they come to repentance.⁵⁴⁴

Revelation 22

Then he showed me a river of the water of life,
 clear as crystal,
coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,
² in the middle of its street.

On either side of the river was the **tree of life**,
 bearing twelve *kinds* of fruit,
 yielding its fruit every month;
 and the leaves of the tree were for **the healing of the nations**.

The city imagery of Revelation 21 gives way in Revelation 22 to garden imagery. The temple-city is also a garden-city comprehensive of all the natural wonders of the restored creation—rivers, streams, mountains, meadows, forests and open grasslands. God's people will not dwell in the “concrete jungle” of a congested city stingy with green space, but in a garden-city flowing with water and teeming with botanical and zoological life.⁵⁴⁵ The **river of the water of life** has a dual reference. The clear reference is to Ezekiel's vision of water flowing from the temple south of the altar, increasing in progressive stages until it was as deep as a river (Ezek. 47: 1-9). The

⁵⁴⁴ Beale, p. 1099, also quoting Gundry, “New Jerusalem”

⁵⁴⁵ Okay, yes, I believe that there will be animal life in heaven. God said of them, “It is good.”

river made everything **fresh**, even restoring **the sea**, namely, the Dead Sea, so that biological life could live in it. There were also **many trees** on either side of the river recalling the tree of life in the Garden of Eden and the temple-city.

⁷ Now when I had returned, behold, on the bank of the river there *were* **very many trees on the one side and on the other**.⁸ Then he said to me, "These waters go out toward the eastern region and go down into **the Arabah**; then they go toward **the sea**, being made to flow into the sea, **and the waters of the sea become fresh**."⁹ "It will come about that every living creature which swarms in every place where the river goes, will live. And there will be very many fish, for these waters go there and *the others* become fresh; **so everything will live where the river goes**. (Ezekiel 47:7-9 NASB)

The passage in Revelation also recalls the promise of Isaiah 35 which blends the signs of Christ's first coming with the consummated kingdom of His second coming. Notice also from the Isaiah text that the guarding of the highway is similar to the guarding of the temple-city so that nothing **unclean** will enter (Rev. 22: 15) and that **sorrow and sighing** will be a thing of the past (Rev. 21: 4). Moreover, **no lion will be there** (v. 9). This seems like a contradiction of Isaiah 11: 6-7 which speaks of the radical domestication of predatory animals; but in Isaiah 35 the negation (no) could mean only that the predatory lion will no longer exist in the new world order since the alienation between different parts of creation will be eliminated (Gen. 9: 2).

The wilderness and the desert will be glad, And the Arabah will rejoice and **blossom**; Like the crocus² **It will blossom profusely** And rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, The majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the LORD, The majesty of our God.³ Encourage the exhausted, and strengthen the feeble.⁴ Say to those with anxious heart, "Take courage, fear not. Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance; The recompense of God will come, But He will save you."⁵ Then the eyes of the blind will be opened And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.⁶ Then the lame will leap like a deer, And the tongue of the mute will shout for joy. **For waters will break forth in the wilderness And streams in the Arabah**.⁷ The scorched land will become a pool And the thirsty ground springs of water; In the haunt of jackals, its resting place, Grass *becomes* reeds and rushes.⁸ A highway will be there, a roadway, And it will be called the Highway of Holiness. The **unclean** will not travel on it, But it *will* be for him who walks *that* way, And fools will not wander *on it*.⁹ **No lion** will be there, Nor will any vicious beast go up on it; These will not be found there. But the redeemed will walk *there*,¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD will return And come with joyful shouting to Zion, With everlasting joy upon their heads. They will find gladness and joy, And **sorrow and sighing will flee away**. (Isaiah 35:1-10 NASB)

John also remembers the Lord's words at the Feast of Booths and at the well with the Samaritan woman recorded in his gospel account.

Now on the last day, the great *day* of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."³⁸ "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow **rivers of living water**.'" (John 7:37-38 NASB)

Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you **living water**." (John 4:10 NASB)

The **river of the water of life** may also be an allusion⁵⁴⁶ to the four rivers of Eden abundantly watering the garden of Eden.

⁵⁴⁶ An indirect reference

Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers.¹¹ The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold.¹² The gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there.¹³ The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush.¹⁴ The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (Genesis 2:10-14 NASB)

The picture here is that of a lush, green environment amply supplied with the essential resource of water for life and productivity. If we look at TV news coverage of the Middle East (including Israel, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, etc.), we wonder how Moses could describe the garden so favorably. Every scene we see today appears dry and barren. However, since the Genesis flood and other geophysical changes to the earth's surface, we cannot be sure about the **exact location** of the garden. Secondly, because of man's fall, drastic environmental changes have taken place through the exploitation of creation causing erosion, deforestation, and its consequence of drought and desertification.⁵⁴⁷ Some experts are saying that the Sahara Desert is expanding southward at the rate of one mile per year across its width. Deserts generally have a negative connotation in the Bible as the result of God's curse—hence, **the scorched land** and **the haunt of jackals**⁵⁴⁸. It is a place of testing and trial. In the restored earth, even the deserts will disappear underneath the foliage of green plants and flowers. The whole earth will be fit for human habitation.⁵⁴⁹

The river flows from **the throne of God and of the Lamb**, signifying that life is from God—biological life and spiritual life. The abundance of physical imagery discourages any dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual. The new city coming down from heaven—although described metaphorically in Revelation 21 as a city of transparent gold—is definitely a **place** suitable for man's physical existence.

