

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

The word, eschatology comes from the Greek word, *eschatos*, meaning “last”. However, many of the things which are considered “last” by some interpreters have already occurred—in the opinion of other interpreters. Rather than begin with the major views of the millennium, we will start our study with the Scriptures. Of course, every evangelical appeals to the Scriptures to support his millennial view; and this is as it should be. It’s the only final authority we have. The reader should understand that we are not discussing a subject which will affect one’s eternal destiny if misunderstood. There are relatively few fundamentals of the faith that would jeopardize our salvation if misunderstood or not believed—like the substitutionary atonement of Christ on the cross, His deity and humanity, etc. But even these fundamentals do not have to be understood exhaustively; otherwise, none of us would be saved. Essential knowledge of the truth does not imply exhaustive knowledge. Differences in eschatology constitute a family “squabble” between believers who love the Bible and believe in the plenary (complete, entire) inspiration of the Bible. But we are not all in agreement on what the Bible teaches. Humility and patience should guide our study—patience toward those who disagree with us and humility concerning the limitations of our own understanding, for no one possesses the entire truth concerning the matter. We will now jump right into the quagmire of interpreting the “last things.”

I. The Prophecy of Daniel

A. Daniel 7—The Four Beasts

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel saw a dream and visions in his mind *as he lay* on his bed; then he wrote the dream down *and* related the *following* summary of it. ² Daniel said, "I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ "And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another. ⁴ "The first *was* like a lion and had *the* wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. ⁵ "And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs *were* in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!' ⁶ "After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁷ "After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ⁸ "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*. ⁹ "I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture *was* like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, Its wheels *were* a burning fire. ¹⁰ "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. ¹¹ "Then I kept looking because of the sound of the boastful words which the horn was speaking; I kept looking until the beast was slain, and its body was destroyed and given to the burning fire. ¹² "As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time. ¹³ "I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He

came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. ¹⁴ "And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed. ¹⁵ "As for me, Daniel, my spirit was distressed within me, and the visions in my mind kept alarming me. ¹⁶ "I approached one of those who were standing by and began asking him the exact meaning of all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of these things: ¹⁷ "These great beasts, which are four *in number*, are four kings *who* will arise from the earth. ¹⁸ "But the saints of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come. ¹⁹ "Then I desired to know the exact meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others, exceedingly dreadful, with its teeth of iron and its claws of bronze, *and which* devoured, crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet, ²⁰ and *the meaning* of the ten horns that *were* on its head and the other *horn* which came up, and before which three *of them* fell, namely, that horn which had eyes and a mouth uttering great *boasts* and which was larger in appearance than its associates. ²¹ "I kept looking, and that horn was waging war with the saints and overpowering them ²² until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom. ²³ "Thus he said: 'The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the *other* kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. ²⁴ 'As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. ²⁵ 'He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; 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.' ²⁸ "At this point the revelation ended. As for me, Daniel, my thoughts were greatly alarming me and my face grew pale, but I kept the matter to myself." (Dan. 7:1-28 NASB)

With this chapter we begin a new division of *Daniel* and a different genre of literature from the historical narrative of Dan. 1—6. The style is apocalyptic, similar to *Revelation*. For much of the interpretation, I am indebted to E.J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* and O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, with more abbreviated contributions from C.F. Keil, *Daniel*, with whom Young has much agreement.

The vision of the four beasts corresponds to the vision of the statue in Chapter 2 which is given to Nebuchadnezzar, but from a different perspective. In chapter 2, the vision was a magnificent statue symbolizing the power and glory of human kingdoms—Nebuchadnezzar's perspective. But here, the vision consists of a series of devouring beasts opposing God and threatening his people—God's perspective. ¹

The **four winds of heaven** have been interpreted as “the heavenly powers and forces by which God sets the nations of the world in motion; and the number four has a symbolical meaning—that the people of all regions of the earth are moved hither and thither in violent commotion.” ² Thus,

¹ Keil, p. 221

² Keil, pp. 222-223; cf. Young, p. 142

the sea is a reference to the nations or mankind. By the might of His providence (the four winds), God stirs up the nations of the world (the sea) in the sovereign exercise of His eternal purpose, something we surely learn from the pre-exilic prophets who predicted the fall of Israel and Judah to Assyria and Babylon. God uses the nations to accomplish His will. They are a drop in the bucket (Dan. 4: 35).

Four beasts come out of the sea in succession—not at the same time—symbolizing the successive kingdoms of the world which have human origin unlike the kingdom which is cut out of the mountain without hands.³ The first is like a **lion** with the **wings of an eagle**, a symbol which archaeologists have found among the ruins of ancient Babylon.⁴ The first beast represents Babylon even as the head of gold in chapter 2 represents the same. The plucking of the beast's wings has been interpreted as the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar through insanity (Dan. 5).⁵ After his humiliation, the beastly kingdom of Babylon became kinder through the changed character of its ruler—symbolized by the beast standing on two feet and being given a **human mind**.

The second beast, a **bear**, is an inferior beast relative to the lion—just as silver is inferior to gold (2: 32, 39). This is the Medo-Persian Empire with one of its sides raised to indicate the emphasis upon the Persian element of the empire. The ribs are the many conquered peoples Persia vanquished and assimilated into the empire (3: 4, 7).

The third beast, a **leopard** (v. 6), corresponding to the third kingdom of bronze in chapter 2, is not as strong as a bear but much faster and more agile, especially a leopard with **four wings**. The Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great, who lived only 33 years, was unsurpassed in its lightning-swift conquest of the whole civilized world, including the Persian Empire. Since the number four often represents the extremities of the earth (as in **four winds** or **four corners**; Rev. 7: 1), the four heads may symbolize the incorporation of the whole world into the Macedonian Empire. Alternatively, they may symbolize the division of Alexander's empire among four of his generals—Ptolemy of Egypt, Seleucus of Syria, Cassander of the western portion of Macedonia, and Antigonus of Asia Minor.⁶

The **fourth beast** is Rome and corresponds to the **legs of iron** and **feet partly of iron and partly of clay** in Dan. 2: 33. The beast had **iron teeth** (7: 7) to devour its enemies. Rome did exactly that, extending its empire beyond anything the world had ever known, even to the limits of northern Britain, and thereby spreading its influence over the whole earth, an influence that continues to this very day. No people or nation could stand against the mighty power of the Roman legions. The beast had **ten horns** (7: 7) which should not be taken literally as ten distinct kingdoms arising from the Roman Empire. Young interprets the ten horns in terms of completeness as the full number of human kingdoms which owe their origin either directly or indirectly to the Roman Empire—not in terms of immediate origin but philosophical and/or economic origin. Included in

³ I.e. without human origin—cf. comments on Chapter 2; also Rev. 13: 1

⁴ Keil, p. 223

⁵ Young, p. 144

⁶ Calvin, contra Young

this number could be many of the kingdoms of Europe past and present, including the US which is of European origin. Young remarks,

This is certainly not to deny that elements other than Roman have contributed to form the present European governments, but it cannot be denied that modern Europe may in a very legitimate sense have arisen from Rome.⁷

These ten kingdoms do not exist side by side but all of them partake of the character of the beast with iron teeth.

The **little horn** (v. 8) arises out of the ten horns and plucks up **three** of the ten horns or kings (v. 24), a number whose significance is undetermined.⁸ This is the third period of the fourth beast. The first period is the activity of the beast itself in v. 7. The second period is the period of the ten horns, and the third period or phase of this beast is the **little horn** which comes up among the ten horns.⁹ Thus, the fourth beast is a composite kingdom made up of many kingdoms covering a large portion of world history beginning with the Roman Empire and continuing until the end of the world until the Anti-Christ. It corresponds to the beast in Revelation 13 in its description (ten horns), activity (boasting and speaking against God and persecuting the saints), and the duration of its authority (time, times, and half a time) corresponding to 42 months of Revelation 13.¹⁰

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. (Rev. 13:1-2 NASB)

The little horn makes great boasts (v. 8, 11) indicating that he assumes the prerogatives which belong only to God. This is the **man of lawlessness 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 Thess. 2: 4; read vv. 1-12 for context). He is the Anti-Christ who wages war with the saints and overcomes them until the appearance of the **Ancient of Days** (Dan. 7: 21, 25).¹¹ The Anti-Christ will **make alterations in times and in law** thus assuming the rights and privileges of God who alone controls the times and standards of human conduct.¹² This gives us a hint that this little horn is some form of human government with legislative powers and the power of the sword to enforce its laws. The United Nations may be a faint shadow of this government, although we must say that the UN, despite its many failures and mismanagement, has accomplished much good in this war-torn world. On the other hand, the UN is just another form

⁷ Young, p. 149. We must qualify this remark by acknowledging the indebtedness of Europe and the US to the Protestant Reformation. Nevertheless, some of our governmental concepts have been influenced by Rome.

⁸ Young, p. 150

⁹ Young, pp. 148-149

¹⁰ Assuming that a “time” is one year or 12 months—12 + 24+6= 42, but the number in both *Daniel* and *Revelation* is symbolical rather than an actual period of time.

¹¹ Young, p. 150

¹² Young, p. 160

of ill-fated human government which proposes human solutions to spiritual problems, never getting at the root. Although assuming messianic pretensions to bring world peace, UN soldiers have committed many atrocities against the very human beings they were supposed to protect.

Calvin believed that the little horn was symbolic of the Caesars of the Roman Empire who persecuted the church, but it is more likely that the revelation here refers to the persecution of the church in any age, including the Roman Empire represented by the fourth beast.¹³ More Christians have been martyred in the 20th century than in all the other 19 centuries combined since the time of Christ, and the situation will probably grow worse in the 21st century.¹⁴ The beast has been waging war with the church from the very beginning, and this warfare is brought to a climax in the little horn, the Anti-Christ, or the man of lawlessness. The **time, times, and half a time** (v. 25) has been interpreted by many as three and a half years (Dan. 4: 16), but it should more likely be interpreted symbolically, not literally.¹⁵ Three and a half is one-half of seven, a number indicating completion. If the saints are **given into his hand** (v. 25) for only half this period of time, the implication is that God will not allow his saints to be completely given over to or destroyed by the little horn.

The **Ancient of Days** (God the Father) now takes His seat upon the throne which is situated among other thrones (v. 9). The scene is that of a courtroom in which judgment is passed decisively upon the beast (vv. 10, 22, 26; cf. Rev. 4: 1-4). The beast with ten horns is slain along with the little horn (vv. 11, 26). The **Son of Man** (Jesus Christ) appears in the **clouds** (v. 13; cf. 1 Thess. 4: 17) to receive a kingdom from the Ancient of Days, an everlasting kingdom which will never be destroyed (v. 14; cf. 2: 44; Lk. 22: 29-30; Rev. 11: 15). The text says **one like a Son of Man** possibly as an allusion to the fact that Christ has not yet appeared as the Son of Man in His incarnation on earth.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thess. 4:16-17 NASB)

The vision is speaking of events which will take place in Daniel's future and will extend from the time of Daniel until the second coming of Christ and the final judgment.

Son of Man is in distinct contrast with the beastly kingdoms coming up out of the sea, and His coming in the **clouds** demonstrates divine origin (Robertson). Christ assumed the designation, Son of Man, as His preferred self-identity during His earthly ministry rather than **Messiah**, a term laden with political overtones and misconceptions. In His final confrontation with the Sanhedrin, He assumes the identity in its fullest connotation found in Daniel 7, provoking the Sanhedrin's charge of blasphemy (Matt. 26: 64).

¹³ Young, p. 158

¹⁴ Operation World

¹⁵ Young, p. 161, who agrees with Keil

Jesus said to him, "You have said it *yourself*; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE **CLOUDS OF HEAVEN**."⁶⁵ Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has blasphemed! What further need do we have of witnesses? Behold, you have now heard the blasphemy; (Matt. 26:64-65 NASB)

Robertson also notes that nowhere in Daniel's prophecy does Christ receive the designation, **Son of David**, nor is the kingdom of God restricted to the restored kingdom of Israel. It is much broader than this, embracing the whole world and all the nations of the world.¹⁶ Thus, Daniel 7 is not talking about the earthly millennial kingdom of Christ; it is predicting the consummation of God's kingdom.

Beginning in v. 15 the explanation of the vision is made to Daniel, some of which we have already covered. While the **Son of Man** receives the kingdom in v. 14, the **peoples, nations, and men of every language** receive the kingdom in v. 18, **But the saints [the elect people of God from every tribe, tongue, and nation] of the Highest One will receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, for all ages to come**. This is a prediction of what Jesus told his followers, "**But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom**" (Lk. 12: 31-32). In union and communion with Christ, Christians of every nation on earth will receive the kingdom bestowed upon Christ Jesus. The bestowal of the kingdom to the saints is such an important element of the vision that it is mentioned three times (vv. 18, 22, 27). Jesus said, "**Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.**" Christ has come into the world to restore the vice-regency of His kingdom to men who are made in His image and who willingly submit to His rule.

B. Daniel 8—The Ram and the Goat; the Persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes

In the third year of the reign of Belshazzar the king a vision appeared to me, Daniel, subsequent to the one which appeared to me previously.² I looked in the vision, and while I was looking I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I looked in the vision and I myself was beside the Ulai Canal.³ Then I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a ram which had two horns was standing in front of the canal. Now the two horns *were* long, but one *was* longer than the other, with the longer one coming up last.⁴ I saw the ram butting westward, northward, and southward, and no *other* beasts could stand before him nor was there anyone to rescue from his power, but he did as he pleased and magnified *himself*.⁵ While I was observing, behold, a male goat was coming from the west over the surface of the whole earth without touching the ground; and the goat *had* a conspicuous horn between his eyes.⁶ He came up to the ram that had the two horns, which I had seen standing in front of the canal, and rushed at him in his mighty wrath.⁷ I saw him come beside the ram, and he was enraged at him; and he struck the ram and shattered his two horns, and the ram had no strength to withstand him. So he hurled him to the ground and trampled on him, and there was none to rescue the ram from his power.⁸ Then the male goat magnified *himself* exceedingly. But as soon as he was mighty, the large horn was broken; and in its place there came up four conspicuous *horns* toward the four winds of heaven.⁹ Out of one of them came forth a rather

¹⁶ Robertson, pp. 255-258

small horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful *Land*.¹⁰ It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down.¹¹ It even magnified *itself* to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down.¹² And on account of transgression the host will be given over to *the horn* along with the regular sacrifice; and it will fling truth to the ground and perform *its will* and prosper.¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to that particular one who was speaking, "How long will the vision *about* the regular sacrifice apply, while the transgression causes horror, so as to allow both the holy place and the host to be trampled?"¹⁴ He said to me, "For 2,300 evenings *and* mornings; then the holy place will be properly restored."¹⁵ When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it; and behold, standing before me was one who looked like a man.¹⁶ And I heard the voice of a man between *the banks of Ulai*, and he called out and said, "Gabriel, give this *man* an understanding of the vision."¹⁷ So he came near to where I was standing, and when he came I was frightened and fell on my face; but he said to me, "Son of man, understand that the vision pertains to the time of the end."¹⁸ Now while he was talking with me, I sank into a deep sleep with my face to the ground; but he touched me and made me stand upright.¹⁹ He said, "Behold, I am going to let you know what will occur at the final period of the indignation, for *it* pertains to the appointed time of the end."²⁰ The ram which you saw with the two horns represents the kings of **Media and Persia**.²¹ The shaggy goat *represents* the kingdom of **Greece**, and the large horn that is between his eyes is the first king.²² The broken *horn* and the four *horns* that arose in its place *represent* four kingdoms *which* will arise from *his* nation, although not with his power.²³ In the latter period of their rule, When the transgressors have run *their course*, A king will arise, Insolent and skilled in intrigue.²⁴ His power will be mighty, but not by his *own* power, And he will destroy to an extraordinary degree And prosper and perform *his will*; He will destroy mighty men and the holy people.²⁵ And through his shrewdness He will cause deceit to succeed by his influence; And he will magnify *himself* in his heart, And he will destroy many while *they are* at ease. He will even oppose the Prince of princes, But he will be broken without human agency.²⁶ The vision of the evenings and mornings Which has been told is true; But keep the vision secret, For *it* pertains to many days *in the future*."²⁷ Then I, Daniel, was exhausted and sick for days. Then I got up *again* and carried on the king's business; but I was astounded at the vision, and there was none to explain *it*. (Dan. 8:1-27 NASB)

The first vision is in the first year of the Belshazzar's reign (7: 1; 542 to 538 BC; *BibleWorks Timeline*), and this one in chapter 8 is in the third year of his reign (v. 1). Chapter 7 concentrates on the fourth beast, the Roman Empire as the type of all the kingdoms of the world opposing the church and ending with the **little horn**, the Anti-Christ. Chapter 8 concentrates on (1) the third kingdom, the kingdom of **Greece** (8: 21) which conquers the Medo-Persian Empire (600-331 BC), and on (2) one of the kingdoms which arises out of the third kingdom, the Seleucid kingdom from which Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 BC) arises as the great persecutor of the Jewish nation.¹⁷ Since both visions of chapter 7 and 8 occur during the first and third years of Belshazzar (7: 1; 8: 1), co-regent of Babylon, the visions occur before the fall of Babylon to Medo-Persia in 538 BC (chap. 5).

Daniel is having visions of events which are both imminent and distant. Alexander the Great defeats Persia in 331 BC and dies in 323 BC. Antiochus Epiphanes IV desecrates the temple in

¹⁷ Young, Chapter 8

Jerusalem in 168 BC leading to the Maccabean Revolt in 167 to 164 BC, ending with the independence of Judea from foreign rule until 63 BC and its subjugation to Rome. All of this is predicted in Daniel 8—12. The accuracy of the vision is so startling that liberal scholars—who don't believe God controls the future—believe that this portion of Daniel is written much later after the events had already occurred.

The ram is identified as Media and Persia (v. 20) of which the Persian element is the most significant and powerful. Cyrus the Persian (the longer horn—v. 3) was a much more powerful king than Darius the Mede who reigned only two years. The ram butting westward, northward, and southward signifies the directions in which the Persian Empire spread its dominion and may correspond to the three ribs in the bear's mouth (also Medo-Persia) of chapter 7.¹⁸ The **male goat** is the Macedonian Empire of Greece from the west of Persia (vv. 5, 21) which conquers Medo-Persia decisively (v. 7). Its lightning-fast conquest of the whole earth is symbolized by the fact that the goat doesn't even touch the ground, but flies (like a leopard with four wings—7: 6). Alexander the Great is the **conspicuous horn** between the eyes of the male goat (v. 5), a horn which is broken as soon as the goat magnifies himself. No sooner than Alexander the Great conquered the world, he dies either of malaria, poisoning, or suffocation in his own drunken vomit, at only 33 years of age. Theories abound, but nothing certain can be confirmed. Alexander conquers the largest empire in the world in 13 years, but God refuses to give him time to enjoy it. "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." Kingdoms rise and fall at God's command.

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! (Ps. 2:10-12 NASB)

After his untimely death, Alexander's empire was divided up into four parts among his subordinate generals (**four conspicuous horns** of v. 8), none of whom were ever as powerful as Alexander (v. 22). The four horns have been identified as (1) Cassander of Macedonia, (2) Lysimachus of Thrace and Asia Minor, (3) Seleucus of Syria, and (4) Ptolemy of Egypt.¹⁹ A small horn grows out of one of the four horns and grows toward the **south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land**—i.e. toward the land of Palestine—and tramples down the sanctuary and the sacrifice **for 2300 evenings and mornings** (vv. 9-11). This is one of the successors of the Seleucid kingdom, Antiochus Epiphanes IV, who puts an end to the Jewish sacrifices in the temple for a short time and persecutes the Jewish people who are faithful to God (the **stars**—v. 10; cf. 12: 3; Rev. 12: 3-4).²⁰ By persecuting God's people, forbidding the sacrifice in the temple, and even later ordering the sacrifice of unclean animals, Antiochus exalted himself as God's equal (v. 11). His offenses are recorded in 1 Maccabees 1: 44-47.

¹⁸ Young, p. 168

¹⁹ Young, p. 169

²⁰ Young, p. 171

And the king [i.e. Antiochus Epiphanes] sent letters by the hand of messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, that they should follow laws strange to the land, and should forbid whole burnt offerings and sacrifice and drink offerings in the sanctuary; and should profane the sabbaths and feasts, and pollute the sanctuary and them that were holy.²¹

He who persecutes the people of God also persecutes God (Acts 9: 4-5). This persecution lasts 2300 evenings and mornings, a period somewhat ambiguous. Is Daniel speaking of 2300 days, or is he adding evenings and mornings together in which case the 2300 may be divided by two to make 1150? This figure roughly corresponds to the 1290 days of Dan. 12: 11 which reports the same persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes.

"From the time that the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up, *there will be 1,290 days.* (Dan. 12:11 NASB)

This would render the period of persecution from 164-167 BC, three years. If 2300 actual days, the period is equivalent to roughly seven years (6.3 years, to be exact) , a significantly symbolical number, from 171 BC to 164 BC.²²

The **time of the end** (vv. 17, 19) does not refer to the end of the world and the second coming of Christ, but the end of the OT dispensation and the inauguration of the Messianic reign of Christ and the Christian dispensation of the church. **The final period of the indignation** (v. 19) is the latter part of the Syrian dynasty under Antiochus Epiphanes in which God allowed the Jewish nation to suffer for their continuing disobedience or **transgression** (v. 12).²³

Antiochus Epiphanes is an historical type of all who persecute the church, especially government officials with the power of the sword. Although he should not be identified with the **little horn**, the Anti-Christ, of chapter 7, he is surely a foreshadowing of the Anti-Christ who persecutes the church at the end of the world. The severe persecution of the Jews at the end of the OT dispensation appears to correspond to the severe persecution of Christians at the end of the church age. It is a foreshadowing of the end times.

C. Daniel 9: 20-27—The Lord's Response to Daniel's Prayer—the Prophecy of Gabriel

Now while I was speaking and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God in behalf of the holy mountain of my God,²¹ while I was still speaking in prayer, then the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision previously, came to me in *my* extreme weariness about the time of the evening offering.²² He gave *me* instruction and talked with me and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you insight with understanding.

²³ "At the beginning of your supplications the command was issued, and I have come to tell *you*, for

²¹ Quoted in Young, p. 172; words in brackets mine

²² For a more detailed discussion of this ambiguity, see Young, *Daniel*, pp. 173-175

²³ Young, pp. 177-179

you are highly esteemed; so give heed to the message and gain understanding of the vision. ²⁴"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*. ²⁵"So you are to know and discern *that* from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. ²⁶"Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. 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." (Dan. 9:20-27 NASB)

Beginning in v. 24 and continuing through v. 27, Gabriel, in answer to Daniel's prayer, outlines God's plan for the Jewish nation and the city of Jerusalem. The interpretation of this section is quite possibly the most debated section in the whole of Scripture, called by many "the dismal swamp of OT interpretation" (O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, p. 259). The manner in which I explain it may seem dogmatic, but I do not intend to be. Evangelical Hebrew scholars still disagree on the interpretation, and I have simply chosen the interpretation that I think captures the meaning best. The reader is free to disagree, as always.

I have divided the text into three parts:

I. The Goal of the Seventy Weeks

II. The Events of the Seven Weeks and the Sixty-two Weeks—The Rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Beginning of Christ's Ministry

III. The Events of the Last Week—The Confirmation of the New Covenant Through the Sacrifice of Christ and the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple

I. The Goal of the Seventy Weeks (v. 24)

A. The Six Things Christ Accomplished in His Death and Resurrection

Gabriel focuses his prophecy on the accomplishments of Jesus Christ the Messiah mentioned in v. 24. But even this is debated. The text reads literally, **anointed leader** (*mashiach nagid*), a term which has been interpreted as Cyrus whom God calls **His anointed** (Dale Ralph Davis, *The Message of Daniel*, pp. 134-135; Allan M. Harman, *Daniel*, p. 227). Both scholars interpret the second **anointed one** in v. 26 as Christ.

Thus says the LORD to Cyrus **His anointed** [*mashiach*], Whom I have taken by the right hand, To subdue nations before him And to loose the loins of kings; To open doors before him so that gates will not be shut: (Isa. 45:1 NASB)

Sometimes a Greek or Hebrew word does not mean the same thing even if it occurs twice within the immediate context. An example of this is the way Paul uses the word, *nomos*, **law**. However, in this case, I don't see how **anointed one** could be interpreted as Cyrus in v. 25 and Christ in v. 26. Davis' justification is the segregation of the two segments of 7 weeks and 62 weeks. Separating

the seven weeks from the sixty-two weeks, the **anointed one** in v. 25 comes at the end of seven weeks, and the **anointed one** of v. 26 is cut off at the end of the other 62 weeks.

However, if one takes the seven weeks and sixty-two weeks as two distinct periods, the ‘anointed one’ at the end of the seven weeks cannot be *the* anointed one par excellence (p. 135, footnote).