The phrase, **in the middle of its street** seems to be the location of the river, not that of **the tree of life**. The NIV reads,

“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb **down the middle of the great street of the city**. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (Rev 22:1-2)

The picture is of a river flowing through the middle of the street with the tree of life—many of them—lining the banks of the river on both sides. The trees' roots drink abundant water from the river; therefore, their leaves will never wither and die, recalling the righteous man whose “leaf will not wither”.

He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers. (Psalm 1:3 NASB)

⁵⁴⁷ Creation of new deserts

⁵⁴⁸ Wild dogs

⁵⁴⁹ No offense intended to readers who love the desert, but I'm a born and reared Mississippi boy accustomed to green grass and oak trees 30 meters tall—lots of them. Maybe you don't like my description of the restored earth, but I just can't picture eternal life in the Sahara Desert. There is great beauty there, but very little life. Perhaps we may expect God to preserve the beauty of deserts like that of Idaho, Arizona, or New Mexico.

While the tree of life was forbidden to fallen Adam and his offspring, it is easily accessible and inviting to those occupying the new garden-city. Bearing its fruit **every month**, eternal life forbidden to sinful man is abundantly available to the redeemed community. The city teems with both physical and spiritual life. The leaves of the tree are for **the healing of the nations**. Although the expression, **kings of the earth**, has had an almost consistently, though not exclusively, negative connotation in Revelation, the analogy of Scripture generally presents the nations as the object of God's blessing and salvation (Gen. 12: 1-3; Isa. 2: 1-4; Rev. 21:24). Men and women **from every tribe and tongue and people and nation** have been purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ (Rev. 5: 9), and we may confidently expect representatives from every people group and culture in the new heaven and earth bringing the richness of their cultural wealth into the temple-city (see discussion above). If the promise of Revelation 5: 9 is exhaustive—including representatives from every culture **without exclusion**—then it might suggest that the coming of Christ is farther off than many Christians would believe.⁵⁵⁰ There are many remote people groups and cultures who have not yet heard the message of the gospel, and there are still many languages (tongues) which have yet to receive a translated Bible.

The **healing of the nations** supports the idea that the effects of sin on every nation and culture will be corrected (healed), thus unveiling the God-given beauty of every people-group that lay hidden under the prevailing counterfeit culture. I persist with the interpretation that destruction by fire implies purification, not annihilation (see above).

³ **There will no longer be any curse;**
 and the throne of God and of the Lamb
 will be in it,
 and His bond-servants **will serve Him;**
⁴ they will see His face,
 and His name *will be on their foreheads.*

As the Bible begins without the curse, so it ends with the curse lifted. Moreover, as it begins with Adam serving (*abad*; also translated “cultivate” or “work”) in the garden-temple (see above), it ends with redeemed Adam (mankind) serving God in the garden-city-temple. In Revelation 20: 6, believers are identified as **priests**, here as **bondservants**. Bondservants are owned by their masters. Since we are **bought with a price** (1 Cor. 6: 20; 7: 23), we are God's possession (Eph. 1: 14; Tit. 2: 14; 1 Pet. 2: 9). As God's slaves, not the slaves of other men or our sinful selves, we may even now do our work unto the Lord. But if we can serve Christ even in this fallen world (Col. 3: 23-24), how much fuller obedience in labor can we give Him with complete sanctification? God never cursed the work of men's hands, only the ground from which man's labor would yield fruit (Gen. 3: 17). The ground is resistant in the present earth, but non-resistant in the restored earth; it will produce fruit (results) never before imagined. As Adam and Eve, believers will have little preference for play over work. Both will be equally enjoyable.

As Adam served in the garden in the presence of God, so also will believers serve in the garden-city in the presence of the Lamb. God is spirit, invisible; but Christ is eternally God incarnate in human flesh, visible to the human eye. We **will see His face** (v. 4, cf. 1 Cor. 13: 12). In contrast to those who took the mark of the beast on their foreheads, the saints will take the name of Christ on their foreheads as a sign of obedience to His words (v. 4). This recalls the words of Moses,

⁵⁵⁰ Many past cultures, of course, have become extinct.

"These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your **hand** and they shall be as frontals on your **forehead**. (Deuteronomy 6:6-8 NASB)

And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their **right hand** or on their **forehead**, (Revelation 13:16 NASB)

Those who take the mark of the beast follow him in thought (the forehead) and deed (the right hand). Likewise, those who have Christ at the forefront of their thoughts also follow Him in **deed**. Moreover, as the Deuteronomy passage indicates, there is no contradiction in Scripture between being committed to God in heart and thought, as if an intelligent Christianity is necessarily unspiritual (vv. 6 and 8; cf. Matt. 22: 37; Mk. 12: 30; Lk. 10: 27). His law is on our hearts **and** in our minds. Christianity which is **willfully** ignorant of the word of God is not heart-Christianity.⁵⁵¹ But the reverse is also true. Merely academic Christianity is a contradiction in terms. People who do not **love** God with all their hearts cannot fulfill the law (1 Cor. 13). Their standard of conduct may be according to the law, but the motive (love for God) and the goal (the glory of God) are absent.

⁵ And **there will no longer** be *any* night;
and they **will not have need**
of the light of a lamp
nor the light of the sun,
because the Lord God will illumine them;
and they **will reign** forever and ever.

What is spoken parenthetically in Revelation 21: 25, (**for there will be no night there**), is repeated for emphasis in v. 5 (see above on 21: 25). The word phrase, **has no need** (21: 23) parallels **will not have need** (22: 5). But the negation of **need** does not necessarily imply the negation of **existence**. Just as the city has no need of a physical temple (21: 22) since God is its temple, the city also has no need of the sun and moon because God is its light. Nothing is hidden in the new city under cover of darkness; nothing needs to be hidden. I seriously doubt that believers will have need of food but will be able to eat food just for the enjoyment of it (Lk. 21: 41-43; Jn. 21: 1-14). **They will reign** indicates the nature of our work. While working as **priests** and **bondslaves**, believers are **ruling** over the earth, having dominion as the vice-regents of God, the way God intended from the beginning (Gen. 1: 26). The difference between our reign and Adam's is that it will never be interrupted by sin. We will reign **forever and ever**. This is not the same reign of the saints in heaven during the millennium—the church age—which last a definite period of time followed by Satan's release and final rebellion (Rev. 20: 6). The reign of v. 5 is eternal.

⁶ And he said to me.
"These words are **faithful and true**";
and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets,
sent His angel
to show to His bond-servants

⁵⁵¹ I must qualify this statement by saying that little children or disadvantaged adults can be saved by a simple faith, but Christians who are wilfully ignorant of the Bible do not demonstrate heart Christianity through a false pietism.

the things which must **soon** take place.

⁷ "And behold, **I am coming quickly**.

Blessed is he who **heeds**

the words of the prophecy of this book."

The prophecy to John is **faithful and true**, assuring him that the events predicted will surely come to pass. Moreover, the whole vision of the new heavens and new earth is also true, and it is revealed to John (**to show his bond-servants**) for the purpose of encouraging the saints to faith and holiness. This is the main point of the epilogue in vv. 6-21.⁵⁵² It is very easy to get lost in the details of Revelation and lose sight of its main message and purpose. As one reads through this book, he should be encouraged by the fact that God has a wonderful future ahead for his faithful people, a future that overshadows any suffering they may experience in this present world. It is not worthy of comparison to the glory that shall be revealed to us (Rom. 8: 18). This glorious future should be an encouragement toward obedience and a deterrent to any form of compromise with the world (cf. Rev. 2—3). **Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book** is not an exhortation to intellectual comprehension, but to obedience. The visions of Revelation, particularly the final visions of Revelation 21 and 22, should be indelibly impressed upon our minds and hearts energizing us to faithfulness whatever it may cost us in this present, fleeting life. If you lose your life for the sake of the kingdom of God you will save it.

"For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. ²⁵ "For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself? (Luke 9:24-25 NASB)

Jim Eliot, missionary and martyr to the Wodona Indians in Ecuador a half century ago said, "He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." We cannot keep this world. Babylon will fall and will one day seem like an illusion, but the new heavens and earth is eternal. The visions of these two chapters help believers to keep life in proper perspective, to prevent double vision and the error of trying to serve two masters (Matt. 6: 22-24).⁵⁵³ This is what Paul means when he tells the Colossians,

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. (Colossians 3:1-2 NASB)

These things will **soon** come to pass (v. 7). If we understand Revelation from the **idealist** perspective in which the visions of Revelation represent principles of spiritual warfare going on throughout the church age in a repetitive pattern rather than to specific historical events, then the word **soon** has a broad interpretation. Many things described in the prophecy do take place soon, even as John is writing.⁵⁵⁴

The three-fold promise, **I am coming quickly** (vv. 7, 12, 20), poses a more difficult problem for amillennialists, postmillennialists, and premillennialists. For preterists, who believe the events of

⁵⁵² Beale, p. 1123

⁵⁵³ The word for "clear" in Matt. 6: 22 may also be translated "single". In other words, the person seeking the kingdom of God has single vision rather than double vision. His single purpose is to seek the kingdom and its righteousness, rather than laying up treasures on earth (see context). He is not attempting to serve two masters.

⁵⁵⁴ Poythress, p. 27

Revelation are fulfilled either in 70 AD or by the end of the Roman Empire in 476 AD,⁵⁵⁵ **I am coming quickly** makes perfect sense. But the preterists have other challenges (see below). According to modernists who do not hold to the infallibility of the Bible, John simply got it wrong. This means, of course, that the angel giving him the prophecy also got it wrong. Such a view is unacceptable to those who have a high view of Scripture. Other solutions are plausible within evangelical circles, but each has its own difficulty.⁵⁵⁶

(1) As mentioned above, some of the events of Revelation do come **soon**, including the warfare, famine, disease and death of Revelation 6 (the four horsemen). **However**, Christ's "coming" in Revelation 1: 3 and 22: 10 are "bookends"⁵⁵⁷ enclosing the entire prophecy of Revelation. Thus, the fulfillment of **every part** of the book is **near**.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; **for the time is near**. (Revelation 1:3 NASB)

And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, **for the time is near**." (Revelation 22:10 NASB)

In other words, the time is near for the fulfillment of **all** the words of the whole prophecy of Revelation, not just **some** of them.