Is there something significant about the first seven or 49 years? If the decree of Artaxerxes is given in 445 BC, then 49 years later is 396 BC, roughly the end of the prophetic period and the special revelation of the OT (Robertson, p. 263). This appears to be its only significance, leaving us to wonder why the two periods (7 sevens and 62 sevens) are separated. Why not just mention 69 sevens? On the other hand, if we allocate importance to the Jubilee symbolism, then seven sevens is 49 years, seven sabbaths of years as an appropriate first segment to the 490 years. Perhaps Daniel, as the representative of Israel, is being reminded that although Israel’s judgment has been extended 7 times the 70-year exile to 490 years (see explanation below), immediately after this period will be the fulfillment of the Jubilee.

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read.¹⁷ And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,¹⁸ "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED,¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD."²⁰ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him.²¹ And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Lk. 4:16-21 NASB)

The context of Daniel leads me to accept the interpretation that the **anointed one** in both v. 25 and 26 refers to the Christ. Daniel’s visions in 2, 7, and 9 all include a segment of time from Daniel’s day to the coming of the Messiah and His everlasting kingdom (Robertson, p. 260). Nebuchadnezzar’s statue incorporating the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Macedonian, and Roman kingdoms is crushed by the **stone...cut out of a mountain without hands**, a kingdom that **will never be destroyed** (2: 44). The beastly kingdoms of chapter 7 are defeated, and an **everlasting dominion** is given to the **Son of Man** (7: 14), the divine-human whose rule over the earth will never come to an end.

Seventy weeks is a perfect and complete number consisting of the number 7 (the number of perfection) multiplied by 10 (the number of completion). Multiplying 7 X 10 you get 70, complete perfection. Complete perfection is precisely what Christ accomplished at the cross. The entire 70-week period climaxes in the final week in which **Messiah the Prince...will be cut off and have nothing** (KJV; “but not for himself”). After this, **the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary**. Until the temple is destroyed, the abomination of the temple sacrifice continues after the death of Christ, but sacrifice is brought to an abrupt halt when Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed in 70 AD. At this point in time, the Christian church is no longer confused with the Jewish faith.

Gabriel lists six things that will be accomplished during the 70-week period (v. 24; cf. Young, p. 197; using the NASB). Three of these are negative and three are positive.

Negative	Positive
1. to finish (or “restrain”) the transgression	4. to bring in everlasting righteousness
2. to make an end of sin	5. to seal up vision and prophecy
3. to make atonement for iniquity	6. to anoint the most holy place

The first coming of Christ accomplished all 6 of these things. By His atoning death Christ **finishes** (or **restrains**) **transgressions** by making a new creation, a people who are zealous for good works and who are no longer under the dominion of sin. By that same atonement he **makes an end of sin** by becoming sin on behalf of His people (2 Cor. 5: 21). All three of these positive achievements are summarized in the third one, **to make atonement for iniquity**. Gabriel’s message is recorded in Hebrew parallelism. All three achievements are different ways of expressing essentially the same thing.

The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8b NASB)

The works of the devil are **sin, transgression, and iniquity**. We should not impose a literalistic interpretation on the phrases, “**finish transgression**” or **make an end of sin**. Although transgression, sin, and iniquity continue in this world after the death of Christ, His atoning work laid the foundation for the complete victory over sin and sin’s ultimate annihilation. This is what theologians call the “now” and the “not yet” of redemption. Although we do not now experience a perfect world, the work of Christ made a perfect world certain in the future—the not yet. The work of Christ set in motion all the necessary conditions by which sin would be restrained and later completely removed from the world. At the consummation of the kingdom of God, Satan, sin, and all evil-doers will be cast out of the kingdom of God (Rev. 21: 27).

In the positive column, Christ **brings in everlasting righteousness**, for in Christ the righteousness of God is revealed (Rom. 1: 17). **To seal up vision and prophecy** refers to the **fulfillment of OT prophecy** in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers **in the prophets in many portions and in many ways**,² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2a NASB)

For as many as are the promises of God, **in Him they are yes**; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us. (2 Corinthians 1:20 NASB)

In the OT God spoke to his prophets in visions and dreams, but in the last days God has spoken finally **in His Son**. There is no more need for additional vision and prophecy to be recorded in the Bible for God’s people. We have what we need in the Old and New Testaments. The NT Scriptures are not an exception to this statement. They are the further explanation and application of the revelation of Jesus’ person and work. They further explain what has already been accomplished in Christ (cf. Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, p. 264).

To anoint the most holy place can be interpreted as the sprinkling of the blood of Christ upon the heavenly altar as the full and final sacrifice for sin.

But when Christ appeared *as* a high priest of the good things to come, *He entered* through the **greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands**, that is to say, not of this creation;¹² and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered **the holy place once for all**, having obtained eternal redemption. (Hebrews 9:11-12 NASB)

[Alternatively, if the verse is interpreted as “**to anoint the most holy**”, then it could imply the anointing of Christ by the Holy Spirit. I prefer the first interpretation since anointing the heavenly altar with His own blood is another accomplishment of Christ’s atoning death.]

When Jesus shed His blood, He was not physically in the holy of holies but on a cross. The author of Hebrews says, however, that He had entered **a greater and more perfect tabernacle** not made by human hands. This could only be the tabernacle in heaven which served as the pattern of the tabernacle on earth (Heb. 8: 5). The tabernacle on earth was made by **human** hands. The temple in Jerusalem was also made by human hands. What’s more, Christ had come spiritually into the holy place, once for all, making the sacrifices in the existing temple unnecessary and obsolete.

All three things—**bringing in righteousness, sealing up prophecy, and anointing the holy place with His blood**—were accomplished at the first advent of Christ.

If our interpretation is correct so far, then we can see that Gabriel’s prophecy concerns the redemptive work of Christ.

II. The Events of the Seven Weeks and the Sixty-two Weeks—The Rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Beginning of Christ’s Ministry

It is agreed by all biblical scholars that Gabriel is not talking about a literal 70-week period or 490 days. Four hundred ninety days would not terminate or end at a time of any particular significance in the history of Israel or the history of humanity. The 70 sevens or seventy weeks symbolizes the principle of the Sabbatical year and particularly the Jubilee Year. In Leviticus, God says,

‘Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop,⁴ but during the **seventh** year the land shall have a **sabbath** rest, a sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. (Leviticus 25:3-4 NASB)

‘You are also to count off **seven sabbaths** of years for yourself, **seven times seven years**, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, *namely*, **forty-nine years**. (Leviticus 25:8 NASB)

Therefore, according to Leviticus, a Sabbath year represents seven years. Seven Sabbaths of years represent 49 years. The 70 weeks of Daniel 9 represent not weeks of days but weeks of years. One week is seven years; therefore, the 70 weeks represent 70 X 7years or 490 years.

These 70 **weeks** correspond, in turn, to the 70 **years** of exile (Dan. 7). The significance of 70 years was that the land of Israel would enjoy its Sabbatical rest. The Israelites were supposed to let the land lie fallow (unplanted) on each Sabbatical Year or every seven years. They had not obeyed this law, so God removed them from the land so that the land could enjoy its Sabbatical rest.

Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, **until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths**. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete. (2 Chronicles 36:20-21 NASB)

Seventy years of Sabbatical years translates into 490 years—one Sabbatical year of seven years X 70 = 490 years. Apparently, the nation had not observed the Sabbatical year for the land since the beginning of Solomon's reign.

In v. 25, this seventy-week period is divided into two segments of **seven weeks** and **sixty-two weeks**.

(1) The first segment of seventy weeks is **seven weeks**, 7 X 7 or 49 years which ends when the 62-week period begins. Since the seven weeks is separated from the 62 weeks, there must be some significance to the seven sevens.

In addition to what has been said about the Jubilee symbolism, the end of this period of 49 years marked the complete rebuilding of Jerusalem which had been demolished by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BC (Barnes, Cambron). Although the temple of Jerusalem was rebuilt by 520 BC (or thereabouts; cf. Haggai 1:1 and Zech. 1: 1), the city itself still lay in ruins by the twentieth year of Artaxerxes in 445 BC (about 75 years later; Neh. 2: 1). Although Nehemiah supervised the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem in a lightning-fast 52 days (Neh. 6: 15), it would have taken a very long time—possibly 49 years—for the whole city to be completely restored. Daniel 9: 25 suggests the complete restoration of Jerusalem that would include the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of buildings destroyed during its destruction in 587 BC.

"So you are to know and discern **that from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem** until Messiah the Prince *there will be* seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; it will be built again, with plaza and moat, even in times of distress. (Daniel 9:25 NASB)

The times of distress in v. 25 is a brief reference to the difficulties that Nehemiah faced from hostile people in Judah while he was attempting to rebuild the walls (Neh. 2: 10-20; 4: 1-23; 6: 1-19).

(2) The second segment of the 70 weeks is 62 weeks or 434 years. The ending point of this segment is the coming of Messiah the Prince. So then, from the issuing of the decree to rebuild the city until Messiah the Prince there will be **seven weeks** plus **62 weeks**, a period of 69 weeks (69 X 7) or 483 years.

(3) The third segment is **one week** or 7 years, but the last week is no ordinary week because no termination point is given for this week. Its end is left indefinite. All the other weeks have an ending point.

The **starting point** of the first seven-week period is the **issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem** (v. 25).

Three interpretations of when the decree is issued to rebuild Jerusalem (v. 25).

1. The decree is issued by Cyrus of Persia about 539 BC to 536 BC

According to this interpretation (Calvin, Young, et al), the issuing of this decree took place in 539 BC (or 536 BC) with the decree of Cyrus of Persia permitting the Jews to return and rebuild the temple (2 Chron. 36: 22-23). Darius the Mede did not reign long after he conquered Babylon. Daniel makes note of the fact that Darius was 62 years old at the time (5: 21). It is possible that he reigned only three years.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of **Jeremiah**—the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also *put it* in writing, saying,²³"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and **He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem**, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!'" (2 Chronicles 36:22-23 NASB)

"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me **to build Him a house** in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.³'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and **rebuild the house** of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:2-3 NASB)

Jeremiah never mentions the name of Cyrus, but he prophesies that the people will return to the land after 70 years. Furthermore, the prophecy of Jeremiah does not specifically mention either the rebuilding of the city or the temple, but the building of both is implied.

"For thus says the LORD, 'When **seventy years** have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, **to bring you back to this place**. (Jer. 29:10 NASB)

However, Isaiah the prophet specifically names **Cyrus** as the one who would decree not only the building of the temple but also the city.

"*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 44:28 NASB)

"I have aroused him in righteousness And I will make all his ways smooth; He will build My **city** and will let My exiles go free, Without any payment or reward," says the LORD of hosts. (Isaiah 45:13 NASB)

If the issuing of the decree is 539 BC, then 483 years later is **56 BC**—a year of no particular biblical significance. However, some scholars believe that Gabriel is not concerned with giving Daniel precise chronological dates. All the years are given in multiples of seven in the spirit of the

Sabbath principle, particularly the Jubilee Year that was every 50th year: 7 X 7 or 49 years plus one year (Young, p. 206). We see the same pattern in Daniel 9. We have three sets of seven—7 sevens and 62 sevens followed by one seven to complete the **70 weeks**. Sixty-nine weeks or 483 years after 539 or 536 BC get us within 86-90 years of the ministry of Christ if we accept 539 BC as the starting point (539 BC-483 years=56 BC+30AD=86 years). Many conservative scholars believe that the beginning point of Daniel's prophecy is the decree of Cyrus which took place in 539 or 536 BC.

On the other hand, there are scholars who believe that we can combine the Jubilee emphasis of the passage (the multiples of seven years) with more chronological precision. The year 56 BC is not close enough to satisfy some interpreters.

2. The decree is issued by God through Jeremiah.

"For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ 'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. (Jer. 29:10-11 NASB)

This prophecy of Jeremiah was made in 594 BC (Davis, p. 134; Harman, p. 231); therefore, if we do the math of v. 25: 594 BC—49 years or 7 weeks = 545 BC, close to the time of Cyrus' decree to rebuild the temple in 539 BC. Thus, Cyrus is identified by Davis and Harman as the first **anointed one** in v. 25 while the second **anointed one** in v. 26 is **Christ**. The reason for interpreting *mashiach* (anointed one) as two different people is the separation of the seven weeks from the sixty-two weeks. After the next 62 weeks, the Messiah will be **cut off**, which Davis interprets as the crucifixion of Christ (p. 135). Add another 62 weeks to the seven weeks (62 x 7 = 434 years) and you get 545 BC—434 years = 111 BC, a date of no particular significance. Davis and Harman do not seem too disturbed by the numbers.

3. The decree is issued by Artaxerxes in 445 BC (or 454 BC) giving Nehemiah permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

You will notice that the decree of Daniel 9: 25 mentions only the building of **Jerusalem**. It says nothing about the **temple**. If this is the decree of Cyrus, it would be strange for Gabriel to omit any mention of the temple since the temple is clearly the focus of Cyrus' decree mentioned in 2 Chron. 36: 23 and Ezra 1: 2-3. Yet, since the prophecy of Isaiah quoted above includes both the rebuilding of the city and the temple, the inclusion of both temple and city strongly suggests that the decree mentioned in Daniel 9: 25 is the decree of Cyrus, even though it omits the building of the temple.

On the other hand, I don't think Isaiah's prophecy proves that the decree of Daniel 9: 25 is literally the decree of Cyrus. Isaiah's prophecy occurs approximately 160 years or so (at the latest, 701 BC) before Cyrus' decree in 539 BC. Since it is the earliest prophecy of Judah's restoration to God's mercy, it includes both the temple and the city. Earlier in the book of Isaiah, he prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah (Isa. 3—5; 6: 10-11); yet, later in Isaiah's ministry, he also gave the people of Judah hope that Jerusalem would be restored (Isa. 44: 28; 45: 13, but also 52: 9; 62: 7; 66: 10-13).

"*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.*'" (Isa. 44:28 NASB)

Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah identifies Cyrus as the Persian king who would be used by God to restore both temple and city. However, Isaiah may not have been given the precise information which allowed Him to separate the building of the city from the building of the temple, or to distinguish between Cyrus from Artaxerxes. Although the two events and two kings of Persia are separated in time, Isaiah lumps them together. Isaiah would not have conceived of a temple lying in the midst of the ruins of Jerusalem.

This theory should not shake our faith in the inspiration of the Bible. Isaiah was not mistaken; he just didn't have all the historical details. The history of redemption is not given to God's people all at once in one prophetic utterance. The OT prophets cannot be accused of inaccuracy for making general pronouncements which lacked scientific precision. In other words, we should never expect the OT prophets to prophesy as if they had just read the NT. They are prophesying events which took place hundreds of years later.

¹⁰As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, ¹¹ seeking to know **what person or time** the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He **predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow**. (1 Peter 1:10-11 NASB)

(This diligent search for truth by OT prophets is quite in contrast to the dogmatic assertions of modern "prophets" who claim to pinpoint the coming of Christ within a short span of time.)

For example, in Isaiah 9 and 11, Isaiah conflates (blends together) the first and second coming of Christ as if they were one event. Obviously, they are two events, but this does not diminish the value of Isaiah's prophecy of Jesus' birth and His victorious reign on earth at His second coming. The OT prophets' knowledge of future events would become more precise as the Holy Spirit revealed it to them. Even within his lifetime, Isaiah also prophesies with precision the events surrounding the death of Christ.

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; **And the government will rest on His shoulders**; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ **There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom**, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this. (Isa. 9:6-7 NASB)

But with righteousness He will judge the poor, **And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth**; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, **And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked**. ⁵ Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, And faithfulness the belt about His waist. ⁶ **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. (Isa. 11:4-7 NASB)

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. ⁵ But **He was pierced through for our transgressions**, He was

crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, **And by His scourging we are healed.** (Isa. 53:4-5 NASB)

By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was **cut off out of the land of the living** For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?⁹ **His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death,** Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. (Isa. 53:8-9 NASB)

Even if Cyrus was not the Persian ruler who ordered the rebuilding of Jerusalem, his decree to rebuild the **temple** set in motion the political conditions that would later result in the full restoration of Jerusalem. For this reason, I believe that the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem in Daniel 9: 25 is separate from the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple. The decree of v. 25 is the decree of Artaxerxes in 445 BC.

In the first part of chapter 9, Daniel is making a precise calculation of the years that Judah has been in exile. If Daniel had only considered the 70 years exile to be symbolical or approximate, he would not have bothered to count the years. What is the point of counting symbolic years that may not correspond to actual years? For Daniel, the exile represented 70 literal years which implies that the 70 weeks of years stand for 490 literal years (Robertson, *Christ of the Prophets*, p. 261).

Counting 483 years from 539 BC and coming to 56 BC does not provide very much accuracy concerning the time of the earthly ministry of Christ which took place around 30 AD, give or take a few years. Although the 70 weeks cannot be counted exactly, the relationship between the 70 weeks and the 70 years must be considered.

We cannot discount either the symbolism of the 70 weeks or the chronology of the 70 weeks (Robertson, p. 266). The Jubilee symbolism of 7 X 7 is important, but so is the chronology (490 years which happens to be the seven sevens of Jubilee multiplied X 10, 49 X 10 = 490, a complete number of Jubilee years). For this reason, Robertson, Barnes, and others argue that the **issuing of the decree to rebuild** was not the decree to rebuild the temple, but the decree to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This decree was made by **ArtaXerxes** in the days of Nehemiah, not Cyrus. It is recorded in Nehemiah 1 and 2 and is distinguished from the decree to rebuild the temple in Ezra 1: 2 (Robertson, p. 262, footnote).

¹The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, *in* the **twentieth year**, while I was in Susa the capitol,² that Hanani, one of my brothers, and some men from Judah came; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped *and* had survived the captivity, and about Jerusalem.³ They said to me, "The remnant there in the province who survived the captivity are in **great distress and reproach**, and **the wall of Jerusalem is broken down and its gates are burned with fire.**"⁴ When I heard these words, I sat down and wept and mourned for days; and I was fasting and praying before the God of heaven. (Nehemiah 1:1-4 NASB)

And it came about in the month Nisan, in the **twentieth year of King Artaxerxes**, that wine *was* before him, and I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.² So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad though you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of heart." Then I was very much afraid.³ I said to the king, "Let the king live forever. Why should my face not be sad **when the city**, the place of my fathers' tombs, **lies desolate and its gates have been consumed**

by fire?"⁴ Then the king said to me, "What would you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.⁵ I said to the king, "If it please the king, and if your servant has found favor before you, send me to Judah, to the **city** of my fathers' tombs, **that I may rebuild it.**" (Nehemiah 2:1-5 NASB)

You will notice in these two passages that nothing is said about rebuilding the temple. The second temple had already been rebuilt by 520 BC—seventy-five to 80 years earlier—under the leadership of Zerubbabel the governor of Judah and Joshua the high priest, both of whom were encouraged by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah. But Nehemiah is sad because the **city** of Jerusalem—after about 91-94 years since the first return of the exiles to Jerusalem (536 BC-445 BC= 91 years)—still has no walls or gates to defend itself against its enemies. Nehemiah asks permission from Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls and gates of the city, and permission is given.

The year 445 BC is generally accepted as the 20th year of Artaxerxes. Other estimates have been 454 BC (Hengstenberg, cf. Barnes), but this is only nine years difference from 445 BC, not 91-94 years difference. If you do the math, either 445 BC or 454 BC gets you very close to the public ministry of Christ on earth.

If you add 69 sevens (49 years + 434 years) to 445 BC, you get to 38 AD. If you add 483 years to 454 BC, you get to 29 AD. Either 38 AD or 29 AD are acceptable dates for the public ministry of Christ. Since the New Testament does not give us the exact dates either of Jesus' birth or death, we can only estimate the dates from secular sources. But either 38 AD or 29 AD gets us close enough. The decree of Cyrus, on the other hand, only gets us within 86 years of Christ's earthly ministry.

Why is the chronology of the 70 weeks important? Because you can't identify the correct ending point without the correct starting point. Why did Gabriel show up in the first place? Gabriel comes in answer to Daniel's prayer. What was Daniel praying about? He was praying for God to restore the people to the land of Judah for the purpose of rebuilding the city and the temple—all of this for the glory of God, not for the glory of Judah. Daniel's primary concern was neither the temple nor the city, but God's glory.

Gabriel's prophecy to Daniel was designed to give Daniel hope concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. His message accomplished this purpose. It gave Daniel the hope of restoration; and, therefore, hope for God's reputation among the nations. Daniel himself would interpret the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple as the answer to his prayers because he would have known of this decree from the prophecy of Isaiah 100 years previously.

But Gabriel had even more important news for Daniel than the rebuilding of the city and the temple. If Daniel's primary interest was God's reputation among the nations, then the coming of **Messiah the Prince** and the completion of all sacrifices for God's people would be the most wonderful news that Daniel could imagine. We have already seen in v. 24 that the accomplishments of Messiah the Prince completely overshadow the predictions concerning the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple. Restraining sin, bringing in everlasting righteousness, etc. are far more important than physical temples and cities. Gabriel reminds Daniel of the predictions concerning the Messiah in Isaiah (e.g. Isa. 9, 11).

By giving Daniel information about the timing of Messiah the Prince, he was also providing information which would be important to many generations of faithful Jews living from 445 BC until the first coming of Christ. But if Gabriel is giving Daniel a time-table for the future coming of the Messiah, his prophecy would be valuable to future generations only to the extent that it was chronologically accurate. By identifying the decree of v. 25 as the decree of Artaxerxes in 445 BC, not the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC, future readers of Daniel's prophecy will be able to reasonably predict the beginning of Christ's ministry.

In fact, we have evidence from John's gospel that some Jews were actively looking for the Christ in the early part of the first century AD. Priests and Levites asked John the Baptist whether he was the Christ (Jn. 1: 20). In John 2: 25, Simeon was **looking for the consolation of Israel** and identified the baby Jesus as

³² A LIGHT OF REVELATION TO THE GENTILES, And the glory of Your people Israel." (Lk. 2:32 NASB)

Likewise, on the same occasion, Anna the prophetess spoke of Jesus **to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem** (Lk. 2:38 NASB). Many faithful Jews were looking for the Messiah during the first century AD. Could it be that they were looking for **Messiah the Prince** based upon the chronology of the prophecy of Daniel? If so, they were doing the same thing Daniel was doing with the 70 years of exile—they were counting off the years.

The purpose of Gabriel's message, therefore, was not simply to inform Daniel, but to inform the faithful remnant of Jews living at the termination point of the 69 weeks until Messiah the Prince. In addition to this purpose, Gabriel's message has been taught to God's people for the last 2000 years, proving that God's program of salvation is going ahead as scheduled. The God who can pinpoint the beginning of the ministry of Christ 483 years from the decree of Artaxerxes is the same God who ordains the end from the beginning. Is there any doubt in our minds that God is sovereign over history? Only a God who can declare the future is the one true God.

"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.' ⁷ 'Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; Yes, let him recount it to Me in order, From the time that I established the ancient nation. And **let them declare to them the things that are coming And the events that are going to take place.** ⁸ **'Do not tremble and do not be afraid; Have I not long since announced it to you and declared it?** And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any *other* Rock? I know of none.'" (Isa. 44:6-8 NASB)

Why is the symbolism of Daniel's prophecy also important? Christ himself describes His own ministry as the **fulfillment** of the Jubilee Year.

"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE **POOR**. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM **RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES**, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO **SET FREE** THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM **THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.**" (Luke 4:18-19 NASB)

The **favorable year of the Lord** is the Jubilee Year when Israelite slaves were set free, poor people who had sold their land were returned to their land, and debts were forgiven. The Jubilee Year was given to limit the oppressive economic effects of sin. But Christ looks beyond the economic oppression and applies the Jubilee Year to spiritual oppression. The worst sort of bondage is not the economic bondage of slavery and debt—although that, too, will one day be eliminated. The worst bondage is slavery to sin and the debt of sin. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Jubilee Year because He frees those who believe in Him from the penalty and the dominion of sin.

Therefore, Gabriel is informing Daniel when **Messiah the Prince** will come in fulfillment of the Jubilee Year— $70 \times 7 = 490$ years. Seven was the number of perfection, and 10 was the number of completion, a number representing the perfect timing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For while we were still helpless, **at the right time** Christ died for the ungodly. (Romans 5:6 NASB)

But when **the fullness of the time came**, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law,⁵ so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. (Galatians 4:4-5 NASB)

D. Daniel 9: 26-27

Review of Dan. 9: 24-25

(1) Verse 24 is a summary of the redemptive work of Christ. First, He **makes an end of sin**. This must not be interpreted literally as if sin ceases to exist after the crucifixion. Nevertheless, the atoning work of Christ sets in motion the necessary conditions for sin to be completely eradicated or removed from the world. One day there will be a sinless world—the not yet of the kingdom of God. But the now of the kingdom is that sin and the wages of sin have been decisively defeated at the cross. The other side of this achievement is that by His atoning work on the cross Christ has brought in **everlasting righteousness** and has fulfilled all OT prophecy. Everything written in the NT is simply a filling-out or explanation of Christ's accomplishments.

(2) The decree to rebuild Jerusalem is not the decree of Cyrus in 539 BC but the decree of Artaxerxes at the personal request of Nehemiah in 445 BC or 454 BC. If you add 69 weeks of years ($7 + 62 = 69$) or 483 years to either of these two dates, you come very close to the time when Jesus—**Messiah the Prince**—began His earthly ministry. Since the method of dating was not exact in ancient times, either of these two dates will give us acceptable chronological accuracy. But if accept the decree of Cyrus to be the beginning point of the 70 weeks, we will only get to about 56 BC ($539 \text{ BC} - 483 \text{ years} = 56 \text{ BC}$), a date that has no special significance and which is 86 years earlier than the accepted date of Christ's public ministry. Many faithful Jews like Simeon and Anna were looking for the promised Messiah to begin His ministry based upon the prophecy of Daniel 9. Jesus came in the fullness of time, right on time.