(2) The "coming" of Christ that is "soon" is not the second coming but various "comings" of punishment or reward (e.g. Rev. 2: 5, 16; 3: 11).

"Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent. (Revelation 2:5 NASB)

"Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth. (Revelation 2:16 NASB)

"I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown. (Revelation 3:11 NASB)

The quickness of Christ's coming in these texts must be understood within the **context** of Christ's words to three specific churches as well as other churches that imitated either their sin or obedience. He would not wait until the second coming to remove their lampstands or punish their false teaching. If the spiritual condition of modern Turkey is any indication, Christ **came** in judgment to Asia Minor long ago. Likewise, Christ also promises the church in Philadelphia, about which he has nothing negative to say, that He is **coming quickly** to deliver them from the hour of extreme testing and persecution (Rev. 3: 10-11). These "comings" in Revelation 2—3 point to an "inaugurated understanding" of His repeated comings in blessing and judgment upon the church throughout the church age, one that is consummated at the final coming.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁵ The date preferred by Edward Gibbon, a noted Roman historian

⁵⁵⁶ Poythress, pp. 35-37

⁵⁵⁷ The technical word is *inclusio*, but "bookends" (Poythress' term) helps us understand the concept.

⁵⁵⁸ Beale, p. 1127

However, Poythress observes that these texts have specific contexts which serve to limit the kind of coming in view within each context. That is, some kind of immediate punishment or blessing seems to be implied in each of these texts, but not the final coming. But in 1: 7; 22: 20; and 21: 1—22: 5, the context is not limited to specific contexts, but is clearly the second coming of Christ.

(3) The second coming of Christ is literally **near**—the preterist interpretation. The whole prophecy of Revelation relates to the problems mentioned in the letters to the churches in Revelation 2—3 (cultic prostitution, martyrdom, etc.). **However**, every apocalyptic passage in Scripture, however futuristic, has practical applications for its present audience. For example, Daniel 7—12, written to exiled Jews in Babylon, refers to events far into the future beyond his immediate audience, but with great practical value for them and succeeding generations. This is also true of Matthew 24 (the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD) and 1 Thessalonians 4—5. The value of a text for the present audience does not preclude its consummate fulfillment at some date far into the future.

(4) The nearness of the prophecy of Revelation is a “structural nearness” that applies to the entire period of “inaugurated eschatology” from the first advent of Christ to the second coming. Daniel 2: 44-45 supports this interpretation.

"In the days of those kings the God of heaven **will set up a kingdom** which will never be destroyed, and *that* kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.⁴⁵ "Inasmuch as you saw that a stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it crushed the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold, the great God has made known to the king what will take place in the future; so the dream is true and its interpretation is trustworthy." (Daniel 2:44-45 NASB)

The stone cut out of the mountain which crushes all competitive kingdoms is a clear reference to the kingdom of Christ, a kingdom inaugurated **in the days of those kings**—namely, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome—all of which are form the composite of a single statue in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan. 2). The prophecy in Daniel 2 occurred about 605 BC. Therefore, what was very distant from Daniel’s point of view was “near” from John’s point of view almost 700 years later. Christ had come and died for the sins of His people, had risen victoriously from the dead, and had ascended into heaven to reign at the Father’s right hand. Jerusalem had already been destroyed—all of these events foreseen in Daniel 9: 25-27.⁵⁵⁹ As John writes, some of the things prophesied in Daniel had already been realized and others were being realized, e.g. the rise of the Roman Empire predicted in Daniel 7: 7).⁵⁶⁰ Moreover, John sees himself at the **last hour** when many **antichrists** have already arrived on the scene of history as forerunners of the final Antichrist (1 Jn. 2: 18). Thus, the church throughout the last 2000 years has lived in times that are “structurally” similar to the final crisis of the one Antichrist of Revelation. Daniel’s “little horn” (Dan. 7: 8) is already working **in principle**, waiting for his full manifestation at the end of the age in the man of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2: 3). Before the final, climactic crisis, there will be many crises which reflect the same character or structure as the final climax near the second coming.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁹ If John was written in 90 AD, a disputed date, but accepted by most scholars.

⁵⁶⁰ Poythress, p. 195

⁵⁶¹ Poythress, pp. 34-36

The phrase, **the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets** (v. 6) is the basis and assurance of the trustworthiness of this prophecy. God has spoken to His people continually through faithful prophets in whom He has put His word (Deut. 18: 15-22). Moses was the greatest prophet of the Old Covenant (Num. 12: 1-8)⁵⁶² followed by the much greater prophet of the New Covenant, Jesus Christ (Heb. 1: 1-4; 3: 1-6).