(3) The significance of the first seven weeks (49 years) is the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the introduction of the 70 weeks with the expectation of Jubilee. The next 434 years is simply the time span from the rebuilding of Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince.

(4) Jesus Christ comes in the spirit of the Jubilee Year in which the poor are restored to their land, slaves are set free and debts are forgiven. The redemption we have in Christ is the antitype of the Jubilee Year which is the type. We are set free from slavery to sin. Our debt of sin owed to God is forgiven. We will receive the future inheritance in the new heavens and earth—the fulfillment of the land promise made to Israel. As Israel is restored to the land, we are restored to the favor of God and eventually to the paradise of the garden city, the New Jerusalem representing the entire earth. **Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.** The Jubilee Year came every 49 years plus one— $7 \times 7 + 1 = 50$ years. The 70 weeks represents the perfection and completion of the Sabbatical principle. Christ came to give rest to those who are weary—to those who believe in His name (Matt. 11: 28).

We now come to vv. 26-27.

III. The Events of the Last Week—The Confirmation of the New Covenant Through the Sacrifice of Christ and the Destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem

NASB

²⁶Then after the sixty-two weeks

the Messiah

will be cut off and have nothing,

A

and **the people of the prince who is to come**

will destroy the city and the sanctuary.

And its end *will come* with a flood;
even to the end there will be war;
desolations are determined.

B

²⁷ "And **he** [*i.e. Messiah*]

will make a firm covenant

with the many for **one week**,
but in **the middle of the week**

he [*i.e. Messiah*] will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering;

A

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."**

B

NIV

²⁶After the sixty-two 'sevens,'

the Anointed One

A

will be cut off and will have nothing.

The people of the ruler who will come
will destroy the city and the sanctuary.
 The end will come like a flood:
 War will continue until the end,
 and **desolations** have been decreed.

} **B**

²⁷ **He** [*the anointed one?*]
will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.'

In the middle of the 'seven'
he [*the anointed one ?*]
will put an end to sacrifice and offering.

} **A**

And on a wing of the temple
he will set up an **abomination that causes desolation**,
 until the end that is decreed
 is poured out on him. "

} **B**

After the second segment of 62 weeks (v. 26), several momentous events take place in the last week of the 70 weeks. According to the interpretation I favor, verses 26 and v. 27 are repetitive of one another. They are different ways of expressing the same activity.

Verse 26 describes the final seven in indefinite terms. Verse 27 describes the final seven in more detail (Ferguson, *Daniel*, p. 202).

The activity of two primary people, not one, is presented in vv. 26-27: (1) **Messiah the Prince** and (2) **the prince who is to come**. They are two different people. The Messiah who is **cut off** is not the prince who later comes to **destroy** Jerusalem and the temple. Most interpreters agree with this, but in v. 27 the identification of **he** (occurring three times in the English translation) is uncertain. Moreover, Hebrew scholars are faced with the same ambiguity. They don't agree among themselves, either. The subject of **will make firm a covenant** appears to be the same **he** as the **one who makes desolate**. This is how premillennialists interpret the passage.

...Israel will have returned in large numbers to Palestine, rebuilt its temple in Jerusalem [making this the third temple built by Israel], and by treaty with the world-emperor obtained permission to restore its temple worship [the covenant, DM] including the offering of sacrifices and oblations (Ezek. 37: 7-14; Dan. 9: 27). But the period will prove to be the "day of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30: 7; Dan. 12: 1, 9-13). The emperor [i.e. the "prince who is to come"] will break his covenant with Israel, stop the sacrifices and oblations, and set up an image of himself in the temple (Dan. 9: 27; 11: 31; 12: 11; Matt. 24: 15-31; 2 Thess. 2: 4; Rev. 13: 14, 15) (Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Ecclesiology and Eschatology*, p. 362, emphasis and comment in brackets mine).

According to this interpretation, the **ruler who is to come** is the same person who **makes firm a covenant**. But then, **in the middle of the week**, this same person will break this covenant by putting an end to **sacrifice and grain offering**. But where does it say in the text that **the ruler**

breaks a covenant? It says that he **makes firm a covenant** but not that he breaks it. The part about breaking it must be read into the text. It could possibly be deduced by good and necessary inference if we could rule out the possibility that the **Messiah** who was **cut off** is definitely **NOT** the subject of **making firm the covenant**, but I don't think we can do that. Historically, the Messiah makes firm the new covenant with His people by dying for their sins on the cross. It is also this Messiah who is **cut off** and crucified. This may be one of those cases where history sheds more light on the meaning than the grammar. Again, one cannot be too dogmatic with a text as difficult as this one, but I will present what I think it means with a lot of help from my more cranial friends.

Before I do so, notice from the structure of vv. 26-27 that Daniel may be forming an ABAB forward parallel which is characteristic of Hebrew writers. Therefore, **he** who **makes firm the covenant** and is **cut off** are parallel (A), and the one who **destroys** the city and sanctuary is the one who makes **desolate** (B) are parallel. At least we can say that the concepts of destruction and desolation are parallel, but even **make firm** the covenant and being **cut off** are also parallel. Christ makes firm the new covenant in His blood by being cut off and crucified.

(1) First, Messiah the Prince will **confirm** (NIV) a **covenant** with His people for one week (v. 27). (This week is interpreted as the seven years of the great tribulation by dispensational premillennialists (see discussion of the great tribulation below). He is not **making** a covenant but making firm (NASB) a covenant previously promised (cf. Jer. 31). A covenant could not be properly inaugurated without blood being shed. In the case of the Old Covenant, the animal sacrifices provided the blood of confirmation. In this case, the blood of Christ provides the confirmation for the New Covenant.

For a covenant is valid *only* when men are dead, for it is never in force while the one who made it lives.¹⁸ Therefore even the first *covenant* was not inaugurated without blood. (Hebrews 9:17-18 NASB)

Christ said of the New Covenant,

"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant **in My blood**. (Luke 22:20 NASB)

The confirmation of the covenant takes place **in the middle of the week**, i.e. in the middle of the last week or the last seven, which takes place **after the 62 weeks**. **The prince who is to come** is not the one who confirms the covenant. This prince is the one who **destroys the city and the sanctuary**. The way the sentence is constructed, it appears that it is this prince who confirms a covenant, and the NIV translation seems to support this interpretation (see diagram above). Yet, the prince is not the subject of the second clause of v. 26. The subject of the second clause is **the people of the prince**.

The pronoun **he** in v. 27 does not refer to **the prince who is to come**, but to **Messiah the Prince** in v. 26. There is a distinction between Messiah the Prince **who is cut off and has nothing** with **the prince who is to come**. They are two different people. Some expositors have translated **Messiah** as someone other than Christ, but the description given in vv. 24-27 seems to clearly describe the person and work of Christ. Messiah the Prince puts an end to sin, brings transgression to a halt, anoints the most holy place, brings in everlasting righteousness, etc. Who could this possibly be but Jesus Christ? The way Christ accomplishes these things is by being **cut off** in His crucifixion and thus confirming the covenant in His blood.

The destruction of the city and sanctuary is done by the **prince who is to come**, a phrase that puts the second prince in a future context. But Messiah the Prince is already present, and He **confirms** or **makes firm** the New Covenant in His blood, accomplishing the six things mentioned by Gabriel in v. 4.

The phrase **make firm a covenant** and **will be cut off** refer to the same activity—the sacrificial death of Christ. At the very moment Christ dies, He proclaims, “**It is finished.**” At this point Christ confirms the covenant in His blood, and the wrath of God against sin is satisfied. Being cut off indicates “a violent penal death” (Ferguson, p. 202).

‘But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to the LORD, in his uncleanness, that person **shall be cut off** from his people. (Leviticus 7:20 NASB)

Isaiah refers to this violent death in His prophecy of the Christ.

By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered **That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?** (Isaiah 53:8 NASB)

When Messiah is **cut off** and has **nothing**, it would appear to everyone concerned that He has lost everything and that the kingdom of God has been utterly defeated. But things were not as they appear to be. The very death which appears to put a stop to Messiah’s kingdom actually inaugurates or confirms the kingdom. By His death, Christ rescues the kingdom from the power of Satan, and through His resurrection He defeats death which has entered the world through sin.

The last part of v. 27 further explains what Christ does in His atoning sacrifice. In the middle of the last week the Messiah—not the prince who is to come—**will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering**. Gabriel is now getting more specific about the activity of the Messiah who makes firm the covenant. He is speaking figuratively or redemptively about putting an end to sacrifice and grain offering. Although temple sacrifices continued until the destruction of the temple 40 years later, the legitimacy and value of all temple sacrifices came to an end at the sacrifice of Christ.

At the moment Christ died, God no longer recognized or accepted any other sacrifice. This is the third phrase which essentially describes the activity of Christ in vv. 26-27: (1) He **will be cut off** or put to death, (2) He **will make firm** the covenant, and (3) He **will put a stop** to all legitimate temple sacrifices.

Any other sacrifice in the temple would be illegitimate from this point on. All the temple sacrifices were now embodied and fulfilled in the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. They were therefore obsolete and had no more atoning value. God would no longer recognize the sacrifice by the high priest on behalf of the nation once a year on the Day of Atonement—not for the next 40 years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. Israel had rejected its only Savior, and for the time being, God had rejected Israel until **the fullness of the Gentiles has come in** (cf. Rom. 11: 15-36).

Everything about the temple service and the tabernacle was now obsolete, unnecessary, and worse, it was an **abomination**, the reason, I believe, Gabriel says, “**and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate**”. The wing of the temple is possibly the pinnacle or the highest point of the temple.

And he [*Satan*] led Him [*Christ*] to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the **pinnacle of the temple**, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here (Luke 4:9 NASB)

The beautiful temple that Herod the Great had restored or embellished (the second temple built by Jews who returned in 536 BC) had now become an abomination to God. Why? Because the Jews had rejected the only sufficient sacrifice for sin.

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth [*that is, the gospel*], there **no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**, (Hebrews 10:26 NASB)

(2) We now come to the activity of **the prince who is to come** and **the people of the prince**. He is a person whose activity is future to the activity of the Messiah. He does essentially one thing: he and his people destroy the city of Jerusalem and the temple (v. 26).

According to the premillennial interpretation, **the prince who is to come** is the ruler of the restored Roman Empire. This prince makes a covenant with the nation of Israel which he later breaks. Lewis Sperry Chafer, in his *Systematic Theology*, quotes Henry C. Thiessen from *Bibliotheca Sacra*.

We learn that there will be a federated world, i.e. the old Roman empire will be restored, with a Satan-energized ruler at the head. Ten kings will reign under him. It will be a despotic form of government. Rev. 13: 1-10; 17: 1-18; 19: 17-21; cf. Dan. 2: 40-45; 7: 23-27. At the beginning this government will be strongly influenced by the federated church, the false bride of Christ, the mother of harlots; but after a time the emperor will prohibit all former worship, represent himself as god, and require the world to worship him. [Thiessen identifies this ruler as the man of lawlessness in 2 Thess. 2.] Opposers will be persecuted and killed, or by means of an absolute boycott be forced to flee for their lives. Rev. 17: 1-17; 13: 11-18; 2 Thess. 2: 3-12. Along with this Israel will have returned in large numbers to Palestine, rebuilt its temple in Jerusalem [making this the third temple built by Israel], and by treaty with the world-emperor obtained permission to restore its temple worship, including the offering of sacrifices and oblations (Ezek. 37: 7-14; Dan. 9: 27). But the period will prove to be the “day of Jacob’s trouble (Jer. 30: 7; Dan. 12: 1, 9-13). The emperor [i.e. the “prince who is to come”] will break his covenant with Israel, stop the sacrifices and oblations, and set up an image of himself in the temple (Dan. 9: 27; 11: 31; 12: 11; Matt. 24: 15-31; 2 Thess. 2: 4; Rev. 13: 14, 15) (Chafer, *Systematic Theology: Ecclesiology and Eschatology*, p. 362).

Therefore, according to dispensationalism, the prince who is to come is someone still in the future who comes at the end of the age. Another Dispensationalist scholar, Mark Cambron, says,

The prince, the Antichrist, shall confirm a seven-year covenant [the final, seventieth week of Daniel’s revelation, DM]...with Israel. In the midst of that seven-year agreement he breaks his covenant, places his throne in the temple and causes the world to worship him as God (2 Thessalonians 2: 1-12); then he shall immediately destroy it.

The elevation to deity and the recognition of worship (in the temple) is the “abomination of desolation” which is referred to by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24: 15.

After the Tribulation (70th Week) is over, Messiah shall return and set up His Kingdom and He shall reign over the whole world (Cambron, *Daniel and Revelation Made Plain*, p. 363).

Also from *Bible Doctrines*, Nelson and Wawire.

Most students of prophecy hold that the Jews will return to Palestine in unbelief, as they are doing at present. The Antichrist will make a covenant with them during the Tribulation, but later will break it. He will gather all nations together to destroy them completely. The Jews will be brought face to face with utter destruction and extinction. Then they will realize their great national sin of unbelief and their rejection of Jesus the Christ. They will weep in deep repentance, asking God to send back His Son as their Deliverer. The Jews will welcome Him back as their Savior and King (Ezekiel 37:3-4; Daniel 9: 26-27; Romans 11: 25-27).

I have already said that it is the Messiah who makes a covenant with the people. Christ makes this covenant in his blood. Notice also that there is also nothing in the verse about making a covenant with Israel. It says, **And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week** (Dan 9:27 NASB). The verse does not specify with whom He makes the covenant. I believe He makes the covenant with all believers. But it does not say, as Thiessen says, with Israel.

Furthermore, there is nothing in the verse about breaking the covenant. It only says He **confirms** or **makes firm** a covenant with the **many**. The idea of breaking the covenant is inferred from the text which says, **but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering** (Dan 9:27 NASB). Some scholars assume that breaking the covenant is demonstrated in stopping the sacrifices. They would assume this because of their theory about a ruler who makes a covenant with Israel during the tribulation and after a third temple is built. It must be admitted that the suspension of sacrifices in v. 27 is a fitting antitype to what Antiochus IV Epiphanes did in 167 BC. But, as I have suggested, Christ put a stop to all legitimate sacrifices in the temple the moment He said, **“It is finished.”** No other sacrifice was needed, and no other sacrifice was accepted as legitimate after that point.

This cessation of sacrifice corresponds with the accomplishments of the seventy sevens as described earlier when it is stated that iniquity will be atoned for and eternal righteousness will be brought in (Dan. 9: 24). Once iniquity has been covered by a proper atonement, there can be no more sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:26). This climactic event, according to Daniel 9:27, is to occur at the halfway point of the seventieth week of seven years, or three and one-half years into the last week (Robertson, p. 266, emphasis mine).

Alternative View of the “He” in v. 27.

I have already told you that one should not be too dogmatic about this section of Daniel. Davis, among other evangelical scholars, takes issue with the identification of the subject in v. 27 as the Messiah.

The first question to ask of verse 27 is: Who is doing what here? Some think that the anointed one/messiah of verse 26 is the subject of the first two verbs. The messiah then will *make a firm*

covenant wit many for one week and in the middle of that week will *make sacrifice and offering stop*. The use of *the many* (lit.) would support this 'positive' view, for this terminology is use of God's own people elsewhere (Isa. 53: 11-12; 54:1; Dan. 12: 10). Those who take this messianic view see the stopping of sacrifice and offering as a plus, the result of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice as Hebrews 10: 12-14 indicates. I think this view is erroneous. First, the subject of the verb (*make a firm covenant*) is not expressed; it is simply *he*. So it is more natural to identify that 'he' with the more recently mentioned *he* of verse 26b, the *leader who is coming*, rather than with the more remote *anointed one* of 26a. Second, the verb form (*higbir*) is a power-word and suggest a coercive imposing of a covenant. Finally, elsewhere in the book of Daniel when legitimate worship is stopped or taken away it is a hostile act by an ungodly ruler (8:11-12; 11; 31). One expects the same to be the case here.

What then is the picture of verse 27? Apparently the final (remember we are in the last 'week') enemy of God and his people seeks to impose idolatrous worship (*abominations*) until he meets the end God has decreed for him. A final ruler then exalts himself, imposes his authority, forbids true worship, instigates idolatrous worship—and runs into the meat-grinder of God's decree. Predetermined. On target. Certain (*Daniel*, pp. 137-138).

Davis' three points are well-taken. From a grammatical standpoint, it would be more natural to interpret the antecedent of **he** in v. 27 as the **prince who is to come** in v. 26 rather than the Messiah who is mentioned earlier in the verse. It is also true that the suspension of legitimate worship in Daniel is attributed twice to ungodly rulers. Moreover, before the Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD, they desecrated the temple by worshipping images of Caesar inside it, an act which implies putting a **stop to sacrifice and grain offering**.

Nevertheless, I am still more inclined toward an interpretation that takes the whole context of Daniel into greater consideration, taking the reader from Daniel's day to the work of Christ in the first century and then to the consummation. Confirming the new covenant in His blood is precisely what Christ accomplished.

The Gap Theory

The theory of a future prince of a restored Roman Empire (per Chafer's dispensational premillennialism) requires a large gap in time between two phrases in v. 26: **the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary**. Dispensational scholars say that God's time clock for the Jewish people stopped after Jesus' crucifixion and is now waiting to start up again with the coming of the **prince**, the **antichrist** or the **man of lawlessness** (2 Thess. 2). The gap begins after the word, **and**, in v. 26. This gap is now almost 2000 years and is called the "church age". By rapturing the church out of the world before the antichrist, Jesus completes His work with the church and turns his attention once again to Israel, His covenant nation. The clock begins to tick again in the last week during the tribulation in which the antichrist makes war with the Jewish people—not the church since the church has already been raptured from the earth (1 Thess. 4).

One question is this: Where in the text is this "gap" in time between the Messiah's death and the prince who is to come. When you read v. 26, it reads without a break.

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

"Then after the sixty-two weeks the Messiah will be cut off and have nothing, and the people of the prince who is to come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. And its end *will come* with a flood; even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined. (Daniel 9:26 NASB)

There seems to be no such gap. The Messiah is cut off and then the prince and people come and destroy the temple. We know from secular history that in AD 70 the Roman general Titus Vespasianus (or Titus, son of Vespasian) surrounded Jerusalem with Roman legions (troops) and besieged the city. He did so in response to the rebellion of the Jews against Roman rule from 66 to 70 AD. Jesus predicts what happens in that siege in Matthew 24.

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him. ² And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down." (Matthew 24:1-2 NASB)

"Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of **through Daniel the prophet**, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. ¹⁸ "Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak. ¹⁹ "But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! ²⁰ "But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. ²¹ "For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will." (Matthew 24:15-21 NASB)

What is this **abomination of desolation** that Jesus speaks of in Matt. 24: 15? Dispensational scholars say that this will occur in the future when the ruler of the restored Roman Empire will set up his image to be worshipped in the third Jewish temple (not yet built). However, something has already happened in 70 AD that fits this description. Matthew, writing for Jews, used a very familiar term that any Jewish reader would have recognized. Antiochus Epiphanes had desecrated the temple in 167-164 BC by having the priests sacrifice pigs on the altar in the temple. This story is not in the Bible, but it is predicted in Daniel's prophecy.

"Forces from him will arise, desecrate the sanctuary fortress, and do away with the regular sacrifice. And they will set up the abomination of desolation. (Daniel 11:31 NASB)

Jesus was saying that something much like this would happen again in 70 AD. In the words of F.F. Bruce, when

...the temple area was taken by the Romans, and the sanctuary itself was still burning, the soldiers brought their legionary standards into the sacred precincts, set them up opposite the eastern gate, and offered sacrifice to them there, acclaiming Titus as emperor (victorious commander) as they did so....This action, following as it did the cessation of the daily sacrifice three weeks earlier, must have seemed to many Jews, as it evidently did to Josephus, a new and final fulfillment of Daniel's vision of a time when the continual burnt offering would be taken away and the abomination of desolation set up (*Israel and the Nations*, p. 224. Quoted in Knox Chamblin, *Matthew*, Vol. 2, p. 1182).

There is further evidence from Luke's gospel that when Jesus mentions the abomination of desolation, He is predicting the desecration of the temple by Roman soldiers in 70 AD. He is not

predicting the prince of a restored Roman Empire, but rather the one that existed in His day. Once more from Matthew and Luke.

"Therefore **when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet**, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),¹⁶ then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.¹⁷ "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. (Matthew 24:15-17 NASB)

"But **when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies**, then recognize that her desolation is near.²¹ "Then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those who are in the midst of the city must leave, and those who are in the country must not enter the city;²² because these are days of vengeance, so that all things which are written will be fulfilled. (Luke 21:20-22 NASB)

The similarity of these verses show that Matthew and Luke are reporting the same event. Why does Luke report Jesus' instructions differently? Remember that Matthew writes to Jewish believers who would have recognized the phrase, **abomination of desolation** from the book of Daniel. But Luke's Gentile readers would not have been familiar with the book of Daniel. But when Luke writes, **When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies**, they could understand that kind of language. Luke does not mention Daniel's prophecy directly, but he does say, **so that all things which are written will be fulfilled**—i.e. things which are predicted in the book of Daniel. I do not deny that there must be some kind of gap between the death of Christ and the prince who is to come. The gap is 40 years, but this gap is not so long that it makes a complete break in the prophecy of Gabriel. The angel Gabriel does not fill in any of the details between the death of Christ in 33 AD and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD simply because the details were not necessary for Daniel to know.

Daniel needed to know four things:

(1) The 70-year exile would end and the temple and the city would be restored.

(2) After 483 years the Messiah would begin his earthly ministry and accomplish the six things listed in v. 24 and repeated in a different way in v. 27—i.e. the Messiah would confirm the new covenant in His own blood, thus laying the foundation for a sinless new creation. Daniel would be familiar with Jeremiah's prophecy of a new covenant (Jer. 31).

(3) Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed again sometime after Messiah is cut off, sometime after the middle of the week. You will notice that Gabriel does not tell Daniel when the last week is terminated. Therefore, it does not matter that the destruction of Jerusalem comes a full 40 years after Christ's death.

(4) Daniel should not worry about the temple being destroyed because it would no longer be needed. The Messiah would make a complete sacrifice for sin rendering all further sacrifices an abomination before God.

The interpretation above is based on documented historical events that have already occurred in 70 AD, not on speculation about a restored Roman Empire or a rebuilt Jewish temple. Such things may occur in the future, but they have not yet occurred; and there are many scholars who believe that they will never occur. I personally doubt that God will allow a third Jewish temple to be built

when none of the sacrifices offered in this new temple would be acceptable to Him. They would all be an abomination to God since they would imply the insufficiency of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

The Dispensational interpretation of Daniel is based on the theological separation between Israel and the Church which is exegetically doubtful. What God has joined together in the Church—both Jews and Gentiles—let no theologian separate. He has joined together both Jews and Gentiles, and people from all tribes and nations. The church is the bride of Christ and there is no salvation outside this mystical church whether you are Jew or Gentile. There will be no restarting of God's program with the Jews separate from His program with the Gentiles.

Daniel 9: 24-27 is a prediction of seven-fold judgment upon Judah because of their persistent unbelief.

Because of Judah's persistent disobedience and disregard for the law of God, the judgment of the 70-year exile would be continued seven times the duration of the 70-year exile—70 X 7 or 490 years (Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 551). Notice the curses of the covenant given in Leviticus 26 (cited in Waltke).

'If also after these things [*curses*] you do not obey Me, then I will punish you **seven times more** for your sins. (Leviticus 26:18 NASB; word in brackets mine)

'If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you **seven times** according to your sins. (Leviticus 26:21 NASB)

'And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me,²⁴ then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you **seven times** for your sins. (Leviticus 26:23-24 NASB)

'Yet if in spite of this [*curse*] you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me,²⁸ then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you **seven times** for your sins. (Leviticus 26:27-28 NASB; word in brackets mine)

Again, what did Daniel need to know from Gabriel? He needed to know that Judah would return to the land and that the temple and the city would be restored—just as God had promised through Jeremiah. Yet, because Judah had not repented of their sins but would remain disobedient even after returning from the exile, God would judge them yet another 490 years (70 x 7-fold judgment = 490). How did God judge them? After the prophecy of Malachi, God did not send Judah any more prophets until John the Baptist roughly 400 years later. (The northern kingdom of Israel had not received a prophet since Hosea in 750 BC and God did not send them one single prophet while they were in exile.) After the extended last week of Daniel's prophecy (more than 7 years) God would once more judge the nation by destroying the city, the temple, and every single person in Jerusalem in 70 AD. None would be spared.

There was another curse-promise that Jesus had made to the Jews when they rejected His message.

"Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God **will be taken away from you** and given to a people, producing the fruit of it. (Matthew 21:43 NASB)

Jesus never said that His kingdom would be given back to the Jews as a nation. The only program going on right now is the Church, and Israel as a nation will one day repent and be brought into the church through repentance and faith (Rom. 11; cf. John Murray, *Romans*).

II. Jesus' Prophecy—Matthew 24

A. Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming—Matthew 24: 1-42; Mark 13: 1-33; Luke 21: 5-36

Jesus came out from the temple and was going away when His disciples came up to point out the temple buildings to Him.

² And He said to them, "Do you not see all these things?"

Truly I say to you,

not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."

³ As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives,
the disciples came to Him privately, saying,

"Tell us,

when will these things happen,

and what will be the sign

of Your coming,

and of the end of the age?"

⁴ And Jesus answered and said to them,

"See to it that no one misleads you.

⁵ For many will come in My name, saying,

'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.

⁶ "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars.

See that you are not frightened,

for *those things* must take place, but *that* is not yet the end.

⁷ "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,

and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes.

⁸ "But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs.

⁹ "Then

they will deliver you to **tribulation**,

and will kill you,

and you will be hated by all nations

because of My name.

¹⁰ "At that time

many

will fall away

and will betray one another

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

and hate one another.

¹¹ "Many false prophets
will arise
and will mislead many.

¹² "Because lawlessness is increased,
most people's love will grow cold.

¹³ "But the one
who endures to the end,
he will be saved.

¹⁴ "**This gospel of the kingdom
shall be preached in the whole world
as a testimony to all the nations,
and then the end will come.**

¹⁵ "Therefore **when you** see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION
which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet,
standing in the holy place
(let the reader understand),

¹⁶ **then those** who are in **Judea**
must flee to the **mountains**.

¹⁷ "Whoever is on the housetop
must not go down to get the things out that are in his house.

¹⁸ "Whoever is in the field
must not turn back to get his cloak.

¹⁹ "But woe
to those
who are pregnant
and to those
who are nursing babies in those days!

²⁰ "But pray that your flight will not be
in the winter,
or on a Sabbath.

²¹ "For **then** there will be a **great tribulation**,
such as has not occurred
since the beginning of the world until now,
nor ever will.

²² "Unless **those days**
had been cut short,
no life would have been saved;
but for the sake of **the elect**

those days

will be cut short.

²³ "Then if anyone says to you,
'Behold, here is the Christ,'
or 'There *He is*,'

do not believe *him*.

²⁴ "For false Christs and false prophets
will arise
and will show great signs and wonders,
so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect.

²⁵ "Behold, I have told you in advance.

²⁶ "So if they say to you,
'Behold, He is in the wilderness,'
do not go out,
or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,'
do not believe *them*.

²⁷ "For just as the lightning
comes from the east
and flashes even to the west,
so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

²⁸ "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

²⁹ "But immediately after the tribulation of those days

THE SUN
WILL BE DARKENED,
AND THE MOON
WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT,
AND THE STARS
WILL FALL from the sky,
and the powers of the heavens
will be shaken.

³⁰ "And then

the sign of the Son of Man
will appear in the sky,

and then

all the tribes of the earth
will mourn,
and they will see the SON OF MAN
COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY
with power and great glory.

³¹ "And He will send forth His angels
with A GREAT TRUMPET

and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER
His elect from the four winds,
from one end of the sky to the other.

³² "Now learn the parable from the fig tree:

when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves,
you know
that summer is near;

³³ so, you too,

when you see all these things,
recognize that He is near, *right* at the door.

³⁴ "Truly I say to you, this generation

will not pass away

until all these things take place.

³⁵ "Heaven and earth will pass away,

but My words will not pass away.

³⁶ "**But of that day and hour**

no one knows,

not even the angels of heaven,

nor the Son,

but the Father alone.

³⁷ "For the coming of the Son of Man

will be just like the days of Noah.

³⁸ "For as in those days before the flood

they were eating and drinking,

marrying and giving in marriage,

until the day that Noah entered the ark,

³⁹ and they did not understand

until the flood came

and took them all away;

so will the coming of the Son of Man be.

⁴⁰ "Then there will be two men in the field;

one will be taken

and one will be left.

⁴¹ "Two women *will be* grinding at the mill;

one will be taken

and one will be left.

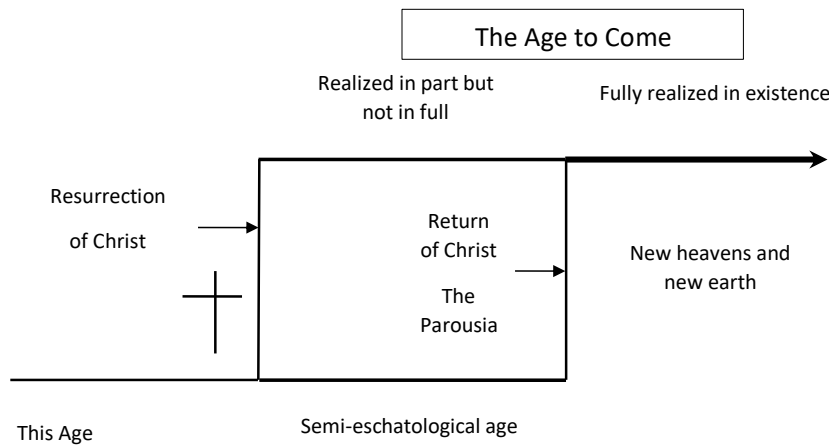
⁴² "Therefore be on the alert,

for you do not know

which day your Lord is coming.

As they are leaving the temple, the disciples stop a moment to admire the architecture. Jesus promptly tells them that a day would come when the whole edifice would be demolished. This statement is so shocking that it evokes the conclusion that Christ was talking about His future **coming** (*parousia*) and **the end of the age**. Jesus does not correct the misunderstanding that the end of the present age must come at the same time as the destruction of the temple. Instead, Jesus weaves the two events together as if they were one event in a mastery of prophetic foreshortening.

As we shall see below, Jesus is not being deceptive or deliberately confusing in His explanation. There are significant clues in the discourse to the effect that these are separate events; yet, on the other hand, the resurrection of Christ marks the beginning of a new age, the “semi-eschatological” age concurrent with the present age. Note the diagram below, slightly modified from Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, pp. 278-279. Frame’s diagram is a slight modification of Geerhardus Vos’ two-age structure found in *The Pauline Eschatology*, p. 38, cited by Frame.



“This age” begins at the fall of Adam and continues until the return of Christ, the Parousia. “The age to come” begins at the resurrection of Christ and continues through all eternity. Therefore, “this age” and “the age to come” co-exist simultaneously between the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ—the “semi-eschatological” age in which we live (represented by bold lines). The age to come (partially realized from the resurrection of Christ until the *Parousia*; 1 Cor. 13: 9-12) will be fully realized or consummated at His return and will continue eternally in this fully realized state (represented by the bolder line).

1. Preliminary signs (Matthew 24: 4-14; Mark 13: 5-13; Luke 21: 8-19)

In this section, Jesus begins to answer the disciples’ question: “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” He answers the last question first, the signs accompanying the end of the age. To prevent His disciples being misled, several signs are given to them.

First, false **Christs** will arise (Matt. 24: 5; Mk. 13: 6; Lk. 21: 8). Second, there will be **wars and rumors of wars** and **nation will rise against nation** (Matt. 24: 6-7a, 7-8a, 9-10). Thirdly, there will be **famines** (caused by droughts and wars) and **earthquakes** (24: 7a, 8a, 11). Luke adds **plagues, terrors** and **great signs from heaven** (21: 11). The disciples should not be alarmed by **these things** since they are merely the beginning of the end, not the end itself—like the beginning of **birth pangs** but not the regular, frequent contractions of a woman in active labor. It is interesting that Paul uses this same analogy in Romans 8: 22 with the verb form of the same word (*sunodinō*, **birth pangs**, compared with *ōdin*). The earth itself is likened to a woman about to give birth. The “baby” is the new heaven and new earth unspoiled by the futility of man’s sin (Rom. 8: 18-25). Little did the disciples know that Jesus was describing the next 2,000 years of world history—false Messiahs, wars, famines, plagues, earthquakes, terrors. Based on this description, it is unlikely that Jesus was describing imminent world events in the 1st century.

(1) Rome would continue to dominate the world, virtually unchallenged, until the fall of Rome in the late fifth century AD. Thus, **nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom** are descriptions that do not fit the first century AD, at least in the Mediterranean world, the only world with which the disciples would be familiar.

(2) **You will be hated by all nations because of my name** also does not fit the first century AD before Christianity became well-known to nations outside the Mediterranean world. It more aptly describes the situation of the end of the age in Revelation and in Daniel 7. Although Christians were severely persecuted and put to death in the first century, they were persecuted primarily by one nation, Rome. Moreover, the Roman persecution would intensify in the centuries following.

(3) It is unlikely that **This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world** would describe the missionary advance of the first century, but would include that advance for the last 20 centuries and counting.

The destruction of the temple and His second coming were two distinct events, not one—unless we are willing to believe some untraditional interpretations of His second coming.

The description of Matt. 24: 9-14; Mk. 13: 9-13; and Lk. 21: 12-19 is one which accurately summarizes the history of the church from the first century, beginning with the book of Acts and the martyrdom of Stephen, to this very day. According to church tradition, all the apostles except John died a martyr’s death. Both Paul and Peter were beheaded in Rome. The followers of Christ would first be arrested by their Jewish persecutors who would subsequently turn them over to the civil magistrates of the Roman Empire. The afflictions of the Apostle Paul are recorded in Acts and his epistles.

But the persecutions mentioned in these texts are not limited to the first century. The first three centuries of the church were characterized by intense persecution up until 313 AD when Emperor Constantine made the Christian faith legal in the Roman Empire with the Edict of Milan. Many centuries later, thousands of French Huguenots (Calvinists) were slaughtered during the period of

the counterreformation in France, a country now left spiritually desolate through its murder of believers. The 20th century has seen more martyrdoms than all the other nineteen centuries combined, and the 21st may well surpass the last century in blood spilled for the sake of Christ. During this period, many professing Christians have abandoned their faith completely because of persecution, but those who **endure to the end**—namely, those who are truly chosen—will be saved (Matt. 24: 13).

While the verse clusters above accurately describe the history of the church under persecution for the last 2,000 years, Matthew 24: 6-7; Mk. 13: 7-8; and Luke 21: 10-11a, accurately describe the history of the world for the same period. The world has been a place of unceasing wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, famines, earthquakes, and plagues. Half of Pompey had been left in ruins by a volcanic eruption in 63 AD (Geldenhuis, *Luke*, p. 531, note) followed by its total annihilation by the same volcano, Mt. Vesuvius, in 79 AD. There were also famines in the reigns of both Claudius and Nero previous to 68 AD (Geldenhuis, p. 531; cf. Hendriksen, *Matthew*, pp. 852-853, for an excellent treatment of vv. 6-7, including the many severe earthquakes which have occurred in the last 2,000 years). Such catastrophic events should not alarm or surprise the disciples, nor should they distract them away from their primary purpose of preaching the gospel to the nations (Matt. 23: 14; Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished, p. 216).

Such occurrences also should not distract the modern church from its mission, nor stimulate its scholars into frenzied attempts to calculate the timing of Christ's return. Additionally, the occurrence of such things should not fool the disciples into believing false Christs who would exploit these events to prove the validity of their claims to be the Christ (Matt. 23: 4-5, 11; Carson, p. 498). These events do not signal the **end** (*telos*), and the disciples must not allow themselves to be confused. They are but the **beginning of birth pangs** (v. 8) or the "beginning of the end."

The connection between **wars and rumors of wars** and the destruction of Jerusalem described in Matthew 24: 15-25 should be noted. When the disciples of Jesus hear rumors of war between Judea and Rome before AD 66 and see the **armies** (Lk.) beginning to gather around Jerusalem, they should know that these things, however significant, do *not* signal the time of His **coming** or the **end of the age**. They are only the beginning. This contradicts the preterist interpretation of Matthew 24 which insists that Jesus returned in 70 AD during the destruction of Jerusalem. Had He returned at the end of the Jewish War in 70 AD, He would have contradicted His express statements, **but that is not yet the end** (v. 6b) and **But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs** (v. 8).

The **end** will not come until the gospel has been preached **to all the nations** (v. 14). The preterists (those who believe Christ literally returned in 70 AD) would interpret the fulfillment of this verse in the missionary enterprise of the Apostle Paul who took the gospel to Asia Minor, Macedonia, Achaia, Rome, and possibly to Spain—the known nations of the Roman Empire—before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Thus, by 70 AD the gospel had been preached in all the nations of the Roman Empire; but in light of the expansion of the gospel in the last 2000 years, it is unlikely that Christ was referring to the gospel's proclamation merely to the Roman Empire (cf. Chamblin, *Matthew*, vol. 2, 1175, footnote).

It is true that all the predictions found in this section occurred in the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, but we must interpret them as the foreshadowing of the greater consummation of the gospel mission, as well as the foreshadowing of the persecution of believers occurring in the subsequent history of the church.

2. The destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24: 15-25; Mk. 13: 14-23; Lk. 21: 20-24)

In this section, Jesus shifts the emphasis to the more imminent persecution facing Christians in Judea before and during 70 AD. The reader will notice the specific geographical locations mentioned: **Judea** and **the mountains**. If He was speaking of tribulation at the end of the world and throughout the world, the mention of Judea and the mountains would be irrelevant. When Christ returns to save His people and judge the world, it will serve no purpose to flee from Judea to the mountains. The specific mention of these locations indicates that Jesus is predicting the fall of Jerusalem which occurred 70 AD, an established historical fact.

The context makes it clear that Christ is not speaking to the general multitudes but only the disciples, specifically Peter, James, John (the inner circle) and Andrew, Peter's brother. He now gives advance warning (vv. 23, 25; no reference in Lk.) that Jerusalem will be invaded and instructions about what to do when this happens. The **abomination of desolation** mentioned in Matthew and Mark is identified in Luke as invading **armies** (21: 20) since Luke's Gentile readers would not be as familiar with Jewish history. The phrase, **abomination of desolation** would have been immediately understood by the disciples (and subsequent Jewish readers—**let the reader understand** (that is, the reader of *Daniel*) as a reference to the desolation of the temple by Antiochus IV, Epiphanes from 167-164 BC. Antiochus IV set up a statue of Jupiter (some expositors say Zeus) in the temple and forced Jewish priests to offer unclean sacrifices of pigs (Dan. 11: 31; 12: 11), an egregious offense giving rise to the Maccabean revolt (cf. my notes on Daniel as well as *Synoptics*, p. 2). Jesus had no need to explain any of this history which would have been as well-known in His day as the Jewish holocaust of the 1940's, the Rwandan genocide of 1994, or the horrendous reign of Idi Amin (1971-1979) in the past century.

Just as the **abomination of desolation** (in Daniel) is equated with the presence of unclean (uncircumcised) Gentiles (Seleucids) in the temple precincts, the abomination of desolation in Matt. and Mk. refers to the presence of Roman armies within the city of Jerusalem whose military banners (something like metal flags on tall poles) boasted the picture of the Roman emperor whom they worshipped as a god. After occupying the city, Roman soldiers took these blasphemous banners inside the temple precincts and offered sacrifices to them there. Three weeks before this sacrilege, the regular daily sacrifices had already been suspended. Thus, in the Jewish mind, the details of Daniel's prophecy were repeated in the events of 70 AD (Chamblin, *Matthew*, unpublished syllabus, p. 218; citing F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations*, p. 224). From the Jewish perspective, the prophecy of Daniel received its final fulfillment.

He now gives them instructions about what to do when they see **these things** taking place. Since the Jewish rebellion against Roman oppression would take place from 66 AD to 70 AD, they will have adequate advance warning about the approach of Roman armies. Furthermore, **rumors of war** had been circulating from 62-66 AD (Lane, *Mark*, p. 458). Just as Nebuchadnezzar's armies laid siege to Jerusalem for eighteen months before taking the city in 587 BC (2 Kings 25: 1-3), the

Roman general Titus does the same thing to weaken the resistance of the Jewish forces. Ravaged by starvation, the Jewish population resorted to terrible atrocities against one another, possibly even the cannibalism of infant children (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*; Carson, p. 501, citing Josephus, V. 10. 2-3). It was a time of unspeakable horror in Jerusalem, prompting Jesus to predict it as a **great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will** (v. 21).

Considering the atrocities against the Jews and against mankind in general since 70 AD, it may be confusing that Jesus would say this; yet, Carson has pointed out that there has never been “so high a percentage of a great city’s population so thoroughly and painfully exterminated and enslaved as during the Fall of Jerusalem (p. 501). Geldenhuys elaborates further,

After a siege of about five months by a mighty Roman army under the command of Titus, the son of the emperor Vespasian, the Romans eventually overwhelmed the whole city, completely destroyed and plundered the temple and slew tens of thousands of the Jews, men, women and children. And when they were satiated with the slaughter, they carried off the remainder (except the weak and the aged, whom they killed without exception) as prisoners of war, so that not a single Jew was left alive in the city. For many years after the destruction of the city no Jew was again allowed in the city or even in its surroundings. Only on the day on which the destruction of the temple was commemorated every year were they allowed to go and mourn from the hills in the vicinity of the destroyed city. The first Jews who were again permitted to inhabit a part of the destroyed city were the Christians of Jewish descent who had fled to Pella and who had some time after the conclusion of the Roman-Jewish war received permission to inhabit a certain portion of the ruined city (*Luke*, pp. 528-529).

Furthermore, according to the view that this is the great tribulation of 70 AD, Jesus is not including every atrocity against mankind in the history of the world, but the greatest atrocity against the Jews that ever happened (cf. Chamblin, *Matthew*, vol. 2, p. 1188). This would take into consideration even the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis in WWII. Although more Jews died during that time, the assassination of Jews was not as concentrated into a short period of time as the **great tribulation** of 70 AD, nor as physically violent.

Hendriksen, on the other hand, argues that the “tribulation” of v. 21 is not the destruction of Jerusalem.

It is the period mentioned also in Rev. 11: 7-9; 20: 3b, 7-9a. For the sake of God’s chosen ones [the Christian elect from all nations, not only the Jewish elect] in order that not all might have to die a violent death, the days of this final tribulation shall be cut short. Herein, too, the love of God is made manifest. It should hardly be necessary to add that justice is not done to the concept of history and which surpasses any other distress in its intensity, if it is referred solely to the sorrows experienced during the fall of Jerusalem (p. 860, emphasis mine).

Hendriksen’s position is consistent with the possible temporal connection between the tribulation of v. 21 and the coming of the Son of Man in vv. 29-31. The word, **immediately** (*eutheōs*; v. 29) in Matthew generally denotes a quick succession of events (cf. Matt. 4: 20, 22; 8: 3; 13: 5; 14: 22, 31; 20: 34; 21: 2; 26: 49, 74; 27: 48).

“But **immediately** after the tribulation of **those days** THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will

be shaken.³⁰ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matt. 24:29-31 NASB)

Thus, per Hendriksen's interpretation, **immediately** after the tribulation mentioned in v. 21, the Son of Man **will appear in the sky**, and the end will come; and unless **those days** had been shortened—namely, the tribulation immediately before the coming of Christ—even elect believers would have been killed. This interpretation also connects **those days** in v. 29 with **those days** in vv. 19 and 22 which are shortened for the sake of the elect. Further, **those days** in v. 22 refers back to the **great tribulation** in v. 21.

"For then there will be a **great tribulation**, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.²² "Unless **those days** had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect **those days** will be cut short. (Matt. 24:21-22 NASB)

"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. (Matt. 24:29 NASB)

The problem with this interpretation, however, is that it appears inconsistent with the other connecting words in the passage. For example, **those days** of v. 22 can be connected to **those days** in v. 19 which clearly refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD because of their immediate connection with the reference to Judea and the mountains in v. 16.

then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. (Matt. 24:16 NASB)

"But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days!²⁰ "But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. (Matt. 24:19-20 NASB)

Moreover, the reference to fleeing in the winter or the Sabbath would be irrelevant if these verses refer to a world-wide tribulation for all believers. When that happens, many believers will be living in tropical climates with no winter, and the Sabbath will have no relevance in pagan countries or Muslim countries (if there are any at the end of the age).

More significantly, vv. 15-20 is connected to v. 21 by the clause, **For then there will be a great tribulation**. **For then** is *gar tote* in which *gar*, **for**, is explanatory of the preceding section, vv. 15-20. In other words, Jesus is using v. 21 to explain or clarify the distress of vv. 15-20. It will be a great tribulation never seen before now nor shall ever be seen again.

"For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. (Matt. 24:21 NASB)

(Incidentally, the identity of vv. 15-20 with the destruction of Jerusalem is not disputed by any commentators other than dispensationalists who believe that vv. 15-28 refer to the Great Tribulation after the rapture of the church mentioned in 1 Thessalonians 4—a position which

Carson judges as “historically implausible in reference to both the history of Jesus and the history of interpretation”; p. 495).

Thus, Hendriksen’s position must ignore the possible—though uncertain—temporal connection between **those days** in v. 22 and v. 19 (see also Mk., vv. 17, 19, 20, for the same connections), but also the more significant explanatory clause at the beginning of v. 21. Hendriksen is not alone in minimizing the temporal significance of **those days**. Lane remarks,

Juxtaposed [side by side] to the false hopes which will mislead many of the people in the critical moment [vv. 21-22] is the assurance that the period of suffering and distress will be followed by final redemption when the Son of Man will be manifested in power and glory [vv. 24-27]. The correspondence between these two phases in God’s eschatological program is indicated only in a general way: “in those days, after that tribulation...” “In those days” is a stereotyped expression in the OT that came to acquire distinctly eschatological associations from the contexts in which it occurs (e.g. Jer. 3: 16, 18; 31: 29; 33: 15f.; Joel 2: 28...; Zech. 8: 23). In itself, however, it has no determined temporal value. In verse 24 this phrase designates a period subsequent to the days of tribulation described in verses 19-20, but the matter of chronological sequence is left imprecise. It is clear from the structure of the discourse that the parousia cannot take place until after all the preliminary events announced in verses 5-23 have occurred. They are necessary precursors to the coming of the glorified Son of Man, yet in themselves they do not determine the time of that event (*Mark*, p. 474; words in brackets and emphasis mine).

Rather than putting weight upon **those days**, Lane makes a logical deduction from v. 19, “For those days will be a *time of tribulation* such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created until now, **and never will.**”

The significant addition “and never shall be” clearly indicates that the tribulation is not the distress which accompanies the last days. As great as the oppression will be, it is nevertheless not to be immediately followed by the end, for time will be extended, with the possibility of other, though lesser, tribulations (*Mark*, p. 472).

Carson concurs by saying,

That Jesus in v. 21 promises that such “great distress” [great tribulation] is never to be equaled implies that it cannot refer to the Tribulation at the end of the age [that is, just before the parousia]; for if what happens next is the Millennium or the new heaven and the new earth, it seems inane [foolish] to say that such “great distress” will not take place again (*Matthew*, p. 501; emphasis and words in brackets mine).

In other words, if the tribulation Jesus is describing is the tribulation immediately before the coming of the Son of Man (Hendriksen’s position)—at which time the present age will end and the new heaven and earth will begin—then it is unnecessary even to speak about the possibility of a worse tribulation occurring, for there will be no time remaining in the present age for such a tribulation to occur. The end of the age will be upon us.

Carson, likewise, does not put exegetical significance on **those days** in v. 22, saying,

Many problems in interpreting the Olivet Discourse relate to the assumption that “those days” refers to the period described in vv. 15-21 and also to v. 29. But there are excellent reasons [see below] for concluding that vv. 22-28 refer to the general period of distress introduced by vv. 4-14 and that therefore “those days” refers to the entire period of which vv. 15-21 are only one part—the “great distress” (v. 21) (p. 502; emphasis mine).

Carson suggests a break between v. 21 and v. 22. In the latter verse Jesus is no longer speaking exclusively about the carnage in 70 AD but the entire period from vv. 4-14 (Matt.) which includes the whole of world history (see discussion above) leading up to the return of Christ (p. 502). One reason given for this view is that the term **the elect** generally refers to all believers.

Second, “no life” is *ouk pasa sarx (no flesh)*, terms normally referring to all mankind (cf. Lk. 3: 6; Rom. 3: 20; 1 Cor. 1: 29; 15: 39; Gal. 2: 16; 1 Pet. 1: 24; as well as OT references from the LXX including but not limited to Gen. 6: 12; 6: 17; 9: 15).

Third, the warning against false prophets (false Christs) found in vv. 5 and 11 is repeated in vv. 23, 24, and 26 thus connecting the two sections together. Carson admits that these arguments (plus three others not included here) are not decisive, but “If they are correct,

then v. 22 tells us that this age of evangelism and distress—wars, famines, persecution, hatred, false prophets—will become so bad that, if not checked, no one would survive. In a century that has seen two world wars, now lives under the threat of extinction by nuclear holocaust, and has had more Christian martyrs than all the previous centuries put together, Jesus’ prediction does not seem farfetched. But the age will not run its course; it will be cut short...This promise enables believers to look for God’s sovereign, climactic intervention without predicting dates (Carson, p. 503).

Chamblin concurs with the break between Matt. 24: 21 and 22. Commenting on vv. 22-28, he says,

Times of great distress are still in view. Only Jesus now speaks, not strictly of his own generation (as in 24: 15-21), but of the whole course of history before the end, as he had done in verses 4-14.