Moreover, the pattern of God's ways with His people has always been that He would reveal everything they needed to know through the prophetic ministry.

Surely the Lord GOD does nothing Unless He reveals His secret counsel To His servants the prophets. (Amos 3:7 NASB)

Likewise, God considered it necessary for the church to understand something—but surely not everything—about the persecutions and challenges she would face from the 1st century until the coming of Christ. The people of God should not count their fiery ordeal of affliction a strange thing (1 Pet. 4: 12). “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” God wanted His church to be vigilant and prepared for Christ's second coming throughout her turbulent history; otherwise she would surely be overcome by external and internal forces. From the first advent until the second coming of Christ, whoever **heeds** the prophecy of Revelation will be **blessed** (v. 7).

⁸ I, John, am the one
who heard
and saw
these things.

And when
I heard
and saw,
I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel
who showed me these things.

⁹ But he said to me,
"Do not do that.
I am a fellow servant of yours
and of your brethren the prophets
and of those who heed the words of this book.
Worship God."

For a second time, John falls down at the feet of an angel to worship him; and for a second time, he is told not to do so. The angel considers himself a **fellow servant** of John and John's **brethren the prophets** as well as any believer who gives **heed** to the prophecy. To reiterate what has been said before, angel worship is forbidden. They are all “ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation” (Hebrews 1:14 NASB). The angel includes his own work as part of the long prophetic ministry of those who informed the OT and NT saints of God's work in history.

¹⁰ And he said to me,
"Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book,

⁵⁶² For an excellent treatment of this passage, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*

for the time is **near**.

¹¹ "Let the one who does wrong,
still do wrong;
and the one who is filthy,
still be filthy;
and let the one who is righteous,
still practice righteousness;
and the one who is holy,
still keep himself holy."

¹² "Behold, **I am coming quickly**,
and My reward *is* with Me,
to render to every man
according to what he has done.

¹³ "**I am** the Alpha and the Omega,
the first and the last,
the beginning and the end."

John is commanded by the angel, **Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book**, the very opposite of the command he received earlier by a voice from heaven.

When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "**Seal up** the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and **do not write them**." (Revelation 10:4 NASB)

Similarly, Daniel is ordered to **seal up vision and prophecy** and to **seal up the book until the end of time**. Daniel never receives the opposite command **not** to seal up his vision or the book.

"Seventy weeks have been decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sin, to make atonement for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, **to seal up vision and prophecy** and to anoint the most holy *place*. (Daniel 9:24 NASB)

"But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and **seal up the book until the end of time**; many will go back and forth, and knowledge will increase." (Daniel 12:4 NASB)

How can we account for the differences in these commands? In Daniel's day, there was much left to be revealed concerning God's plan for Israel, and His plan for the end of time; and Daniel was not permitted to understand everything God was revealing to him in visions. In Daniel 8, Daniel was instructed to **seal up** (NIV, not **keep secret**, NASB), the visions pertaining to the persecution of the Jewish people under Antiochus Epiphanes (167-164 BC). If the vision took place in 550 BC, then the actual events prophesied did not take place until 383 years later. He was instructed to seal them up or preserve them⁵⁶³ until such a time as the prophecy was needed by the post-exilic Jews living in Palestine. It would be better for them to be forewarned ahead of time before the persecutions took place. Likewise, in Daniel 9 and 12, the sealing up of the vision, prophecy, and the book signifies the concealing of future events **until the end of time**. But the end of time was not **near** in Daniel's day as it was in John's.

⁵⁶³ Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, pp. 105, 112

In Revelation 10: 4, John is not permitted, at that point in the prophecy, to reveal all the details of God's judgments. This information would be reserved until the end of the prophecy. The statement in Revelation 10: 6-7 that **there will be delay no longer** and **then the mystery of God is finished** (v. 7; cf. Rev. 15: 1, 8) indicates that the finality of judgment is associated with the seventh trumpet.⁵⁶⁴ The details of this trumpet and the final judgment are reserved until the end of the prophecy; thus, in Revelation 22: 10, John is instructed **not** to seal up the prophecy since the time of judgment is **near**.⁵⁶⁵ Every detail about the final judgment **necessary** for God's people can now be disclosed.

What Daniel prophesied can now be understood because the prophecies have begun to be fulfilled and the latter days have begun. That "the words of the prophecy" are not sealed means that now, at last, the OT end-time prophecies, especially Daniel's, have begun to be fulfilled and, in the light of that fulfillment, can now be understood better. It thus indicates not only the beginning of fulfillment, but also the revelation of greater insight into the prophecies, which was kept from OT saints (so likewise Eph. 3: 4-5). In particular, Christ's death, resurrection, and reign over history and the saint's tribulation are where fulfillment of OT prophecies begins. Through Christ's initial fulfillment and teaching, saints can have a greater insight into OT prophecy and better obey God's word for their generation.⁵⁶⁶

Following in verse 11 is a series of statements suggesting that **the time for spiritual transformation has passed**. The statement parallels that of Daniel 12: 10 and Ezekiel 3: 27.⁵⁶⁷

"Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand. (Daniel 12:10 NASB)