The question is: Where is the exegetical justification for this supposed break in the sequence of events between v. 21 and v. 22? Examining the text, I see none.

"For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.²²"Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (Matt. 24:21-22 NASB)

It seems unnatural to apply Jesus’ words in vv. 22-28 to anything other than the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. I am inclined to believe, therefore, that the designation, **those days**, has significant temporal significance and that the use of this phrase connects the events of vv. 15-20 with the events of vv. 22-25. I also believe that the clause, **For then** (v. 21), is used by Jesus to explain the significance of vv. 15-20—it is a **great tribulation** for the Jewish nation, and no one else, which has no equal either before this time or afterwards.

Having committed myself (for now) to this position, I must admit some discomfort in minimizing the **immediately** of Matthew 24: 29.

"But **immediately** after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.³⁰ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory.³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matt. 24:29-31 NASB)

Never mind the "immediate" problem, it seems senseless for Jesus to say that such a tribulation will not be repeated again in human history (**nor ever will**, v. 21) if the great tribulation of v. 21 **immediately** precedes the very end of the age in which case there would be no time for another tribulation. (This of course leaves open for question the exact meaning of **immediately**.) Lane has noted the strong adversative, **but** (*allá*; Mk. 7: 24), which distinguishes the events associated with the *parousia* from the events associated with Jerusalem's destruction (*Mark*, p. 473, footnote).

"**But** in those days, **after** that tribulation, THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT,²⁵ AND THE STARS WILL BE FALLING from heaven, and the powers that are in the heavens will be shaken.²⁶ "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN CLOUDS with great power and glory.²⁷ "And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven. (Mk. 13:24-27 NASB)

Thus interpreted, unless the carnage against the Jewish nation had been limited to a few years (from 66-70 AD), not even the elect Jewish believers living in Judea would have physically survived (**been saved**), but for the sake of those who were chosen, God cuts the Jewish rebellion short to leave Himself an elect Jewish remnant throughout Judea (so also Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, Vol. 3, pp. 137-139), perhaps the same Jewish remnant who forms the nucleus of the missionary expansion after Stephen's execution (Acts 7-8).

Having taken this position, I admit that some of the events associated with the destruction of Jerusalem have been repeated, and will continue to be repeated, throughout human history and especially in relation to the *parousia*, the second coming of Christ. This is true particularly with the existence of false prophets and the persecution of believers (the elect from every nation). Thus, many of the elements of Matthew 24: 15-25 (and its synoptic counterparts) foreshadow end-time events. This explains why Jesus so masterfully blends the two "distinguishable" but somewhat "inseparable" epochs together (cf. Chamblin, p. 220, unpublished; citing 2 Thess. 2: 4, a text remarkably like Dan. 11: 31 and 12: 11).

Jewish Christians must not stay in Jerusalem and Judea until the situation goes from bad to worse (vv. 16, 14, 21, respectively). As soon as they see the **armies** (of Rome) gathering outside the city (Lk. 21: 20), they must leave the city and escape to the **mountains**. The danger will be so urgent that those who were on the housetops (houses were built with flat roofs) should not consider carrying any valuables with them but should escape immediately, perhaps even leaping from roof to roof (Chamblin, p. 218, unpublished). They should leave their homes like those who are escaping from a burning house, taking nothing with them. Those who are laboring in the fields

should not even return to their homes to get their one and only cloak to keep them warm at night (Ex. 22: 27; Deut. 24: 13). Hopefully, their escape will not occur during the winter months when the streams in Judea were normally swollen and the Jordan River impassable. Winter would be especially difficult for pregnant women or nursing mothers; and they should also pray that it will not occur on the Sabbath when zealous Pharisees might forbid them to travel (The Pharisees had strict regulations about traveling on the Sabbath).

Christians living in Jerusalem during the Jewish War heeded Jesus' warnings communicated to them by their leaders 40 years before this event. They did just what He told them to do: they escaped from Jerusalem and Judea and fled to the mountains. The ancient historian, Eusebius, believes that Christians escaped to the mountain city of Pella in Perea on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

On the other hand, the people of the Jerusalem church were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. (*Ecclesiastical History*, III. V. 3; cited in Hendriksen, p. 858).

Their abandonment of Jerusalem and the Jewish cause (rebellion against Rome), furthermore, completed the division between Jewish Christians and non-Christian Jews living in Judea. Before 70 AD, the distinction between them was vague to many people, and believers continued worshipping in the synagogues on the Sabbath. Afterwards the Christian sect (**the Way**; Acts 9: 2) became very distinct as the religion of Jesus Christ who was crucified. They were no longer welcomed into orthodox Jewish circles.

Jesus then repeats His warning about the appearance of false **Christs** who would arise and lead people astray, even the **elect** if that were possible (vv. 24, 22, Matt. and Mk, respectively). But this was not possible, even though these false prophets would be able to display **signs and wonders** (cf. 2 Cor. 2: 12; Heb. 2: 4; Matt. 7: 21-23). The result was that Christians would be delivered, but Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Gentiles (**trampled under foot**) and the Jewish nation subdued by them **until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled** (Lk. 21: 24).

In his description of the spiritual hardening of the Jews (Rom. 11: 25b), Paul uses a similar phrase, **a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in**. Therefore, there appears to be a double meaning to the phrase, **trampled under foot until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled**. On the one hand, it refers to the physical oppression of the Jews by the Gentiles. For how long? As it turns out, much longer than the Jewish War (66-70 AD). Anti-Semitism has become a well-established fact for 2000 years of human history continuing to this very day even in European countries like France (see *World*, a Christian news magazine—*“Living in the Past”*, June 6, 2009). The best known oppression of the Jewish nation occurred during the holocaust of the Third Reich (World War II) in which the Nazi “final solution” to the “Jewish question” consisted in the extermination of six million Jews throughout Germany and German-occupied European nations such as France and Hungary. Anti-Semitism still occurs today in the western media who continue to lambast Israel for their treatment of the Palestinians while saying nothing of the continuing terrorist activities of Palestinian terrorists against Israel.

But what constitutes the **fullness of the Gentiles**? The word **come in** (*eiserchomai*) is generally used in the NT for entering into the kingdom of God (Mk. 9: 43; 10: 15; Lk. 13: 24; 18: 17; Jn. 10: 9; Rev. 21: 27; cf. Murray, p. 93). This could refer to the full number of elect Gentiles who will be converted to the gospel throughout the duration of Christian missions (cf. Leon Morris, *Romans*, p. 420; Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, p. 719). However, Romans 11: 12 runs counter to this interpretation.

Now if their [*the Jew's*] transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!

In other words, their **transgression** and unbelief has resulted in riches for the Gentile nations, but how much more (the argument from the lesser to the greater) will their conversion result in riches. Concerning v. 12, John Murray remarks,

...the fullness of Israel will involve for the Gentiles a much greater enjoyment of gospel blessing than that occasioned by Israel's unbelief. Thus there awaits the Gentiles, in their distinctive identity as such, gospel blessing far surpassing anything experienced during the period of Israel's apostasy, and this unprecedented enrichment will be occasioned by the conversion of Israel on a scale commensurate with that of their earlier disobedience. We are not informed at this point what this unprecedented blessing will be. But in view of the thought governing the context, namely, the conversion of the Gentiles and then that of Israel, we should expect that the enlarged blessing would be the expansion of the success attending the gospel and the kingdom of God (*Romans*, Vol. 2, p. 79, emphasis mine).

Thus, if the **fullness of the Gentiles** consists of the full number of elect Gentiles “coming into” the kingdom, how then could any richer blessings be given to the Gentiles resulting from the conversion of the Jews (cf. Murray, p. 95)? Commenting on v. 25, Murray says,

The contextual data, therefore, point to the conclusion that “the fullness of the Gentiles” refers to blessing for the Gentiles that is parallel and similar to the expansion of blessing for Israel denoted by “their fullness” (v. 12) and the “receiving” [acceptance, NASB] (v. 15) (p. 95).

Now if their **transgression** is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their **fulfillment** be! (Rom. 11:12 NASB)

For if their **rejection** is the reconciliation of the world, what will *their acceptance* be but life from the dead? (Rom. 11:15 NASB)

Paul's conviction seems to be that the wholesale conversion of most (?) of the Jewish nation—though not every individual Jew—will result in an expansion of the kingdom of God on earth which has heretofore been unparalleled—an expansion resulting in unimaginable blessings to the whole world, including Gentiles (a possible argument for postmillennialism). It is not difficult to imagine why this would be so. When the Jews realize that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is their Messiah, a holy zeal for evangelism, missions, and mercy ministry will be unleashed upon the world the likes of which have never been seen resulting in unimaginable covenant blessings. One cannot help but wish to be alive on earth when this happens, but we are given no indication when

this will take place. If present circumstances are any indication, the restoration of Israel will be a long time coming.

Returning to Luke 21: 24, Jesus' words have both a proximate (near) and typological fulfillment. On the one hand, Jerusalem will be destroyed in 70 AD and the Jews either killed or scattered to the nations, the proximate fulfillment. The scattering of the Jews throughout the world is known today as the Jewish Diaspora. Typologically, the destruction in 70 AD foreshadows the oppression of the Jewish nation and their forfeiture of covenant blessings to the Gentiles from the time of their rejection of Christ until the present day—a period of 2000 years and still counting (Matt. 27: 25; “And all the people said, ‘His blood shall be on us and on our children!’”). Furthermore, the trampling of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple were a type of the events surrounding the return of Christ, even as Noah's flood was a type of the destruction of the world (Matt. 24: 37-39). The destruction of Jerusalem, like the flood event, is a type of the final judgment. Even details like the escape of knowledgeable disciples to the mountains around Pella fits the type. These Christians were able to flee the destruction and were eventually allowed to return to the promised land. Likewise, Christians will escape the destruction of the world and return to a new heavens and earth in which wickedness and unbelief have been uprooted.

We will also see in the accompanying parables that the disciples' most essential need was not the exact timing of events but the need for alertness—the need to be ready whenever these things took place, whether the invasion of Roman armies or the coming of Christ. And so it is with us. We don't need to know when Christ will return. If we did, He would have told us! What we do need to know is whether we are presently ready to meet Him when He does return by seeking the realization of His kingdom rather than our own kingdom.

3. The second coming of Christ and the end of the age (Matt. 24: 26-31; Mk. 13: 24-27; Lk. 21: 25-28)

"So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, *or*, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe *them*.²⁷ "For just as the **lightning** comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.²⁸ "Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.²⁹ "But immediately after the tribulation of those days **THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL** from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.³⁰ "And then **the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky**, and then **all the tribes of the earth will mourn**, and they will see the **SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY** with power and great glory.³¹ "And He will **send forth His angels** with A GREAT TRUMPET and **THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect** from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matt. 24:26-31 NASB)

The text now gives more detail about the events surrounding the return of Christ of which the destruction of Jerusalem is a type. Beginning with this section, Chamblin notes “a remarkable shift in language” from that of Matthew 24: 15-25—language describing “cosmic” events of an apocalyptic nature (pp. 218-219). Verse 26 recalls the warning about false Christs in v. 24 (Mk. v. 22). All sorts of false rumors will circulate about Christ's return, and many false prophets will attempt to imitate Him. Even as John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, some false Christs will make their debut in the wilderness to validate their claims to authenticity (Chamblin, p. 216).

But it is clear from the text that when Christ truly returns, everyone will know simultaneously and unmistakably that He is here.

This public—not secret—coming of Christ is indicated in the analogies He supplies. When we see **lightning**, we know that there is a thunderstorm somewhere (v. 27). No one will miss it. In the same way, whenever someone sees the circling of vultures overhead, there is a dead body somewhere—no doubt about it (v. 28). The point of comparison Jesus is making with these analogies is that the certainty of the sign eliminates any doubt. Some may interpret the vultures to mean that at the point in time when He returns, the world's spiritual decomposition (decay) will have reached its worst, thus requiring His imminent return (cf. Gen. 6: 11; which may be an argument against postmillennialism). However, this denies the prevalent condition of the entire world since the fall. The world of sinners has always been like a rotting corpse, and this will be nothing new when Christ returns.

Likewise, the display of powers in the sky will signal the unmistakable return of Christ. There will be no room for speculation; celestial signs will confirm His appearing (v. 29). It is not likely that Matthew is speaking of an eclipse of the sun by the moon which last only moments, but something like the darkening of the sky occurring at Jesus' crucifixion lasting three hours (Matt. 27: 45). Furthermore, stars falling from the heavens will not resemble the normal meteor shower observed from time to time, nor will the powers shaken in the heavens resemble an ordinary thunderstorm. Men do not faint from uncontrollable fear at such ordinary phenomena, nor are whole nations driven into confusion by the ordinary roaring waves of the sea (Lk. 21: 25-26; cf. Dan. 7: 2).

"There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth **dismay among nations**, in perplexity at **the roaring of the sea and the waves**,²⁶ men **fainting from fear** and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.²⁷ "Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A **CLOUD** with power and great glory."²⁸ "But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Lk. 21:25-28 NASB)

The **roaring of the sea and the waves** is possibly a reference to a massive, world-wide tsunami the likes of which has never been seen. Recall the tsunami of 2004 when over 100,000 people were killed in Indonesia; yet the church throughout the world did not interpret this event as a sign leading up to the imminent return of Christ—although I'm sure many Christians did. Jesus would not mention normal astronomical and geophysical phenomena as unmistakable signs of His coming, and He has already warned the disciples not to confuse such normal phenomena as signs of the *parousia* (Matt., vv. 7-8; Lk. v. 7). Rather, His coming would be attended by abnormal, extraordinary phenomena.

Furthermore, all these signs are connected temporally with what follows by the words, **and then** (v. 30). When these celestial and geophysical signs appear, so also will appear the Son of Man Himself **coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory** (vv. 30, 26, 27, respectively). When the people of God see this, they should know that their final and eschatological redemption is near at hand (Lk. v. 28). (For the many OT references made in Matt. 24: 29-31, see Hendriksen, p. 862.)

The quotation from Daniel 7: 13 is a definitive reference to the everlasting kingdom which will be given to Christ by the **Ancient of Days**, God the Father. The kingdoms of this world will boast of their might and power (Dan. 7: 8); but in the end the last worldly kingdom will be destroyed (Dan. 7: 24-26), and the kingdom of Christ established on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6: 10). This kingdom will be given into the hands of the elect for human administration and development (Dan. 7: 27; Matt. 5: 5; Lk. 12: 32).

The same revelation of Christ's return was undoubtedly given to the Apostle Paul at some point in his life—perhaps in Arabia (Gal. 1: 17)—for Paul repeats the description of final events in 1 Thessalonians. Note the phrase **by the word of the Lord** referring either to the Olivet Discourse or to Jesus' revelation of his second coming directly to Paul.

For this we say to you **by the word of the Lord**, that we who are alive and remain until the **coming of the Lord**, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them **in the clouds** to meet the Lord **in the air**, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words. ¹Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ²For you yourselves know full well that **the day of the Lord** will come just like **a thief in the night**. ³While they are saying, "**Peace and safety!**" then destruction will come upon them **suddenly** like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape. ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; ⁵for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶so then let us not sleep as others do, but **let us be alert and sober**. (1 Thess. 4:16-5:6 NASB)

Many of the same elements of Matt. 24 are present in 1 Thessalonians:

- (1) the Son of Man descending from heaven in the **clouds**,
- (2) the **gathering** of His elect people in the air (**sky**; Matt. 24: 31),
- (3) and the **trumpet sound** (**great trumpet**, v. 31).
- (4) the analogy of a **thief** coming **suddenly** without warning

"Therefore **be on the alert**, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night **the thief** was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. (Matt. 24:42-43 NASB)

Further, there is also the terrifying judgment of the wicked (1 Thess. 5: 3) corresponding to **men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things coming upon the world** (Lk. 21: 26) and the connection between sudden judgment and the **mourning** of **all the tribes of the earth** (Matt. 24: 30; cf. Rev. 6: 12-17 where many of the other descriptions are also present—the darkened sky, stars falling from the sky, celestial and geophysical upheaval, and terror).

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; ¹³ and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. ¹⁴ The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ Then

the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" (Rev. 6:12-17 NASB)

The gathering of the elect by the **angels** (Matt. 24: 31; 1 Thess. 4:17) can be traced back to Jesus' parable of **the wheat and the tares** in which the wheat is gathered into the barn (the elect into his kingdom) and the tares are uprooted and burned (Matt. 13: 30, 36-43). Paul's exhortation to believers to be **alert and sober** (1 Thess. 5: 3-7) corresponds to Jesus' warning not to live a life of **dissipation and drunkenness** and preoccupation with the world.

"Be on guard, so that your hearts will not be weighted down with **dissipation and drunkenness** and the worries of life, and that day will not come on you **suddenly** like a trap;³⁵ for it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth.³⁶ "But **keep on the alert at all times**, praying that you may have strength to escape all these things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man." (Lk. 21:34-36 NASB)

What the Synoptic texts do not say, however, is how long after the tribulation these final events will occur. That is, they do not tell us how long Jesus' return will be delayed after the destruction of Jerusalem, the "great tribulation". As we read the text, the timing of Christ's return seems imminent (soon) after the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple (see the discussion above). The nearness of it seems to be confirmed by Matt. 24: 34, Mk. 13: 30; Lk. 21: 32 containing the phrase **this generation** (see below). The disciples assumed from the beginning of their question (Matt. 24: 3) that the destruction of the temple and the return of Christ must be at the same time; and while Christ distinguishes the two events in substance (they are different events), He does not clearly distinguish them in time but weaves them together as one big event. Yet, however intricately He weaves them together, there are hints throughout the discourse that the timing must also be different (see above).

The Place of Judgment

The first event is localized in **Judea**. Those who are living in **Judea** must flee to the **mountains** when they see the **abomination of desolation** (Matt. v. 16; Mk. v. 14; Lk. v. 21). However, the cataclysmic events of the **coming of the Son of Man** are not confined to Judea but apply universally to

- (1) **all the tribes of the earth** (Matt. 24: 30),
- (2) **from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven** (Mk. 13: 27), and
- (3) **among nations, upon the world and upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth** (Lk. 21: 25, 26, 35).

Furthermore, Matthew will later report Jesus' comparison of His coming to the **days of Noah** and the flood which was universal in scope. Preterists like Milton S. Terry may argue for a localized flood in order to build a case for the return of Christ in 70 AD, but all such attempts appear to be

special pleading and conjecture (*Biblical Hermeneutics*, “*The Gospel Apocalypse*”, pp. 438-452; 542-544).

4. The parable of the fig tree (Matt. 24: 32-35; Mk. 13: 28-31; Lk. 21: 29-33)

"Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near;³³ so, you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, *right* at the door.³⁴ "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.³⁵ "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. (Matt. 24:32-35 NASB)

Earlier, Jesus had said, **Behold, I have told you in advance** (Matt. 24: 25; Mk. 13: 23), an advance warning concerning the **abomination of desolation** and the invading **armies** of Rome (Lk. 21:20). There was, therefore, no excuse for believers living in Jerusalem and Judea to be caught off guard and perish with the unbelieving Jewish population, nor was there any excuse for believing false prophets.

Likewise, the parable of the fig tree is designed to alert the disciples to the signs of the times. When the fig tree produces its leaves, this is an unmistakable sign that summer is near. Likewise, when they **see all these things** (Matt. 24: 33) or **when you see these things happening** (Mk. 13: 29), they should recognize that **He** or **it** (preferred translation of KJV, NKJ, and Young’s Literal Translation) is near, right at the door. Whether we translate the verb, *estín*, as **He is near** or **it is near** may determine our interpretation of the rest of the text, for Jesus says, **Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things [panta tauta] take place** (v. 34). If Jesus had only said, “*some* of these things” we would not have so much difference of opinion among evangelical scholars, but He didn’t say this. He said, **all these things**.

The antecedent of **all these things** appears to be the climactic events pertaining to the *parousia* and the end of the age, including world-wide judgment. But Jesus did not return during the generation of those who were listening to this discourse—at least, this is the opinion of most evangelical scholars even since the preterist theory became popular. There are a relatively few scholars who believe that He returned in 70 AD, and they argue that a different interpretation would render His words deceptive or mistaken, neither of which is possible (cf. Terry, *Hermeneutics*, p. 457). Jesus confessed that no one, not even He, knew the day or hour when **these things** would take place. However, it seems clear that Jesus’ instructions to flee to the mountains assumes an intimate knowledge of the timing of Jerusalem’s destruction. The two events—one which receives advance warning, and one which is unknown even by Jesus—must therefore be distinguished from one another.

Analogously, no one knew the day or the hour when the deluge (flood) would come upon the earth. Everyone was going about their normal routine eating, drinking, marrying, etc. until the day Noah entered the ark (Matt. 24: 38; cf. Lk. 21: 34). By then, it was too late to escape. The description in Matt. 24: 40-41 has been interpreted by dispensationalists as a pre-tribulation rapture of believers.

"Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.⁴¹ "Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. (Matt. 24:40-41 NASB)

They believe in a postponed judgment of unbelievers 1000 years after the tribulation. This interpretation is based on Revelation 20: 5; but Matthew 25: 31-46 depicts a judgment of believers and unbelievers concurrently (so also 1 Thess. 4: 13—5: 3). According to the dispensationalist scheme, unbelievers would be left on earth for 1000 years after the inexplicable disappearance of millions of believers. Aside from the efforts of Terry (not a dispensationalist) to eradicate the universality of Matthew 24, it seems on the surface of the text to depict the world-wide rapture of the church at the final judgment and the concurrent judgment of the wicked according to the scenario outlined by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4: 13—5: 3. In that scenario, deceased believers will rise from their graves and meet the Lord in the air after which believers who are still living will be joined with them. This **coming of the Lord** in chapter 4 is described in 5: 2 as the **day of the Lord** in which Christ will come as a **thief in the night** (cf. Matt. 24: 43-44) and render destruction upon those who are saying "**Peace and safety**" (cf. Matt. 24: 38). Yet, commenting on Matthew 24: 40-41, Terry says,

At the resurrection of Jesus "many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming forth out of the tombs, they entered into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matt. 27: 52, 53). But that wonderful event was not made a phenomenon visible to the world. So, there appears no sufficient reason for denying that at the judgment of Jerusalem [in 70 AD] many other bodies of the saints which slept [were dead] arose, and many living saints were miraculously translated [caught up into heaven like Elijah] (p. 448, words in brackets and emphasis mine).

"No sufficient reason" except that we have no biblical proof for such a theory. The conclusion of Jesus' picture (v. 42) is the need for alertness and readiness, for no one knows the time when Christ will return—the same readiness and alertness urged by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5: 3-7. Yet, under the preterist scheme we may ask why Jesus' previous instructions to flee to the trans-Jordan mountains near Jerusalem would have any relevance for believers in Thessalonica waiting to meet the Lord in the air? If by exegetical necessity we must equate Jerusalem's destruction in 70 AD with the coming of the Lord (or day of the Lord) in 1 Thessalonians 4—5, then some Judean believers remained in the mountains after Jesus' *parousia* (appearing) while others were taken up into heaven; unless of course, those fleeing into the mountains were also raptured. However, this would be contrary to known historical fact that Christians in Judea did, indeed, escape to Pella, a mountainous city about 50 miles away (see Eusebius' quote above).

But if the *parousia* took place in 70 AD, why would Jesus trouble His disciples by requiring them to escape **to the mountains**? Why not let them experience the rapture from their rooftops? It would also seem inconsistent to maintain that the angels gathered only a sampling of the elect from the four winds but left others. Furthermore, it would seem very strange that the catastrophic events happening in Jerusalem in 70 AD would have any great urgency for believers living 900 miles away (as the crow flies) in Thessalonica, especially since Thessalonica was not in rebellion against the Roman state. As far as I know, there is no record in the writings of the church fathers of Christians disappearing either in Jerusalem or Thessalonica during 70 AD.

We must note, however, the obvious exegetical connection between Jesus' teaching on the *parousia* in this discourse (the Olivet Discourse) and Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians. Paul proceeds to instruct the Thessalonian Christians **by the word of the Lord**" (4: 15), a possible reference to this very discourse. What is objectionable is the preterist theory that Christ returned during the catastrophic events of Jerusalem's destruction—events which most evangelical theologians interpret as a type or foreshadowing of the *parousia*, but not the *parousia* itself. It seems to me that an interpreter must stand on his head to make the facts configure properly with the preterist position—and we have not even examined 2 Peter 3.

⁷But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men...¹⁰But 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 Pet. 3:7, 10 NASB)

Furthermore, the preterist must put undue weight on the questionable report of Josephus claiming the appearance of "chariots and troops of soldiers in their armour were seen running about among the clouds and surrounding cities" of Judea (Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 451, citing Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, vi., 5, 3). In that same section, Josephus tells the story of a priest about to sacrifice a heifer in the temple, a heifer which gives birth to a lamb. God can cause such things supernaturally; this is not the question. The question is whether we put more weight upon Josephus' account than the preponderance of scriptures indicating a singular, universal coming of Christ in salvation and judgment at some point in the future. There is no definitive evidence in the NT that Christ will come more than two times, once at His birth and then at His return, the *parousia*.

All these things will take place in **this Generation**.