"But when I speak to you, I will open your mouth and you will say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' He who hears, let him hear; and he who refuses, let him refuse; for they are a rebellious house. (Ezekiel 3:27 NASB)

The difference, as Beale has noted, is that v. 11 comes as an exhortation rather than a simple indicative statement⁵⁶⁸ or as passive permission, as in Ezekiel. The angel is not counseling men to sin; he is merely stating the fact that judgment has been pronounced upon the righteous and the unrighteous, making future moral transformation impossible. Those who have continued as unrepentant sinners are now confirmed as unrepentant sinners. Those who are righteous are confirmed as righteous; and each person will soon be rewarded according to his deeds (v. 12). Similarly, Mounce:

The major thrust of the verse is that since the end of time is now at hand men are certain to reap the consequences of the kinds of lives they have led. The time arrives when change is impossible because character has already been determined by a lifetime of habitual action. The arrival of the end forecloses any possibility of alteration.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁴ Poythress, pp. 125-126

⁵⁶⁵ See discussion above about "structural nearness"

⁵⁶⁶ Beale, p. 1130

⁵⁶⁷ Cited by Beale, p. 1131, and Poythress, p. 196

⁵⁶⁸ Beale, p. 1131

⁵⁶⁹ Mounce, pp. 392-393

The theme of reprobation⁵⁷⁰ highlighted in the plagues of Egypt has already been revisited in the plagues of Revelation which did not bring men to repentance. Four times the words **did not repent** appear in the prophecy (Rev. 9: 20-21; 16: 9, 11). Regardless of the severity of judgment, earth-dwellers persist in their evil **deeds, murders, sorceries, immorality, and theft**. As we learn from the reprobation of Pharaoh in Exodus, men also harden their own hearts, followed by God's judicial hardening. Yet, God had sovereignly decided to harden Pharaoh's heart before he hardened his own heart (Ex. 7: 3). As Romans 9 teaches, God loved Jacob and hated Esau before either had been born and before either had done anything good or bad so that His purpose according to **His** choice, not according to men's choice or works, might stand (Rom. 9: 11-13).

In the 1st century, the judicial hardening of unrepentant Jews in Palestine had risen in proportion to their negative response to the miracles and teaching ministry of Christ. Christ began with forthright instruction from the Law in the Sermon on the Mount, but because of their hardness of heart, He began teaching them in parables (Matt. 13: 11-16), thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah,

He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.'¹⁰ "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."¹¹ Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated *and* without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate, (Isaiah 6:9-11 NASB)

After quoting this Isaiah prophecy, Jesus says to His disciples, "But blessed are your eyes, because they see; and your ears, because they hear" (Matthew 13:16 NASB), thus anticipating the repeated formula of Revelation, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Revelation 2:29 NASB). The repetitive exhortation to hear in Revelation served the same purpose as the warning of Isaiah and Jesus: to harden incorrigible⁵⁷¹ sinners and to shock elect believers into consistent obedience.⁵⁷²

The Daniel 12: 10 reference ("those who have insight") recalls the urgent situation of the Jews (167-164 BC) during the persecutions of Antiochus Euphianes IV, descendent of Seleucus, one of the four generals receiving a portion of the empire of Alexander the Great. In Antiochus' attempt to Hellenize the Jewish nation—forcing it into the worship of Zeus—households were ransacked once a month by authorities in search of copies of the Torah⁵⁷³ or male children who had been circumcised. If either the Torah or a circumcised child was found, the head of the household was put to death.⁵⁷⁴ Daniel's prophecy warns faithful Jews ahead of time that while wicked Jews will not **understand** and would compromise their faith, **those who have insight will understand** and remain firm. The persecution by Antiochus Epiphanees served as the OT type of what would happen later in the Jewish-Roman War of 66-70 AD, but also what would happen during the severe persecution of the church in ancient Rome and throughout history. John utilizes the reference to Daniel as an encouragement to faithful Christians to persevere even as

⁵⁷⁰ The biblical doctrine of God hardening the hearts of unbelievers (cf. Romans 9, especially the example of Pharaoh).

⁵⁷¹ Incapable of correction

⁵⁷² Beale, p. 1132

⁵⁷³ The Law

⁵⁷⁴ Davis, p. 112

faithful Jews persevered under Antiochus Epiphanes. Since the prophecy of Daniel was certain to occur, so also was the apostasy of the wicked and the faithfulness of those who had insight. Likewise here in Revelation 22: 11. Those who have the mark of the beast on their foreheads, whose names are not written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, will continue doing wrong and being filthy, while those whose names are written in the book of life will continue practicing righteousness and being holy.⁵⁷⁵ Everything is predestined without in any sense minimizing human responsibility or freedom.

Christ is coming with His reward in His hand for everyone according to his works (v. 12b). This mirrors the divine prerogative of God spoken by Isaiah, identifying Christ as God.

Behold, the Lord GOD will come with might, With His arm ruling for Him. Behold, **His reward is with Him** And His recompense before Him. (Isaiah 40:10 NASB)

Salvation for the saints is according to grace apart from deeds (Titus 3: 5), but they will be rewarded according to their deeds (Matt. 25: 31-46; Matt. 16: 27; Rom. 2: 5-8; 8: 12-14; 2 Cor. 5: 10; Rev. 2: 23; 20: 12-13). It should be understood that even the righteous deeds of the saints are the fruit of divine grace working in them (Phil. 2: 12-13).