But we still have not resolved the sentence which presents many of the problems: **this generation will not pass away until all these things take place**.

"Even so, you too, when you see **these things** happening, recognize that He is near, *right* at the door.
³⁰ "Truly I say to you, **this generation** will not pass away until **all these things** take place. (Mk. 13:29-30 NASB)

Lane argues that **all these things** of v. 30 corresponds to **these things** in v. 29, both of which refer to the "complex of events preliminary to its fulfillment in verses 5-23" which excludes the events of the *parousia* found in vv. 24-27 (*Mark*, p. 480).

These events [vv. 24-27] represent the end and cannot constitute a preliminary sign of something else. The phrase 'these things' in verse 29 refers to the entire discourse from verses 5-23 [Mk. 13] with special reference to the material evidence provided in verses 14-23. The parallel phrase in verse 30 provides the same perspective. Before the passing of a generation, Jerusalem and the Temple will lie in ruins" (*Mark*, p. 478, emphasis mine).

In other words, everything Christ has told the disciples from Mk. 13: 5-23 is only preliminary to His coming and the end of the age (the disciples' full question occurs only in Matthew). He has warned them not to be fooled by these preliminary events to conclude that His coming and the end

will be marked by these events (v. 7, **but that is not yet the end**). Wars, rumors of wars, the proclamations of false Christs, famines or earthquakes—none of this is a sign that the end has come already. Rather, the sign of the end is marked by the events of Mk. 13: 24-27, supernatural signs which will be unmistakable and public to everyone living. Thus, **this generation** of the Jews now living would not die until these preliminary events took place, but this says nothing about the timing of the coming of Christ or the end of the age. If, indeed, **all these things** (Matt. 24: 33) includes the *parousia* itself, the verse makes no sense (cf. Carson, p. 507); for it could then be paraphrased, “So, you too, when you see all these things—including the coming of Christ in the clouds—recognize that Christ is right at the door”. Huh? If they see Christ coming in the clouds, it should be very obvious that He is near, and the statement would be unnecessary.

As noted above, Lane believes that **it is near** refers to the events surrounding the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Jesus solemnly affirms that the generation contemporary with his disciples will witness the fulfillment of his prophetic word, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem and the dismantling of the Temple. With this word Jesus responds to the initial question of the disciples regarding the time when “these things” will take place (*Mark*, p. 480).

This brings up the question of whether *estin* should be translated **He is near** or **it is near**. The NASB and NAB renders the phrase, “**He** is near”; but there is no definite pronoun, “He”, in the sentence; and the verb *estin* could be, and is, rendered “**it** is near” by the KJV, NKJ, and other commentators (Hendriksen, p. 866-867). Thus, when the disciples see the events of Mk. 13: 5-23 unfolding, they should realize that “**it**”—namely, the destruction of Jerusalem—is *near*, but they should make no conclusions about the coming of Christ or the end of the age, for the events before and during 70 AD are merely preliminary for this final event of human history.

For the sake of consistency, it seems that Jesus could not, on the one hand, tell the disciples that **no one knows the day or the hour** of His return (Matt. 24: 36; Mk. 13: 32) but on the other say that **this generation** will be living when this happens. This would be purposely ambiguous. To object that **this generation** is less specific than **the day or the hour** seems useless trifling with the text. What Jesus intended to say about His return and the end of the age is that it was impossible to determine with any degree of accuracy; and since He Himself did not know when it would happen, He offered no time frame for it. On the other hand, He did offer a time frame for the destruction of Jerusalem in answer to the disciples’ original question: **When will these things happen**, that is, “When will the temple be torn down?”, followed by His warning of armies surrounding Jerusalem. Murray contends that

We must not fail to appreciate the sequence and the antithesis—‘this generation shall not pass until all these things be accomplished...but of that day and hour no one knows...but the Father only.’ Of particular significance is the contrast between what he knew and foretold (vss. 34, 35) and what he did not know (v. 36). In interpreting verse 34 it is a capital error to overlook the sequence of verse 36 and to fail to construe verse 34 accordingly. This would have made clear to the disciples the distinction between the destruction of Jerusalem and correlative events on the more proximate horizon, on the one hand, and the day of his advent, on the other. The disciples would have been prepared for this because repeatedly, in the earlier part of the discourse, Jesus had made clear the distinction between

what was on the more immediate horizon and what was not (vss. 6, 8, 26, 27; Luke 21: 24) (Murray, *Collected Writings*, p. 394, emphasis mine).

"You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for *those things* must take place, **but *that is not yet the end.*** (Matt. 24:6)

"But all these things are *merely the beginning of birth pangs.* (Matt. 24:8)

"So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, *or*, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' **do not believe *them.*** (Matt. 24:26)

"For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, **so will the coming of the Son of Man be.** (Matt. 24:27)

"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until **all these things take place.** (Matt. 24:34)

"**But of that day and hour no one knows,** not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. (Matt. 24:36)

Therefore, as Murray suggests, the close grammatical sequence between **this generation will not pass away until...** and **But of that day and hour no one knows**, should be fully appreciated. The simplest explanation is that Jesus is answering the first part of the disciples' question in Matt. 24: 3, "Tell us, when will **these things** happen..."; namely, when will the temple be destroyed. It appears that Matthew deliberately uses the same words, **these things**, to describe the events that will happen within **this generation**.

And He said to them, "Do you not see all **these things**? Truly I say to you, not one stone here will be left upon another, which will not be torn down."³ As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will **these things** happen, and what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"

"But all **these things** are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs.

so, you too, when you see all **these things**, recognize that He is near, *right* at the door.

"Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all **these things** take place.

5. The need for readiness—Matt. 24: 36-42; Mk. 13: 32-33; Lk. 21: 34-36

"But of **that day** and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.³⁷ "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.³⁸ "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.⁴⁰ "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.⁴¹ "Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.⁴² "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. (Matt. 24:36-42 NASB)

Speaking from the perspective of His true humanity with all its sinless limitations, Jesus says that even He does not know the day or the hour of His return, but the Father alone. Notice that **that**

day (Matt. 24: 36) is distinguished from **those days** (Matt. 24: 19, 22, 29) **For** (*gar*; v. 37) connects the uncertainty of the timing with the events of the flood. No one knew when the flood would come, either; and it took everyone but Noah and his family by surprise.

In this section of the Olivet discourse, Jesus wishes to prepare the disciples for the inevitability of His coming. Just as God had promised Noah that He would destroy the world with a flood, Christ promises that the Son of Man will return in glory, but the timing is left indefinite. And because it is indefinite, they must be ready when it comes. Readiness does not imply exact precision, for even Noah did not know the exact day when God would judge mankind with a flood. Nevertheless, he and his family were ready when it happened. The ark was complete and stocked with every necessary provision, and the animals had already been corralled into their respective places. All Noah had to do was get on board.

The negative aspect of the coming of the Son of Man—given only passing mention earlier (Matt. 24: 30; **then all the tribes of the earth will mourn**; Lk. v. 26)—is now given full expression with its typological relationship to the flood. Both salvation and judgment came with the flood; and so it shall be with the coming of the Son of Man. After the supernatural events of the flood began to unfold, people all over the world were mourning the loss of life, and so it will be in the end.

The elect will be gathered together to be with Christ, but the wicked will be rooted up from the kingdom for judgment. Furthermore, if the analogy is carried through, salvation and judgment will be occurring at the same time, contrary to the dispensationalist theory that the judgment of the wicked occurs 1000 years after the rapture of the church. The concurrent salvation of God's people and the destruction of His enemies is a recurring theme throughout the scriptures—passing through the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army; conquering the land of Canaan; the military campaigns of King David, etc. If God's people must blissfully inhabit the new heaven and new earth, it is self-evident that the wicked must not be given a place in this new creation.

But it is also clear from the text that mankind will be utterly unprepared for this event, even as mankind was unprepared for the flood. When Christ returns men, women, and children will be going about their normal routines heedless of the more pressing concerns of knowing God and doing His will.

"For as in those days before the flood **they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage**, until the day that Noah entered the ark,³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.⁴⁰ "Then there will be **two men in the field**; one will be taken and one will be left.⁴¹ "Two women *will be grinding at the mill*; one will be taken and one will be left. (Matt. 24:38-41 NASB)

They will be totally immersed and preoccupied with the things of this world which are transient and passing away (Lk. 21: 34a, **the worries of life**) and will not understand anything until destruction comes upon them (Lk. 21: 34b; 1 Thess. 5: 3). Although God has left mankind with clear evidence of a world-wide flood covering the earth—evidence which gives him ample warning of future destruction—he is still skeptical about the prospect of being judged by a holy and righteous God (2 Pet. 3: 3-10). It is small wonder, then, that the godless are so zealous to find proofs for the theory of evolution maintaining that man evolved from lower life forms. Somehow

or other, he must get rid of God before whom he must give an account of his life. Having failed to find definitive proof of evolution on earth (no transitional fossil forms, the irreducible complexity of cell metabolism, the second law of thermodynamics, etc.), many scientists are now turning to outer space to find evidence of life which miraculously found its way to planet earth the “pansperma” hypothesis. With atheistic evolutionists, anything is possible—except the existence of God.

The suddenness of the *parousia* is made vivid in vv. 40-41. Two people, perhaps from the same family, will be working together side by side when, suddenly, one of them will disappear. The literalness of this scene is supported by the description of the *parousia* in 1 Thessalonians 4: 17, **Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them [resurrected believers] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.** Those who are not believers will, therefore, remain on the earth to suffer the terrifying judgment of the Lord (Rev. 6) on the same day (1 Thess. 5: 1-3).

Premillennial Interpretation of the Tribulation

Taken from gotquestions.org

The tribulation is a future seven-year period of time when God will finish His discipline of Israel and finalize His judgment of the unbelieving world. The church, made up of all who have trusted in the person and work of the Lord Jesus to save them from being punished for sin, will not be present during the tribulation. The church will be removed from the earth in an event known as the rapture ([1 Thessalonians 4:13-18](#); [1 Corinthians 15:51-53](#)). The church is saved from the wrath to come ([1 Thessalonians 5:9](#)). Throughout Scripture, the tribulation is referred to by other names such as the Day of the Lord ([Isaiah 2:12](#); [13:6-9](#); [Joel 1:15](#); [2:1-31](#); [3:14](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:2](#)); trouble or tribulation ([Deuteronomy 4:30](#); [Zephaniah 1:1](#)); the great tribulation, which refers to the more intense second half of the seven-year period ([Matthew 24:21](#)); time or day of trouble ([Daniel 12:1](#); [Zephaniah 1:15](#)); time of Jacob’s trouble ([Jeremiah 30:7](#)).

An understanding of [Daniel 9:24-27](#) is necessary in order to understand the purpose and time of the tribulation. This passage speaks of 70 weeks that have been declared against “your people.” Daniel’s people are the Jews, the nation of Israel, and [Daniel 9:24](#) speaks of a period of time that God has given “to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy.” God declares that “seventy sevens” will fulfill all these things. This is 70 sevens of years, or 490 years. (Some translations refer to 70 weeks of years.) This is confirmed by another part of this passage in Daniel. In verses 25 and 26, Daniel is told that the Messiah will be cut off after “seven sevens and sixty-two sevens” (69 total), beginning with the decree to rebuild Jerusalem. In other words, 69 sevens of years (483 years) after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, the Messiah will be cut off. Biblical historians confirm that 483 years passed from the time of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the time when Jesus was crucified. Most Christian scholars, regardless of their view of eschatology (future things/events), have the above understanding of Daniel’s 70 sevens.

With 483 years having passed from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem to the cutting off of the Messiah, [this leaves one seven-year period](#) to be fulfilled in terms of [Daniel 9:24](#): “to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to

seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy." This final seven-year period is known as the tribulation period—it is a time when God finishes judging Israel for its sin.

Daniel 9:27 gives a few highlights of the seven-year tribulation period: "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." The person of whom this verse speaks is the person Jesus calls the "abomination that causes desolation" (Matthew 24:15) and is called "the beast" in Revelation 13. Daniel 9:27 says that the beast will make a covenant for seven years, but in the middle of this week (3 1/2 years into the tribulation), he will break the covenant, putting a stop to sacrifice. Revelation 13 explains that the beast will place an image of himself in the temple and require the world to worship him. Revelation 13:5 says that this will go on for 42 months, which is 3 1/2 years. Since Daniel 9:27 says that this will happen in the middle of the week, and Revelation 13:5 says that the beast will do this for a period of 42 months, it is easy to see that the total length of time is 84 months or seven years. Also see Daniel 7:25, where the "time, times, and half a time" (time=1 year; times=2 years; half a time=1/2 year; total of 3 1/2 years) also refers to "great tribulation," the last half of the seven-year tribulation period when the beast will be in power.

For further references about the tribulation, see Revelation 11:2-3, which speaks of 1260 days and 42 months, and Daniel 12:11-12, which speaks of 1290 days and 1335 days. These days have a reference to the midpoint of the tribulation. The additional days in Daniel 12 may include the time at the end for the judgment of the nations (Matthew 25:31-46) and time for the setting up of Christ's millennial kingdom (Revelation 20:4-6).

In summary, the Tribulation is the 7-year time period in the end times in which humanity's decadence and depravity will reach its fullness, with God judging accordingly (gotquestions.org).

As you can see from my treatment of Matt. 24 above, I disagree with my brothers at gotquestions.org. The true church has always gone through tribulations, true to Jesus' prediction; and they will continue to do so until the consummation.

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and **you will be hated by all nations** because of My name. (Matt. 24:9 NASB)

"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.**" (Jn. 16:33 NASB)

"When you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, **but the end does not follow immediately.**"¹⁰ Then He continued by saying to them, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom,¹¹ and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."¹² "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake."¹³ "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony."¹⁴ "So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves;¹⁵ for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute."¹⁶ "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."¹⁸ "Yet not a hair of your head will perish."¹⁹ "By your endurance you will gain your lives. (Lk. 21:9-19 NASB)

One can see from Jesus' own words that tribulation is part of the Christian life in one degree or another. Some Christians in this world are already facing the kind of **tribulation** Jesus is speaking of. They

After these things I looked, and behold, **a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands;¹⁰ and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,¹² saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen."¹³ Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "**These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?**"¹⁴ I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "**These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation**, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."¹⁵ "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.¹⁶ "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;¹⁷ for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes." (Rev. 7:9-17 NASB)

Jesus never promises the disciples that they, or those whom they disciple (Matt. 28: 18-20) will escape tribulation. Dispensationalists and historic premillennialists agree that the church has been persecuted throughout its history. If so, then why should the church escape the greater tribulation of the end times—the tribulation we have not yet discussed at length?

IV. The Revelation of John

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."²⁴

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).²⁵

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—

²⁴ Hendriksen, p. 163

²⁵ Mounce, p. 234, emphasis mine

warfare, economic hardship, famine, disease. **Trumpets** of judgments have been sounded as warnings to earth-dwellers (unbelievers) 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, despite 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.²⁶

¹**A great sign appeared in heaven:**

a woman

**clothed with the sun,
and the moon under her feet,
and on her head a crown of twelve stars;**

²and she was with **child**;

and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.

The **woman** in is the church of God in the Old Testament and the New Testament,²⁷ the “true church of God in every age”.²⁸ More specifically, she is the faithful remnant of Israel from whom Christ descends in the flesh.²⁹ It was Israel according to the flesh from whom we received Jesus Christ (Rom. 9: 5). Elect Israel and elect Christians are not distinct, but one universal church.³⁰

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.³¹

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: 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.** In his dream, Joseph is a type of Christ who becomes the king of the Jews. 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

²⁶ Beale, pp. 622-623

²⁷ Hendriksen, p. 164

²⁸ Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come—Studies in Daniel and Revelation*, p. 168

²⁹ Third Millennium, *Revelation*, Lesson 2, p. 21

³⁰ 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.

³¹ Osborne, p. 456; Beale, p. 625

and NT prophets (Eph. 2: 20).³² 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.”³³

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 son in His royal splendor.³⁴ 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.³⁵ 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)”.³⁶

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 period³⁷ 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 promises made to Abraham and his believing seed (cf. Isa. 26: 17-18).³⁸ 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.

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

and behold, a **great red dragon**
having seven heads and ten horns,
and on his heads were seven diadems.

⁴ And his tail swept away

a third of the stars of heaven

and threw them to the earth.

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

so that when she gave birth

he might devour her child.

⁵ And she gave birth

to a son, a male *child,*

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

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

³² See Hendriksen, *Ephesians*, in which he argues for prophets referring to NT prophets, not OT prophets

³³ Beale, p. 627

³⁴ Mounce, p. 236; Hendriksen, p. 164).

³⁵ Derek Thomas, *Let’s Study Revelation*, p. 103

³⁶ Vern Poythress, *The Returning King—A Guide to the Book of Revelation*, p. 134

³⁷ Beale, p. 629

³⁸ Cited in Osborne, p. 458

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

The woman is just about to give birth to a male child, Jesus, 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).

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. (Rev. 13:1 NASB)

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**. (Rev. 17:3 NASB)

We find a beast with ten horns first in Daniel, one that some scholars have identified with the Roman Empire.³⁹

"After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and **it had ten horns**. (Dan. 7:7 NASB)

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).⁴⁰ According to Young, it is impossible to determine the separate identity of the ten horns upon the fourth beast.⁴¹ 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 opposed the church in one way or another. All of these, in an indirect way, may have originated from the Roman Empire in the sense that the Roman government has been a model for many modern forms of government.⁴² The little horn (the eleventh horn mentioned) arising out of the ten represents the Antichrist who poses the biggest threat to the church at the end of the age.⁴³

"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*. (Dan. 7:8 NASB)

The fact that the little horn of Daniel arises out of the ten horns supports the conclusion that the biggest enemy of the church at the end of the age—currently as well—will be *organized government*. This interpretation is supported by Ps. 2 and the opposition of the kings of the earth to the Lord's anointed one.

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,

³⁹ Edward J. Young, *Daniel*, p. 147

⁴⁰ However, the exact identity of these beasts is debated by scholars.

⁴¹ Young, pp. 143-146

⁴² However, in a broader sense, the beasts of revelation represent every kingdom arrayed against the kingdom of Christ.

⁴³ Young, pp. 147-150

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.⁴⁴

Could this composite government (with seven heads and 10 horns) be the “one-world government” which many world leaders propose? This interpretation is possible 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,⁴⁵ but the kingdom of Christ will get stronger and will ultimately defeat any human usurper.⁴⁶ 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 and his demonic hosts in the heavens, and when He rose from the grave and ascended into heaven, they were throwing them 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.⁴⁷ 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 organized revolt 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.

The picture of the woman bearing a child and the dragon (serpent) waiting to devour the child alludes to Genesis 3: 15.⁴⁸ 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 knows the bible (cf. Matthew 4)—he was not always convinced that his rebellion was hopeless. He attempted many times throughout human history to vanquish his archenemy, 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. Herod 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).

⁴⁴ Political liberals in the US use legislative powers to enact hate laws against anyone, including pastors, who denounce homosexuality as an ungodly lifestyle. Christians believe, of course, that denouncing sin is an act of love with the hope of repentance and the improvement of the person’s life.

⁴⁵ An expression which means, “get stronger and then weaker”

⁴⁶ A usurper is one who unlawfully seizes power.

⁴⁷ See Daniel 10: 13 and context in which the “prince of Persia”, a demon assigned to Persia [?], opposed the angel sent to help Daniel.

⁴⁸ Beale, pp. 630-631

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 filling the earth before the flood, (2) the bondage of Abraham’s descendants 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 but for the intercession of Moses, (5) the temptation of David to commit adultery with Bathsheba,⁴⁹ (6) Athaliah’s usurpation of the throne in Judah and her murder of all but one of David’s descendants, Josiah, and (7) Haman’s attempt to annihilate the whole Jewish race [*Esther*].⁵⁰ 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. Throughout human history, there have been thousands of satanic conspiracies to destroy the kingdom of God on earth, all of which are useless in the face of God’s sovereignty and the accomplished salvation of his people in the atoning work of Christ.

The crowns upon the dragon are not signs of legitimate authority, but “arrogated authority” without legitimate basis.⁵¹ 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.⁵² Hendriksen and Osborne believe that they are the fallen angels who were originally judged with Satan.⁵³ Satan’s original rebellion sweeps some of the angelic host away from their loyalty to God 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 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.⁵⁴ 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.⁵⁵

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 through His resurrection 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

⁴⁹ Not Hendriksen’s, but my observation

⁵⁰ Hendriksen, pp. 165-170

⁵¹ Hendriksen, p. 165

⁵² Beale, p. 637

⁵³ Hendriksen, p. 165; Osborne, p. 461

⁵⁴ This would include Isaiah 14: 12-13, which has been erroneously interpreted as Satan, although explicitly applied to the king of Babylon (14: 4).

⁵⁵ Poythress, p. 135

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.⁵⁶

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**, cf. 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. A large portion of organized "Christian" religion is the enemy of Christ.

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) many anabaptists who refused to submit their children to infant baptism—a sad historical fact most of us Presbyterians would rather forget.⁵⁷ Thus, even a church otherwise teaching sound doctrine can be used by Satan to prosecute his war against the kingdom of God. Of course, Satan primarily uses the apostate church teaching false doctrine. Satan laughs at the health and wealth "gospel" preached in millions of African and western churches, for he knows that such a gospel will not win the allegiance of its hearers to the kingdom of God, but his own counterfeit kingdom. 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 and the false practice of 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 of time the witnesses are prophesying (11: 3).

"And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for **twelve hundred and sixty days**, clothed in sackcloth." (Rev. 11:3 NASB)

⁵⁶ Beale, p. 640, emphasis mine

⁵⁷ Leonard Verduin, *Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, see also McNeill, "Religious Persecution During the 16th Century Protestant Reformation"

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 (Gal. 4: 22-26).

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 *repetitive, symbolic 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 physically. But Jesus tells us not to fear those who may only kill the body, but to fear God who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10: 28).

⁷ **And there was war in heaven,**

Michael and his angels

waging war with the dragon.

The dragon and his angels

waged war,

⁸ and they were not strong enough,

and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.

⁹ And the **great dragon was thrown down,**

the **serpent of old**

who is called

the devil and Satan,

who deceives the whole world;

he was thrown down to the earth,

and his angels were thrown down with him.

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

"Now the salvation,

and the power,

and the kingdom of our God

and the authority of His Christ

have come,

for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down,

he who accuses them before our God day and night.

¹¹ "And they overcame him

because of the **blood of the Lamb**

and because of the word of their **testimony,**

and they did not love their life even when faced with death.

¹² "For this reason,

rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them.

Commented [D1]: Rev. 6: 10; 7: 9-10; 19: 1

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.⁵⁸ Michael's struggle **in heaven** corresponds to Christ's struggle **on earth**. 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). Also in Colossians, we read,

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. (Col. 2:13-15 NASB)

The **rulers and authorities** in the above text are clearly evil angelic powers whose ultimate power has been stripped from them through the power of Christ's crucifixion, the immediate context of the verse.

The mention of **Michael** links the reader back to the heavenly conflict in Daniel 10 in which Michael the archangel, along with another unnamed angel, fights a heavenly battle against **the prince of Persia**.

Then he said to me, "Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding *this* and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.¹³ **But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days**; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, **came to help me**, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia. (Dan. 10:12-13 NASB)

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.⁵⁹ 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).⁶⁰

However, this statement must be qualified by saying that the eternal decrees of God in heaven have already decided the outcomes of earthly battles. Therefore, the sovereign decrees of God are always the deciding factor. This is one reason all liberal theology is fruitless. Liberal theology, which denies the virgin birth of Christ, the bodily resurrection of Christ, etc. vainly teaches a moral system based on

⁵⁸ 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.

⁵⁹ The other way around

⁶⁰ Similarly, Dan. 10: 12 says that the angel came "in response to [Daniel's] words, that is, his prayers. The implication is that Daniel's prayers were instrumental in the angel's defeat of the "prince of Persia", a demonic force.

mythology. If Christ did not actually rise from the dead, our faith is in vain (1 Cor. 15: 14). 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 His material gifts. His accusations, unjustified in this case, are the basis for the test God used in proving Satan wrong.⁶¹ Job passes the test—a type 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 accomplished side of the atonement, the Apostle Paul emphatically denies that anyone, including Satan, has any *legal grounds* for accusing God’s people, even if they are actually guilty of the crime. The reason for this is that the penalty of the crime has already been paid.

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 events⁶² 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 consequence 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 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.”⁶³ However, it makes little sense that after being kicked out of heaven he would be allowed 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).⁶⁴

Therefore, Paul’s question, **Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?** is rhetorical. That is, the question demands a certain answer, in this case a negative answer: No one. No one, not even the devil, can bring a charge against God’s people because the very basis of the charge, their guilt, is null and void.

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

⁶¹ Likewise, the accusations made against Christ in his trial by the Sanhedrin were false and unjustified.

⁶² A combination of events

⁶³ Osborne, p. 480

⁶⁴ Poythress, p. 137, emphasis mine

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.⁶⁵ 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 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).⁶⁶

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.⁶⁷

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).⁶⁸ 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**.⁶⁹

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...

⁶⁵ Mounce, p. 243

⁶⁶ Cf. Osborne, p. 470, who also interprets this verse as a possible reference to the original fall of Satan.