The self-identification, **I am the alpha and omega** (v. 13), is the third time this expression has been used in Revelation (cf. Rev. 1: 8; 21: 6). As the beginning and the end, Christ has ordained both the beginning of history, the end, and everything in between.⁵⁷⁶ Nothing, not even the most secretive deed, can be hidden from His sight since His decreed will is the ultimate cause of everything. In Isaiah, we learn that God declares the end from the beginning; therefore, this is another reference in Revelation to the deity of Christ.

¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes,
so that **they may have the right**
to the tree of life,
and may enter
by the gates into the city.

¹⁵ **Outside**
are the dogs
and the sorcerers
and the immoral persons
and the murderers
and the idolaters,
and everyone who loves and practices lying.

Those who have washed their robes have done so in the blood of the Lamb. Salvation has both passive and active elements. On the one hand, we can do nothing to save ourselves. None of our works are sufficient, and our sins are insurmountable obstacles to being right with God. We are dead in trespasses and sins and must be born again of the Spirit who must regenerate us before we are able to repent and believe (Eph. 2: 8-10). On the other hand, the gift of faith is an active faith. The **blessed** (v. 14) are seen here as actively washing their robes in Christ's blood. There is

⁵⁷⁵ Beale, pp. 1132-1133

⁵⁷⁶ Christ does this in conjunction with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The activity of any person of the Trinity is done in coordination and cooperation with the other two persons, the doctrine known as perichoresis.

no other way to make them clean and white.⁵⁷⁷ Therefore, while the blood of Christ has been made available to believers by the obedience of Christ, it must be appropriated by faith. Election to salvation is not election apart from means, but election **leading to** active belief. God ordains not only the end (salvation) but the means to the end (faith).

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?"¹⁴ I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and **they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** (Revelation 7:13-14 NASB)

The **right** (*exousia*) to the tree of life is not by one's works but by the substitutionary atonement of Christ as well as His righteous deeds during His life. John uses the same word to describe the **right** to become the children of God.

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the **right** [*exousia*] to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name, (John 1:11-12 NASB)

Fallen Adam was barred from the **tree of life** because of disobedience, as well as all of his posterity since; and men have not been capable of producing the kind of righteousness that merits the reward of eternal life (Matt. 19: 16-19; Lk. 10: 25-28). But through Christ's righteousness, both active and passive, access to the tree of life has been gained on the basis of receiving Christ and believing in Him, not perfect obedience.

It is **by the gates** that one enters the temple-city, not by crawling over the wall. The right to the tree of life is syntactically parallel with the permission to enter the city. We have seen that the gates have been continually open in all four directions for anyone wishing to enter by faith, to those who have washed away their sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. All who have done so have the right (also translated **authority**) to enter the city. On the other hand, those **outside** who do not have authority to enter are people whose lives have demonstrated lack of belief.

The address of vv. 12-13 and 16 (note the first person singular, **I**) is obviously that of Christ. It is more difficult to determine whether Jesus is addressing John in vv. 14-15. Translations differ, as indicated by the application of quotation marks which are not used in the Greek text. There is nothing in the context to indicate that Jesus is not still speaking in vv. 14-15. Whether directly spoken, the words of the angel, or John's words, these are strong words for unbelievers. Unbelievers are not inside, but **outside** the city, forever banished from the tree of life (Gen. 3: 23-24). They are not washed, but soiled with sorcery, immorality, murder, idolatry, and lies (v. 15). **Everyone who loves and practices lying** may refer to the duplicity of professing believers who claimed to know Christ but denied him by compromising with worldly idolatry and immorality. It is not merely a reference to false teachers.⁵⁷⁸ The NT is filled with warnings to those who profess one thing but **practice** another. The final warning occurs here in Revelation in close association with the warning in John's first epistle.

⁵⁷⁷ The verbs **washed** and **made white** in Revelation 7: 14 are active indicative. The active voice indicates that the subjects of the sentence, believers in this case, are performing the action of the verb.

⁵⁷⁸ Beale, p. 1141

Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who **practices** righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; ⁸ the one who **practices** sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. ⁹ **No one who is born of God practices sin**, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:7-9 NASB)

Either John, Jesus, or the angel calls them **dogs**. Dogs are not regarded favorably in Scripture. They were not the lovable creatures that westerners imagine but were dangerous scavengers roaming the streets of ancient cities. Jesus uses the term in Matthew 7: 6 as a reference to unbelievers (primarily Jews) who were continually resistant to the gospel, and Paul uses it of professing Jewish Christians “whose god is *their* appetite”.

"Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces. (Matthew 7:6 NASB)

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; ³ for we are the *true* circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh....For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹ whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things. (Philippians 3:2-3, 18-19 NASB)

Why does Jesus, Paul, and possibly John, refer to unbelievers as dogs? Dogs are primarily interested only in food and physical security. According to instinct and nature, they are completely selfish and self-preserving, especially true of dogs which had no owners and lived on the city streets. The **dogs** of v. 15 have “an insatiable craving to preserve their earthly security”.⁵⁷⁹ At their very root, they care for nothing but themselves.

¹⁶ "I, Jesus,
have sent My angel
to testify to you these things for the churches.
I am the root
and the descendant
of David,
the bright morning star."

The phrase, **bright morning star**, does not appear in the OT except as **star of the morning**, a reference to the king of Babylon who had exalted himself as God (Isa. 14: 4, 12). Balaam prophesies, “A **star** shall come forth from Jacob” will destroy Moab, a clear reference to David’s military exploits against Moab (Num. 24: 17). The oracle of Balaam, although an unbeliever, is ultimately fulfilled in the bright morning star who is also the descendent of David. The only other NT reference besides Revelation 2: 28 is 2 Peter 1: 19, also a reference to the second coming of Christ.

So we have the prophetic word *made* more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until **the day** dawns and **the morning star** arises in your hearts. (2 Peter 1:19 NASB)

⁵⁷⁹ Beale, p. 1141

Peter's use of **morning star** seems to refer to one's individual conversion experience as the light of Christ **arises in your hearts**, but his use of **the day** in 2 Peter 3: 10 is a reference to the return of Christ. Therefore, Peter combines the subjective belief in Christ at conversion with the objective coming of Christ at the end of the age. What the Christian believes in his heart about Christ and the second coming will one day become an objective reality.⁵⁸⁰ Mounce says that the morning star is a sign that "the long night of tribulation is all but over and that the new eschatological day is about to dawn", namely, the second coming.⁵⁸¹ In the same way that the Christian emerges from darkness into light at conversion, the darkness of this present evil age (Gal. 1: 4) will come to an end with the second coming of the bright morning star.

By using His human name, Jesus, and by the words, **the root and the descendent of David**, Christ indicates that He is the fulfillment of all the OT promises of the restored Davidic kingdom, the kingdom the Jews were expecting when they rejected Him. The Jewish nation was correct in looking for a descendent of David (Isa. 11: 1) who would be a conquering king restoring the former glories of David's kingdom.

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit. (Isaiah 11:1 NASB)

...And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. (Isaiah 11:4b NASB)

But the sinful nation applied the word **wicked** to the pagan nations and not to themselves. They failed to see that judgment must first begin with them, not the Gentiles. The Jews wanted a material kingdom with prosperity for all—likened to Solomon's kingdom—but they did not want a personal relationship with Yahweh.

¹⁷ The Spirit and the bride say,
"Come."
And let the one who hears say,
"Come."
And let the one who is thirsty
come;
let the one who wishes
take **the water of life** without cost.

The speaker in v. 17 is still indefinite. Poythress suggests that the Holy Spirit is now leading the church in prayer to say, "**Come!**" as in v. 20, **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**⁵⁸² Therefore, the first invitation is directed to Christ and so also the second, **And let the one who hears say, "Come."** The purpose of chapters 21 and 22 is to stir up the anticipation of the believer to the second coming of Christ. The second two invitations of v. 17b are directed to people who are not yet part of the bride of Christ. They are being invited to repent and believe. This may appear confusing since I have interpreted v. 11 as the confirmation of all sinners in their disbelief. Once more, however, we must not force John into rigid chronological boundaries. He is now coming to the end of the Revelation, and the entire book is designed to encourage **genuine** believers to have

⁵⁸⁰ Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of 2 Peter and Jude*, pp. 82-83

⁵⁸¹ Mounce, p. 395

⁵⁸² Poythress, p. 197

hope in the second coming of Christ and to warn unbelievers and those who are **insincere professing believers**, to **come** to faith before it is too late. Until Jesus literally comes, repentance is still possible, but when He appears in the clouds, it is too late. Thus, the gates to the city are still open to the one who is thirsty (v. 17b). The phrase, **water of life**, occurs four times in Revelation, possibly arising from John's remembrance of Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4: 14).

¹⁸ I testify

to everyone who hears the words
of the prophecy
of this book:

if anyone **adds** to them,

God will add to him the plagues
which are written in this book;

¹⁹ and if anyone **takes away** from the words
of the book

of this prophecy,
God will take away his part
from the tree of life
and from the holy city,
which are written in this book.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says,

"Yes, **I am coming quickly.**"

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.

Verses 18-19 warn against tampering with Scripture. From the immediate context, the warning applies specifically to the one who **adds to** or **takes away from** the prophecy of Revelation. Yet, by logical deduction, the warning applies to anyone who would add to or take away from **any part** of the word of God. God's word is a seamless whole; therefore, what applies to Revelation would also apply to Lamentation or any other book of the Bible. Since all scripture is "God-breathed", then no one can add to or subtract from the inspired words of God without incurring His curse, **God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city**. As we have seen from our discussion of Revelation 3: 5, it is not a logical necessity to assume that one who is cursed once had a part of the tree of life, but now no longer has a part. Those who have a part of the tree of life are the same people whose names have been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. If their names have not been written there, then they **never** had a part of the tree of life.

Again, the Lord says, **I am coming quickly**, to which John, joined in unison by all true believers says, **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus**.