⁶⁷ Beale, p. 660, 663, emphasis mine

⁶⁸ Hendriksen, p. 173

⁶⁹ Hendriksen, p. 172; see also 13: 7

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.⁷⁰

Contrary to Seraiah, 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).⁷¹ 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.⁷² 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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴

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.⁷⁵

"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)

Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵

⁷⁰ C. Jonathin Seraiah, *The End of All Things—A Defense of the Future*, pp. 94-95, emphasis mine

⁷¹ Pillay and Hofmeyr, *Perspectives on Church History*, p. 9

⁷² Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 1, pp. 85-87).

⁷³ Pillay and Hofmeyr, pp. 9-10

⁷⁴ Source unknown

⁷⁵ Poythress, p. 181

and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. (Heb. 2:14-15 NASB)

"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** [*deo*] **the strong man**? And then he will plunder his house. (Matthew 12:28-29 NASB; cf. Mark 3: 27)

And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and **bound** [*deo*] him for a thousand years; (Rev. 20:2 NASB)

In John 12, Jesus speaks of Satan being **cast out**. From the context, this will occur in association with Christ's 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. Christ's **casting out** demons indicates that He has **bound** Satan, the completion of which occurs in the cross, resurrection, and ascension. Lastly, the reader should note that the same word for **bind** [*deo*] in Matt. 12: 29 and Mk. 3: 27 is used for **bound** in Rev. 20: 2. Thus, God has already triumphed over Satan through the cross; Satan has already been bound, that is, restricted in his activity of deception. He may still deceive individuals, but not whole **nations**.

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 (the millennium), after the ascension of Christ followed by a time of increasing hostility and persecution of the church which reaches its highest point just before the return 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.

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.** (Rev. 12:6 NASB)

This segment of time also occurs in Daniel describing the persecution of believers.

'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.** (Dan. 7:25 NASB)

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. (Dan. 12:7 NASB)

This period is one-half of seven. Seven signifies completion; therefore, the time allowed for the persecution of the church in the wilderness will not be complete, resulting in her utter destruction. The time will be cut short in assurance of her preservation. We also note from Revelation 11 that this is the same period for the testimony of two witnesses.

"And I will grant *authority* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for **twelve hundred and sixty days**, clothed in sackcloth..." 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.** ⁸And 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. ⁹Those 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. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹But 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. ¹²And 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. (Rev. 11:3, 7-12 NASB)

Twelve hundred and sixty days divided by 365 days in a year equals 3.45, roughly three and a half—time (1), + times (2), + half a time (1/2) = 3.45 or roughly three and a half. During the church age, the world will not witness any resurrections (my opinion). Here, John is speaking in anticipation of the resurrection from the dead at the end of the church age.⁷⁶ The fear of unbelievers (**those who dwell on the earth**) recalls the fear of the Lamb in Revelation 6: 15-16. **Three and a half days** is contrasted with **three and a half years**,

⁷⁶ So also Osborne, p. 432

corresponding with Christ's **three days** in the tomb contrasted with His three-year ministry. Thus, the victory of the beast over the church at the end of the church's witness (the church age) is very short compared with the church's witness throughout the millennial age, a time, times, and half a time.⁷⁷

Concerning the extreme tribulation which the church will face at the end of the age, Wallace remarks,

We have to remember when we face this very terrible picture that this does not necessarily mean that everything in human history favours the side of evil, even for a limited period. The tribulation is due to the tension and fear that evil has of the triumphant and developing kingdom of Christ around it. It is the increase of goodness on earth that causes this intense reaction of evil, from the simple motive of fear.⁷⁸

Quoting James Denney on 2 *Thessalonians*, Wallace continues,

The question is sometimes asked *whether the world gets better or worse as it grows older*, and optimists and pessimists take opposite sides upon it. ***Both...are wrong. It does not get better only, nor worse only, but both.*** Its progress is not simply a progress in good, evil being gradually driven from the field; nor is it simply a progress in evil before which the good continually disappears: ***it is a progress in which good and evil alike come to maturity***, bearing their ripest fruit, showing all that they can do, proving their strength to the utmost against each other; the progress is not in good itself or in evil itself but in the antagonism of the one to the other.⁷⁹

Some of the symbolism of the exodus event is incorporated into Rev. 12. 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 to God's prophet, Elijah, who is nourished by the ravens in his flight from Jezebel (1 Kings 19). The pattern of the Christian's journey through this world is 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, the God-man, can no longer be touched; He has ascended into heaven never to suffer or die again,⁸⁰ but the church continues His incarnate ministry in this world through its

⁷⁷ Beale, p. 594-595

⁷⁸ Wallace, p. 193

⁷⁹ Wallace, p. 193; emphasis mine

⁸⁰ 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.

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 allusion⁸¹ to Satan's plan to drown the Israelites in the Red Sea.⁸² Floods are commonly used as metaphors for "overwhelming evil"⁸³, 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).⁸⁴ 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).⁸⁵ 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 find some meaning and purpose in 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). Two things are noted here. First, the true, spiritual church consists of people who obey the law of God. They hold to a transcendent law of God which is above themselves and authoritative.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth."¹⁹ "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,²⁰ teaching them to **observe** all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20 NASB)

The word, **observe** (*tereo*) has been translated **obey** in the NIV translation. The church which is protected in Revelation 12 is not the church of professors but the church of obeyers. Christ did not command his disciples to make converts but to make **disciples who keep** (*tereo*) his commandments. There is no contradiction in the Bible between loving God and obeying God, as if obedience to His commandments was somehow beneath the dignity of His children. This is an antinomian (anti-law), lawless misconception of Christianity. Jesus said, "If you love me, **keep** [*tereo*] my commandments" (Jn. 14: 15). Love without law-keeping is just as absurd as an adulterous husband saying that he loves his wife. By definition, an adulterer does not love his or her spouse.

Secondly, true believers **hold to the testimony of Jesus**. They are not simply moral people who try to live good lives. They believe the gospel which includes everything the Bible teaches about the person and work of Jesus Christ—his virgin birth, his true humanity and true deity, his sinlessness, his atoning death on the cross, his resurrection and ascension, etc. They are, in a word, bible-believers because the whole bible is

⁸¹ In literature, an allusion is an indirect, rather than a direct, reference to something else.

⁸² Thomas, p. 106

⁸³ Mounce, p. 246; cf. Isa. 43: 2

⁸⁴ Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come—Studies in Daniel and Revelation*, p. 170, emphasis mine

⁸⁵ Beale, p. 675

the testimony of Jesus who is the **Word of God**. Such people, and only those people, are the **offspring of the woman**.

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

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.

Commented [D2]: 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)

Commented [D3]:

Commented [D4]: 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)

We have now come to a passage in Revelation 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? I 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 (in order of occurrence). 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 or actual events—it is argued here—are not in chronological order. For example, Revelation 6 records the final judgment, but clearly there are many other visions recorded later in Revelation concerning events previous to the final judgment. Revelation is not chronologically arranged but thematically arranged. 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 these enemies is one glorious event happening simultaneously. I have 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 (probably most) individuals within the nations.⁸⁶ Revelation 20 records the binding of Satan in more detail. This means that the binding of Satan in Revelation 20: 2-3 is a repetition of Revelation 12 and Michael's war in the heavens prevailing over Satan and the fallen angels. This results in Satan's being cast down to earth and his being bound in the abyss for 1000 years—a figurative period of time symbolizing the church age and the expansion of the church through missionary activity unhindered by Satan's deception. After this period, he will be released briefly to deceive the nations once more, who will then launch an all-out earth-based attack upon the church resulting in Christ's utter destruction of the beast, the false prophet, Satan, and all earth-dwellers allied with Satan against the church. The following comparison between Rev. 12 and 20 is taken from Beale.⁸⁷

Revelation 12: 7-11

(1) heavenly scene (v 7)

⁷And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,

(2) angelic battle against Satan and his host (vv7-8)

⁷And 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.

(3) Satan cast to earth (v 9)

⁹And 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 20: 1-6

(1) heavenly scene (v. 1)

¹Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.

(2) presupposed angelic battle with Satan (v. 2)

²And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;

(3) Satan cast into the abyss (v. 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.

⁸⁶ 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.

⁸⁷ Beale, p. 992, I have added verse citations.

(4) The angel's evil opponent called "the great dragon, the ancient serpent, the one called the devil and Satan, the one deceiving the whole inhabited earth" (v 9)

⁹And 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.

(5) Satan's expression of "great wrath because he knows he has little time" (v 12b)

"...^{12b}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."

(6) Satan's fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ (v 10) and his saints (v 11; note the "conquering" theme)

¹⁰Then 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.

(7) the saints' kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan and Christ's victory but also on the saints' faithfulness even to death in holding to "the word of their testimony" (v. 11)

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.

(4) the angel's evil opponent called "the dragon, the ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan," restrained from "deceiving the nations any longer" (vv 2-3), to be loosed later to deceive the nations throughout the earth (vv 3,7-8)

⁷When 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.

(5) Satan to be "released for a short time" after his imprisonment (v 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.

(6) Satan's fall, resulting in the kingdom of Christ and his saints (v 4)

⁴Then 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.

(7) the saints' kingship, based not only on the fall of Satan but also on their faithfulness even to death in holding to "the testimony of Jesus and the word of God" (v. 4)

⁴Then 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

What does this binding of Satan involve?

1. For the period between the first and second advents of Christ, Satan will not be able to deceive the elect, those who have been purchased by the blood of Christ and **sealed by the Holy Spirit**.⁸⁸

"For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, **if possible, even the elect**. (Matt. 24:24 NASB)

²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹"My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; **and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father's hand**. (Jn. 10:28-29 NASB)

³²He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? ³³**Who will bring a charge against God's elect?** God is the one who justifies; ³⁴who 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. ³⁵**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?** Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (Rom. 8:32-35 NASB)

In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation-- having also believed, you were **sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise**,¹⁴ who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of *God's own* possession, to the praise of His glory. (Eph. 1:13-14 NASB)

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God,²² who also **sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge**. (2 Cor. 1:21-22 NASB)

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, **by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption**. (Eph. 4:30 NASB)

And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having **the seal of the living God**; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,³ saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees **until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads**."⁴ And I heard the number of those who were **sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand** sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel: ... 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." (Rev. 7:2-4, 9-10 NASB)

In Rev. 7: 4, the number of **144,000** represents completeness (12x12x10x10x10=144,000). Twelve represents the number of the twelve tribes of Israel, and another twelve represents the apostles (cf. 21: 14). Ten also represents completeness, and one thousand = 10x10x10.

⁸⁸ Beale, p. 986

Since the apostles and NT prophets are the foundation of the church consisting of both Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2: 19-22: 3: 5), we are warranted to interpret **every tribe of the sons of Israel** (7: 4) figuratively as the elect from all tribes and nations. Revelation 14: 1-3 reads as follows:

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**...³
And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and **no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.** (Rev. 14:1, 3 NASB)

The name of the Father and the Lamb **written on their foreheads** is antithetically parallel to the mark or name of the beast upon the foreheads of those who are not the elect (13: 17). The spiritual protection God supplies to those who are **sealed** with His name on their foreheads applies not simply to a remnant of ethnic Israel at the end of the age, but to all of God's elect people (see Eph. and 1 Cor. texts above). The twelve tribes are figurative for the complete number of God's elect people, including all Gentile believers who are spiritual Jews.

2. During the millennium, Satan **will also not be able to deceive the unbelieving nations into making an all-out war upon the church resulting in its annihilation**, and he **will not be able to stop the forward movement of the church** throughout the world regardless of how severely the church is persecuted.

When we consider the metanarrative of Scripture Satan's deception as the "father of lies" has always been to the forefront of the bigger story. Satan deceived Adam and Eve into abandoning their trust in God and their commission to subdue the earth for His glory in order to pursue their own private kingdom independent of God. Satan deceived Cain into believing that God had been unjust in rejecting his sacrifice (implied, but not directly stated, **sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you**, Gen. 3:7), leading to the murder of Abel, the archetype of the persecution of God's people throughout the ages. God's purpose for the covenant community in completing the task of dominion was hindered by envy and murder, and it has been hindered ever since by every form of sin.

Therefore, the binding of "the ancient serpent" is intended to restrain him so that he cannot accomplish the deceptive purposes that he formerly accomplished during ancient times in Eden.

Indeed, after the Fall, the serpent and his agents do on a worldwide scale what the devil began to do in the garden...In the OT age Satan was able to delude the majority in Israel so that they were not able to fulfill their commission to be a salvific light to the nations (e.g., cf. Isa. 49:6). As a result, the good news of God's kingdom was not heralded to the pagan nations, and the nations remained in spiritual darkness (e.g., Acts 14: 16; 17: 30). Also because of Israel's sin, Israel remained in subjection to Satanic oppression from foreign nations attempting to exterminate Israel. This attempted extermination was climaxed by Satan's attack on Christ, who summed up the community of true Israel in himself. Satan appeared finally successful when his agents put Christ to death, but the resurrection demonstrated that Satan had failed.

Rev. 12: 2-5 telescopes this process of Satanic oppression against the covenant community climaxed with Christ's death and resurrection. All who subsequently identify with Jesus as true Israel begin to fulfill the commission to be a light to the nations, so that Satan's veil of deception over the nations is

lifted (cf. Isa. 49: 6; Luke 2: 32; Acts 13: 47; 26: 18, 23). This means that the devil will not be able to stop the spread of the preaching of the gospel or its expanding reception (= church) during most of the age preceding Christ's return... But at the end of the age, directly preceding Christ's return, Satan will again be allowed for "a little time," to stop the preaching of the gospel and to draw the curtain of delusion over the nations, especially with the goal of mounting a devastating attack against the people of God, as he did before in Eden, against Israel, and at the cross against Jesus, the true Israel... A lethal attack must be launched against the corporate body of Christ, as earlier against the individual Christ...⁸⁹

But after the millennium, Satan will be released from his bondage **for a short time** (Rev. 20: 3) and will blind the majority of the world's population to the truth of the gospel.⁹⁰ This majority will also seek to exterminate by whatever means the relatively small minority of believers left upon the earth at this time. It should be noted that this pessimistic picture does not in any sense minimize the enormous gains of the church during the millennium, now two thousand years and counting (see Excursus on "Amillennial pessimism"). Only the future will reveal just how successful the church will be in disciplining the nations before Satan is released from his restrictive prison for a **short time** before the final judgment. It must be reiterated that Satan's prison is not physical; it is spiritual. During His earthly ministry Jesus bound the **strong man** and made off with his property, the souls of men held in spiritual bondage.

"Go therefore and make disciples of **all the nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (Matt. 28:19 NASB)

"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 NASB)

While going through the Roman persecutions off and on for more than three centuries, early Christians were informed by John's Revelation that they were **sealed** for the day of redemption. Though put to death for their faith, nothing could **separate** them from Christ. Doubtless, many sincere believers thought the end of the age was coming upon them, and Christ would soon return to rescue the remaining members of the Christian church. Little did they know that Christians would be studying the book of Revelation over 2000 years later wondering, as they did, when Christ would return. Until the Day of the Lord, we also may be assured that God's program of redemption will continue without being stamped out. The **two witnesses**, the church, will continue their witness until the beast overwhelms them (Rev. 11: 7). But this has been decreed and is part of God's plan. Those who have been martyred already are told to be patient until the number of those who must die are complete.

"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.**¹⁸ "Yet not a hair of your head will perish. (Lk. 21:16-18 NASB)

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

⁸⁹ Beale, pp. 988-989

⁹⁰ Beale, pp. 987-988

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.** (Rev. 6:9-11 NASB)

The premillennial interpretation of this chapter uses the following chronological scheme:⁹¹

1. The second coming of Christ occurs (Rev. 19: 11-21) in which the church is raptured from the world (cf. 1 Thess. 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.⁹² The rebellion is quashed 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:⁹³

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.

⁹¹ Adapted from Poythress, pp. 177-178, emphasis mine

⁹² Osborne, p. 688, cf. Rev. 19: 19, 21

⁹³ Adapted from Poythress, p. 178, emphasis mine

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 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:⁹⁴

1. The Millennium is occurring now in the present church age. Christ is presently reigning in heaven, not on earth, 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.

There is justification for saying that Christ is now reigning with the saints in heaven. Premillennialists assume that Christ reigns on earth for 1000 years during an earthly millennium, but there is nothing in the text about reigning on earth. Rev. 20: 4 says that those who had been beheaded as martyrs, those who had not worshipped the beast, and those who had not received the mark of the beast on their foreheads **came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years**. It does not say that they reigned with Christ on earth for a thousand years. Thus, everyone who has been faithful to the testimony of Christ throughout the history of God's people has been resurrected spiritually, not physically, and is now reigning with Christ in heaven. (For further discussion of this point, see below.)

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 (Lk. 10: 17-18). 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, including very powerful individuals. 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.

⁹⁴ Adapted from Poythress, p. 178

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 ⁹⁵, premillennialism believes that Christ will return to earth, destroy the evil forces, and reign 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.⁹⁶

Cycles of Judgments in Revelation

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 the church age. He presents the following points to support this interpretation. I have supplied some of the texts with emphasis.⁹⁷

1. 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.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. (Rev. 20:7-10 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...And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. (Rev. 16: 13-14,16 NASB)

⁹⁵ Osborne argues that premillennialism was first held in the early church as a result of the teaching of Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian.

⁹⁶ Osborne, pp. 696-697, explanation in brackets mine

⁹⁷ Poythress, p. 179

"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." (Rev. 17:12-14 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. 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. (Rev. 19:19-21 NASB)

2. 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**. (Ezek. 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. (Rev. 20:9 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. 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. (Ezek. 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." (Rev. 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. (Rev. 20:7-8 NASB)

3. 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. (Rev. 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. (Rev. 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. (Rev. 19:20 NASB)

4. 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. (Rev. 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. (Rev. 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." (Rev. 11:18 NASB)

5. 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.

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. (Rev. 20:3 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.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. (Rev. 19:20-21 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".⁹⁸ 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 flocks after Satan when he is released (20:7b).⁹⁹

However, 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, and 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?" (Rev. 6:15-17 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.**" (Rev. 19:17-18 NASB)

⁹⁸ Osborne, p. 688

⁹⁹ Osborne, p. 702, emphasis mine

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.** (Rev. 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. (Rev. 16:14 NASB)

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...And they **gathered them together** to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. (Rev. 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 Rev. 6? Moreover, the **kings of the whole world** in Rev. 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 Rev. 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 by separating these men into 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 must Christ 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*¹⁰⁰—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, especially when the descriptions are so similar. 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 against 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

¹⁰⁰ The logical argument which reduces an opposing argument to the absurd.

years divided into one thousand years) are not enough to overturn their allegiance to Satan. Therefore, the eternal lake of fire is a necessity.¹⁰¹

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 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 flocks after Satan when he is released (20:7b).¹⁰²

Does Osborne mean that those 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 millenarians¹⁰³ 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 texts in John and Daniel 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*

¹⁰¹ Osborne, pp. 697-698

¹⁰² Osborne, p. 702, emphasis mine

¹⁰³ People who have lived a thousand years

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. 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 Thessalonians 4—5 indicates that there is nothing left for the unbeliever after the parousia but destruction and judgment. ...**the coming of the Lord** in 1 Thessalonians 4: 15 cannot be exegetically 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.

Similarities between Revelation 19: 11-21 and 20: 7-15

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:¹⁰⁴

1. The allusions to Ezekiel. The prophecy of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel is interpreted by Beale (and others, including Keil¹⁰⁵) 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 Gog 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).¹⁰⁶

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)

¹⁰⁴ Beale, pp. 972-982

¹⁰⁵ C.F. Keil, *Ezekiel*, chps. 37—48

¹⁰⁶ Beale, p. 977

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)

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).

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.**" (Rev. 16:17 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. (Rev. 20:10 NASB)

5. After the seventh bowl plague of Rev. 16: 17-21, 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).

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. (Rev. 15:1 NASB)

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.

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. (Rev. 16:14 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. (Rev. 19:20 NASB)

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 before the thousand-year millennial reign of Christ, but at the inauguration¹⁰⁷ 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).¹⁰⁸ 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 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 exclusively 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 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 diminish—if not stop altogether—the preaching of the gospel and the expansion of the

¹⁰⁷ Beginning

¹⁰⁸ Beale, P. 985

church. The church will also be exposed to a time of persecution unmatched by anything she has ever experienced (cf. 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 (*deō*) and sealed in the abyss (Rev. 20: 1-3), but as the *same* event from two different perspectives.¹⁰⁹ 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** [*deō*] the strong man, and then he will plunder his house" (Mark 3:27; cf. Matt. 12: 29, also using *deō*).

The biblical authors use the same root word for **bound** and **binds** (*deō*). Christ had entered Satan's (the strong man's) house and plundered his property, the souls of men. Through the missionary activity of the church to the nations Christ is now reclaiming what Satan has taken unlawfully. However, Satan had to be **bound** first by the atonement of Christ and His victorious resurrection, thus defeating the power of sin and death. Upon hearing the Father's voice from heaven at the third Passover during His ministry, Jesus said,

"Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world **will be cast out** [*ekballō*].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** (*ekballō*) and Jesus will draw **all men** to Himself, i.e. even Gentiles from every nation 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 (*ballō*) Satan into the abyss (Rev. 20: 3) and Satan being thrown down to the earth.

and he threw [*ballō*] 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. (Rev. 20:3 NASB)

¹⁰⁹ So also Hendriksen, p. 226

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

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. This is one of the principle rules of biblical interpretation. 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, 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. Recall from Revelation 12: 10 a voice from heaven saying 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)

Despite 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. Which nations were worshipping the true God before Christ appeared on the scene of human history—the Chinese (?), the Indians of Asia (?), the native Americans (?), 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. Hendriksen 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...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: 12.¹¹⁰

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.¹¹¹ The Jews of Palestine were sheep with no shepherd (Mk. 6: 34).

¹¹⁰ Hendriksen, pp. 224-225, bold emphasis mine

¹¹¹ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, pp. 63, 67

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.¹¹²

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 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.¹¹³

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.

1. How could anyone 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)?

¹¹² Osborne, p. 703, emphasis mine

¹¹³ Mounce, pp. 353-354, emphasis mine

2. 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.

3. It is 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 clear 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.

4. 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 incorruptible reign, people can still be convinced of Satanic lies leading them to revolt against His kingdom?

5. 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.¹¹⁴ 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 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, Hendriksen 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!¹¹⁵

Excursus: If you are a Premillennialist, by Sam Storms

If you are a Premillennialist (whether Dispensationalist or not), there are several things you must necessarily believe:

¹¹⁴ 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).

¹¹⁵ Hendriksen, p. 228

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

You must necessarily believe that physical death will continue to exist beyond the time of Christ's second coming.

You must necessarily believe that the natural creation will continue, beyond the time of Christ's second coming, to be subjected to the curse imposed by the fall of man.

You must necessarily believe that the New Heavens and New Earth will not be introduced until 1,000 years subsequent to the return of Christ.

You must necessarily believe that unbelieving men and women will still have the opportunity to come to saving faith in Christ for at least 1,000 years subsequent to his return.

You must necessarily believe that unbelievers will not be finally resurrected until at least 1,000 years subsequent to the return of Christ.

You must necessarily believe that unbelievers will not be finally judged and cast into eternal punishment until at least 1,000 years subsequent to the return of Christ.

Amillennialists don't see these beliefs being taught in Scripture.

End of Excursus

⁴ **Then I saw** thrones,
and they sat on them,
and judgment was given to them.

And I saw

the souls
of those
who had been **beheaded**
because of their testimony of Jesus
and because of the word of God,
and those
who **had not worshiped**
the beast
or his image,
and **had not received the mark**
on their forehead
and on their hand;
and they came to life
and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

⁵ The **rest of the dead**
did not come to life
until the thousand years were completed.

This is the **first resurrection**.

⁶ Blessed and holy
is the one who has a part
in the **first resurrection**;
over these
the **second death** has no power,
but they will be priests of God and of Christ
and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

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.¹¹⁶ 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 would rebel at the end of the Millennium—at least interpreted from the premillennial perspective. They observe believers living a thousand years while unbelievers are dying after a much shorter period. Or, as Osbourne maintains, unbelievers going through the millennium will live fourteen lifetimes in their normal unglorified state (see above).

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

¹¹⁶ See comment above and Osborne, pp. 697-698

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).¹¹⁷

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.¹¹⁸ 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 bringing into existence a new life in Christ. At the same time, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ mentioned are all physical. Paul bases 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 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

¹¹⁷ Mounce, p. 356, emphasis his, explanation in brackets mine

¹¹⁸ 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.

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 at the consummation is not relevant to Paul's purpose in Romans 6. What *is* relevant is the reality 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 which is promised elsewhere.

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.¹¹⁹

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 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 concluding that Christ is no longer under the mastery of death, that he has vicariously died to sin's power—

¹¹⁹ John Murray, *Romans*, pp.218-219. See also Beale, p. 1004.

the power of death—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.¹²⁰

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, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive** together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and 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. ²Set 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"—in 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 the Lord (2 Cor. 5: 8).¹²¹ 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

¹²⁰ Beale, p. 1005

¹²¹ Beale, p. 1011

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.”¹²², 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**.

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. (Rev. 20:4 NASB)

The **souls** v. 4a include 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 reigned [or, 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.

At this point, the premillennialist will object that if **came to life** of v. 4 is spiritual resurrection, this would demand that **did not come to life** in v. 5 is also spiritual resurrection, something which must be denied to unbelievers. However problematic this may be for the interpretation offered above, **did not come to life** in v. 5 must necessarily have a physical meaning. While believers come to life spiritually and reign with Christ in heaven for a symbolical 1000 years (10x10x10) until the general resurrection; unbelievers do not take part in the first, spiritual resurrection, and do not come to life physically until the millennium is over and the consummation of the age is completed at the return of Christ. Both the spiritual resurrection of believers and the physical resurrection of unbelievers and believers is mentioned by Christ in John’s gospel.

¹²² Mounce, pp. 359-360

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but **has passed out of death into life.**"²⁵ "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when **the dead** will hear the voice of the Son of God, and **those who hear will live.**"²⁶ "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself;²⁷ and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is *the* Son of Man."²⁸ "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which **all who are in the tombs** will hear His voice,²⁹ and will come forth; those who did the good **deeds to a resurrection of life**, those who committed the evil **deeds to a resurrection of judgment.** (Jn. 5:24-29 NASB)

In this text, Jesus speaks of the first and the second resurrections. The spiritually **dead** who **hear** His voice effectually will **live**, and He says that **the hour is coming and now is** when this will happen. Presently in the ministry of Christ there were some who were being effectually called by the Spirit. They heard the voice of Christ and followed Him (Jn. 10: 27). There is a resurrection to spiritual life even **now** for those who **hear the voice of the Son of God**. They have **passed out of death into life**. On the other hand, **an hour is coming—but is not yet**—when all the dead **who are in the tombs will hear His voice**—audibly, like Lazarus—**and will come forth** to either **a resurrection of life** or **a resurrection of judgment**. This is the physical resurrection of both believers and unbelievers. Thus, **the rest of the dead** who received the mark of the beast on their forehead will come to life physically—not spiritually—at the coming of Christ. Just as believers will not be subject to the second death—but only unbelievers—so also unbelievers will not enjoy the first resurrection. They will never be born again. John's revelation only speaks of the **first resurrection**, not the second, and it speaks of the **second death**, not the first. But if there is a first of anything, there must be a second by implication (see below).

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 capable of serving as priests of God 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, arboreal¹²³ temple of God and the new heavens and new earth as the antitype and fulfillment of the OT tabernacle and temple.¹²⁴ 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.¹²⁵

"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.”¹²⁶ “Keeping” and “serving” are also used in the OT context of keeping the commandments of God and serving Him only.

"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

¹²³ Consisting of trees

¹²⁴ 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.

¹²⁵ Beale, p. 68

¹²⁶ Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology*, p. 259

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

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,¹²⁷ 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.¹²⁸ 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?¹²⁹ Christ, on the other hand, is the new Israel who fulfilled the Law and kept the stipulations of the Covenant. Through union with Christ, the church is also the new Israel who serves God in the newness of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3).

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

¹²⁷ John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*

¹²⁸ Cf. Beale, pp. 68-69

¹²⁹ Waltke, p. 255

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)

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 archetype¹³⁰ 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.¹³¹

¹³⁰ The original type

¹³¹ Waltke, p. 255

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).¹³²

⁵The **rest of the dead**

did not come to life

until the thousand years were completed.

This is the **first resurrection**.

Commented [D5]: 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 [D6]: v. 3

⁶Blessed 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**.

Commented [D7]: Rev. 5: 9-10

Commented [D8]: 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.

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.¹³³ 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; some are **beheaded**. But **over these the second death has no power**.

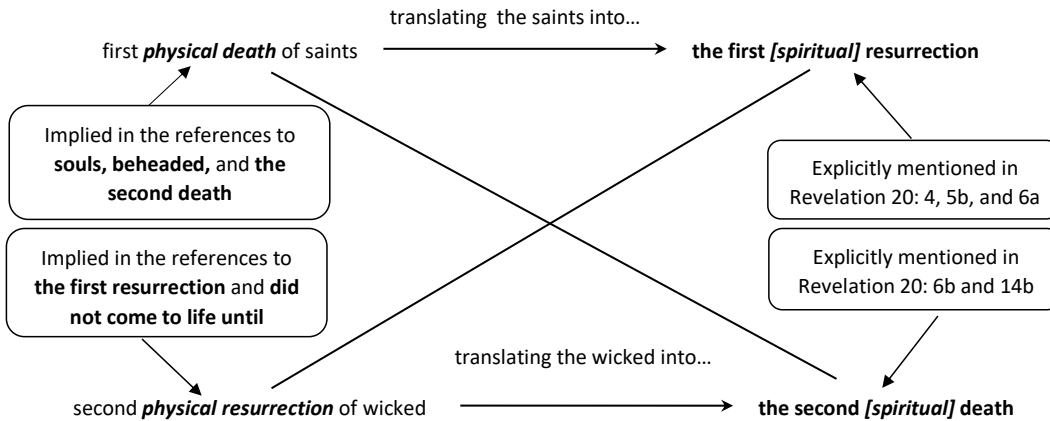
"Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28 NASB)

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 and the bodies of believers who have not worshipped or taken the mark of the beast. 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 not mentioned in the text 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 (see discussion of John 5 above).

¹³² Waltke, p. 259

¹³³ Poythress, p. 180

Beale suggests the following structure of Revelation 20 which I have slightly modified.¹³⁴



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, namely, those who have been converted during the Millennium. But there is no analogy of faith¹³⁵ for a physical resurrection of believers separate from unbelievers, 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 and that the **first resurrection** must refer to all believers, not just martyrs.¹³⁶ 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.

¹³⁴ Beale, p. 1005

¹³⁵ No Scriptural support elsewhere

¹³⁶ Osborne, p. 708

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**).¹³⁷

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 in the new heavens and new earth. 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.¹³⁸

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and **after this comes** judgment, (Hebrews 9:27 NASB)

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.”¹³⁹ There was no delay—contradicting the idea of soul sleep and the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. Thus, Hodge deduced at least some “theological statement” from this parable. I think we may infer from the 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) who exist in agony. This is much more plausible exegetically and theologically than soul sleep for unbelievers.

This leaves us with the question of the apparent physical suffering of the rich man.

"And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, **for I am in agony in this flame.**' (Lk. 16:24 NASB)

¹³⁷ Osborne, p. 708, emphasis and explanation in brackets mine

¹³⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 823

¹³⁹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, pp. 725, 727.

Was the rich man in physical agony, or is the description meant only to be metaphorical for the spiritual anguish of unbelievers in the intermediate state? The analogy of scripture seems to favor the view that there will be no physical resurrection of either believer or unbeliever until the return of Christ.

"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. (Jn. 5:28-29 NASB)

Jesus would not be contradicting himself in the parable of Luke 16. Rather, He implies both the spiritual and physical suffering of the unbeliever in the final judgment without differentiating the intermediate state of the unbeliever from the consummated state at the final judgment.

The biblical writers do not concern themselves about the intermediate state of unbelievers. While Paul extols the privilege of being **with Christ** as **very much better** than remaining in the body, he makes no comments (that I know about) concerning deceased unbelievers.¹⁴⁰

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 it both ways.

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—for a time—and spiritually in the presence of Christ awaiting the resurrection of his body at the second coming. Believers are conscious during the intermediate state of bodiless existence in heaven; otherwise, Paul would not prefer it to conscious, productive life in the present world. But the passage says nothing about the consciousness of unbelievers during the intermediate state. We must infer their intermediate state from other passages.

¹⁴⁰ 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. Thus, I am saying that although there is some theological statement in the parable, there is no exhaustive theological statement.

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 possible since the Romans 6 passage has demonstrated Paul's fluid use of "death" and "life", "burial" and "resurrection". It may be objected that this text is Johannine rather than Pauline, but if this fluid use of words may be attributed to Paul, it may also be attributed to John. 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). People who will never come to faith are dead in sin and will remain in that condition.

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 any probable reason 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. Because of their **first resurrection**, they are placed on thrones of authority and power. They also 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).¹⁴¹ This pastoral consideration does not determine the meaning of the phrase; but if the **first resurrection** refers only to the rapture at some undisclosed date, this would produce little comfort for suffering Christians in the first century.

⁷ When the thousand years are completed,

¹⁴¹ Cf. Poythress, p. 181

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.

Commented [D9]: 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 [D10]: 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 [D11]: And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon. (Revelation 16:16 NAU)

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 in chapter 21. 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 in Revelation 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 now reigning with the physically deceased but spiritually resurrected saints in heaven. That Christ is reigning in heaven and not physically and visibly on earth is the 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 by means 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. Man's sinful suppression (Rom. 1: 18) of God's judgment in Peter's generation continues in the present and will persist until Jesus returns in final judgment.

Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts,⁴ and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation." (2 Pet. 3: 3-4 NASB)

What will this post-Millennial¹⁴² opposition look like? No one knows for sure, but I do not believe we should visualize Abrams M-1 tanks, Apache gunship helicopters, air force jets and submarines shooting nuclear missiles—any more than we should visualize Christ occupying the oval office of the World Government 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 or **war** as a literal war. 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 to Christ and His church will intensify, but not begin, 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 that the Christ they have rejected is Lord, indeed (Phil. 2: 10-11; Rom. 14: 10-11).

Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.⁹ For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth,¹¹ and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:8-11 NASB)

¹⁴² That is, **after** the Millennium

The recognition of Christ as Lord in these verses is not voluntary recognition. This would promote the error of universalism, as if everyone on earth will eventually be saved. Rather, it is the inescapable, involuntary recognition of unbelievers who see Christ coming in the clouds—as noticeable as lightening streaking across the sky.

In other words, while the nations are persecuting the church on an elevated scale never experienced in the history of the world, they are hastening the coming of Christ in judgment. 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)

The **great tribulation** of 66-70 AD culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24: 21) was not only the final fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy (Dan. 11), but also the foreshadowing of the escalated persecution of the church at the end of the age. Coupled with the belief in Christ's imminent return 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 skilled 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.¹⁴³ 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

¹⁴³ In this commentary, I have not given the preterist or postmillennial positions due consideration; 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.

interpretation. Christ never promised to give anyone the date of His coming. He even said that 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 through Matthew 25 demonstrate. Every millennial position encounters exegetical difficulty, but I believe Amillennialism has much less difficulty than all the others.

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.

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. Christ shows up, and it is over for anyone opposed to Him or His people (v. 9b). 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 is 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)

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 most of the world having been won to Christ through the comprehensive discipling of the nations. 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 discipled 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 preclude 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 Hendriksen’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.¹⁴⁴ Naturally, unbelievers are presuppositionally biased. They cannot “see” the kingdom of God (Jn. 3: 3), but Christian postmillennialists should be able to see the forward progress of the gospel within the two thousand years since Christ’s resurrection. To deny it is to downplay the work of the Holy Spirit in His church.

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

¹⁴⁴ 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*

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 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 members (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.

End of Excursus

¹¹ Then I saw

a **great white throne**
and **Him who sat upon it**,
from whose presence
earth and heaven fled away,
and no place was found for them.

¹² And I saw

the dead, the great and the small,
standing before the throne,
and **books** were opened;
and **another book** was opened,

which is *the book* of life;
and the dead were judged
from the things which were written in the **books**,
according to their deeds.

¹³ And the sea
gave up the dead
which were in it,
and death and Hades
gave up the dead
which were in them;
and they were judged,
every one *of them*
according to their deeds.

¹⁴ Then death and Hades
were thrown into the lake of fire.
This is the **second death**, the lake of fire.

¹⁵ And if **anyone's name was not found written in the book of life**,
he was thrown into the lake of fire.

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***.¹⁴⁵ The **books** are records of everyone's deeds, both good and bad (2 Cor. 5: 10; Matt. 16: 27; 25: 31-46).

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 Cor. 5:10 NASB)

"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. (Matt. 16:27 NASB)

"But when **the Son of Man comes in His glory**, and all the angels with Him, **then He will sit on His glorious throne**.³² "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;³³ and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. ³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in;³⁶ naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me...' ⁴¹ "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; ⁴² for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; ⁴³ I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' (Matt. 25:31-36, 41-43 NASB)

¹⁴⁵ 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).

The OT reference to **the books** and **the book** 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.¹⁴⁶ 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**. Writing to the church in Rome, Paul says,

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,⁶ who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS:⁷ to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life;⁸ but to those who are selfishly ambitious and **do not obey the truth**, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation.⁹ *There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil*, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,¹⁰ but glory and honor and peace to everyone **who does good**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.¹¹ For there is no partiality with God. (Rom. 2:4-11 NASB)

I explain this passage more fully in my commentary on Romans. Suffice it to say here that a person's deeds reveal the true state of his heart. A person **is** as he **does**. The believer is not saved by deeds (works), but by faith; however, his deeds will be the criterion of reward. Since the unbeliever does not have saving faith, this leaves only judgment according to his works which will always be deficient.

The **book of life** is the book which contains the names of all who are chosen in Christ and whose names have also been written in this book before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1: 4; Rev. 13: 8; 17: 8). 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; Eph. 6: 7-8), but what the punishment will be for our **bad** deeds is more difficult to determine (cf. 1 Cor. 3: 14-15; 2 Cor. 5: 10); Scripture does not say. Possibly, we will be faced with the shame of our evil deeds of commission and omission,¹⁴⁷ demonstrating our utter unworthiness of salvation, and then pardoned on the basis of our faith in Christ. Our accountability for bad deeds (sins of commission and sins of omission) may take the form of the disappointment we will experience if God gives us a glimpse of unfulfilled accomplishments had we exercised more faith and obedience (pure speculation on my part). Or, it may include the forfeiture

¹⁴⁶ Although deeds alone do not reveal the motives or goals. See John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*.

¹⁴⁷ Osborne, p. 722

of rewards we could have received but will not receive. Nevertheless, 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. Moreover, this judgment of believers will be like the blink of an eye compared to the glory that shall be revealed to us (Rom. 8: 18-25).

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 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.¹⁴⁸

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

¹⁴⁸ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 3, p. 849, emphasis mine

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 [appointment] 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....

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.¹⁴⁹

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, the beliefs that (1) salvation resides in the church, and (2) water baptism by an authorized priest has the power of regenerating the infant.¹⁵⁰ Throughout the Bible, men are always judged on the basis of their deeds. 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)

¹⁴⁹ R.A. Webb, *The Theology of Infant Salvation*, pp. 288-291, italicized emphasis his, underlined emphasis and words in brackets mine

¹⁵⁰ For further reading, see my *Synoptic Gospels* on Matthew 19: 13-15 and Lk. 18: 15-17

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

The names of unbelievers were never recorded in the book of life since this record of names was established before creation when God predestined some to everlasting life and others to everlasting death (Rom. 9: 21-23).

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. (Rev. 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. (Rev. 17:8 NASB)

⁴just 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)

The verb **has not been written** in Revelation 13: 8 and 17: 8 is perfect indicative.¹⁵¹

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.**"¹⁵²

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 in this book before the world began. Consequently, their names have not been erased from a book in which they never existed.

'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. (Rev. 3:5 NASB)

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 in it 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). One's response to the beast is sovereignly determined by God, but his 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, **overcame him [the dragon] by the blood of the lamb and because of the word of their testimony** (Rev. 12: 11).

Beale has argued that the erasure of the names in Revelation 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..." (i.e., in the negation of **erase**, "I will **not** erase his name..."). Second, there is never any positive association between the names of unbelievers

¹⁵¹ Therefore, according to this verse, love existed before there were any humans to love.

¹⁵² Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, p. 573, emphasis mine; quoted from *BibleWorks*.

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**.¹⁵³

As always, the more clearly stated passages of Scripture must be employed to interpret the less clear. 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 dominance of Scriptural passages 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?

In Greek mythology, **Hades** was the god of the underworld; thus, *hades* in the NT has the same connotation as *sheol* in the OT. Generally, the word has a negative connotation in opposition to **heaven**; and in Luke 16 it appears to be a place of torment in opposition to **Abraham's bosom**. If Abraham is considered to be in heaven, the place where departed believers are living (Mk. 12: 26-27), then the rich man was in a place of departed unbelievers.

"And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to **heaven**, will you? You will descend to **Hades**; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. (Matt. 11:23 NASB)

"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. (Matt. 16:18 NASB; translated, **gates of hell** in the ESV and KJV)

"In **Hades** he lifted up his eyes, **being in torment**, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. (Lk. 16:23 NASB)

In the context Rev. 20, **hades** may simply mean the abode of dead bodies of believers and unbelievers. 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 bodies, 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**.¹⁵⁴ Death is personified as the last enemy of God's people.

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

¹⁵³ Beale, pp. 279-280

¹⁵⁴ See Beale, pp. 1034-1035 for further consideration.

"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.¹⁵⁵ But what is true of Satan's punishment need not be paradigmatic¹⁵⁶ 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 a spouse, friends and loved ones, especially since he has neglected others who needed his help and 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)? Hell is really too horrible to think about, possibly the reason the Bible tells us so little about it.

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.

"Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? **Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days.**" (1 Ki. 21:29 NASB)

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 a person's **deeds**, then all his **deeds** will be considered in his judgment, those done against the standard of God's law and those done according to that standard. Human judges who sentence men to prison for theft or to death for murder do not have a keener sense of justice than God. If a man steals a cow, he does not 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 believe there is insufficient evidence in Scripture to justify the belief in different degrees of hell. Hell is just—hell. (See also Matt. 10: 15; 11: 22, 24; Lk. 10: 12, 14; Rom. 2: 5-8, with an emphasis upon **storing up wrath**).

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,

Commented [D12]: cf. 12: 3

¹⁵⁵ Beale, p. 1036

¹⁵⁶ A model

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**.

Commented [D13]: 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 [D14]: Daniel 7: 8

Commented [D15]: 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 [D16]: 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 connotation¹⁵⁷ (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*¹⁵⁸ 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.

"And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another. ⁴"The first *was* like a lion and had *the* wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. ⁵"And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs *were* in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!' ⁶"After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁷"After this I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. ⁸"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*. (Dan. 7:3-8 NASB)

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".¹⁵⁹ That is, the beast cannot be limited to one period of time only.

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

¹⁵⁷ Suggested meaning

¹⁵⁸ Combination

¹⁵⁹ Beale, p. 686

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

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”¹⁶⁰—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 (completeness), the heads and horns cannot be limited to some specific world kingdom or ruler either in the first century or any century.¹⁶¹

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 [Rev.] 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 [successor] 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.¹⁶²

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

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.¹⁶³

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.¹⁶⁴

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?”¹⁶⁵

...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.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁰ Poythress, p. 139

¹⁶¹ Beale, p. 684

¹⁶² Beale, p. 685, also quoting Caird, *Language and Imagery*, p. 229, emphasis mine

¹⁶³ Hendriksen, p. 176, emphasis mine

¹⁶⁴ Mounce, pp. 251, 253, emphasis mine

¹⁶⁵ R. J. Rushdoony, p. 173, emphasis mine

¹⁶⁶ J. W. Bowman, *Drama of the Book of Revelation*, p. 85, quoted by Rushdoony, p. 173, bold emphasis mine

The whole earth (except for 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* (distorted similarities) of Christ found in Revelation 13.¹⁶⁷

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 by the power of Christ, to change lives and cultures. Additional parodies are listed below.¹⁶⁸

Beastly Parodies or Imitations of the Godhead

- 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)
- The earth-dwellers worship the dragon and the beast.
- “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)
- 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)
- 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; Rev. 14: 1)
- 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)

¹⁶⁷ Osborne, p. 497, including the citation of Ex. 15: 11.

¹⁶⁸ A compiling of parodies from Osborne and Poythress. But see also Mounce and Beale.

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.¹⁶⁹ 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!¹⁷⁰

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,¹⁷¹ 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".¹⁷² 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 worshipped Christ exclusively. 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—closely resembling the demands of Nebuchadnezzar to bow down and worship his golden statue.

"There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, *namely* Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up."¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king.¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar responded and said to them, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image that I have set up?"¹⁵ "Now if you are ready, at the moment you hear the sound of the horn, flute, lyre, trigon, psaltery and bagpipe and all kinds of music, to fall down and worship the image that I have made, *very well*. But if you do

¹⁶⁹ Cf. Rushdoony, p. 173; Hendriksen, p. 177; Mounce, p. 250

¹⁷⁰ Rushdoony, pp. 172-173, emphasis mine

¹⁷¹ The denarius was the average daily wage for common labor. See Matthew 20: 2

¹⁷² Mounce, pp. 250-251

not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?"

Sound familiar? "**Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?**" (Rev. 13:4b NASB) Also reminiscent of Dan. 7.

"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.** (Dan. 7:8)

Continuing with Dan. 3,

¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. ¹⁷ "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ "But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up." (Dan. 3:12-18 NASB)

King Nebuchadnezzar knew very well that Daniel and his friends worshipped a different God. This much had already been confirmed earlier, and he had no problem with this allegiance. The question at issue here was whether they would also participate in the worship of the state represented by Nebuchadnezzar as the incarnation of God walking on earth.

Back to Rome, those who would worship the state-appointed deity 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 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*] 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 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. The archbishop lost his life as a result of his courageous stand.

On March 23, 1775, Patrick Henry delivered a speech on the rights of the colonies before the Virginia Assembly, convened at Richmond. He concluded his speech with, "Give me liberty, or give me death!" This short statement became the war cry of the American Revolution. There are some freedoms which an individual cannot yield to an all-powerful state without becoming a slave to the state. God alone owns the individual, not the state.

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 nonexistent 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.¹⁷³ 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), possibly interpreted as 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, in John's revelation the beast *appears* to recover from the wound, a distortion or *parody* of Christ's resurrection—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**. But 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."¹⁷⁴ Thus, I believe that John is speaking proleptically¹⁷⁵ 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

¹⁷³ Mounce, p. 251

¹⁷⁴ Thomas, p. 111

¹⁷⁵ Treating a future event as if it had already happened

to the world of unbelievers and has no application to believers.¹⁷⁶ Moreover, even his authority over unbelievers is under God's control.¹⁷⁷ 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 immediate 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, wrapping them in cloth, nailing them to posts, setting them on fire, 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**.¹⁷⁸ After Nero's death, a legend was propagated that he 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.¹⁷⁹ 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 must all 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.¹⁸⁰

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 250,000 lives so far, many of them children; the civil war in South Sudan, a new country claiming to be the "Christian" portion of Sudan; the barbarity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; 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; millions of unborn babies put to death; young teenage girls being mutilated with double mastectomies (removal of both breasts) as transitional surgeries to become males. 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.

¹⁷⁶ That is, believers are not obliged to obey Satan. They do so voluntarily because of **remaining** sin, not **reigning** sin (Rom. 6).

¹⁷⁷ Beale, pp. 688-689

¹⁷⁸ Hendriksen, p. 178

¹⁷⁹ Poythress, p. 142

¹⁸⁰ 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. He died before he could carry out his plans. The verse may not refer to any particular blasphemous incident.¹⁸¹

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 **two 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 nation**, the very description of those who 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 from the foundation of the world in the book of life** (v. 8). Thus, the **book of life** and the **seal** on the foreheads of believers (7: 3) symbolize 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.¹⁸² This is not a call to revolutionary opposition suggested by liberation theologians¹⁸³, 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 us¹⁸⁴, 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** 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.

“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).

¹⁸¹ Mounce, p. 255

¹⁸² Mounce, p. 257

¹⁸³ 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.

¹⁸⁴ Osborne, p. 506

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.

"Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. (Matt. 24:9 NASB)

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.¹⁸⁵

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.

¹⁶ And he causes all,
the small and the great,

Commented [D17]: An imitation of Elijah?

Commented [D18]: "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)

¹⁸⁵ Beale, p. 704

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

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, 15, 20).¹⁸⁶

'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans... '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. (Rev. 2:15, 20 NASB)

The Episcopal Church in the US teaches that homosexuality is an acceptable Christian lifestyle. What is this except the teaching of the Nicolaitans and Jezebel?

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 13.¹⁸⁷

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.¹⁸⁸

With this second beast, the evil triumvirate ¹⁸⁹ (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

¹⁸⁶ Beale, p. 708, emphasis mine

¹⁸⁷ Osborne, p. 512

¹⁸⁸ Beale, pp. 709-710

¹⁸⁹ Government by three

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.¹⁹⁰

Who is this beast? Revelation 16: 13, 19: 20, and 20: 10 identifies him as a **false prophet**. He also represents **false religion** and false philosophy during the entire church age¹⁹¹ and/or the unbelieving or apostate church.¹⁹²

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.¹⁹³

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).¹⁹⁴ 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).¹⁹⁵ 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.¹⁹⁶ The signs and wonders of the false prophet are not counterfeit because they are real—although many could be fake—but because the design of such signs and wonders is to lead people to worship the beast, a false god. Thus, **the main criterion of a true prophet is that he speaks the truth**. Egyptian magicians were somehow able to duplicate Moses' miracles, but they were counterfeit in that they were intended to justify Pharaoh's decision to prohibit the Israelites from leaving Egypt and worshiping Yahweh.

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

¹⁹⁰ Mounce, p. 258

¹⁹¹ Hendriksen, p. 179

¹⁹² Rushdoony, p. 174

¹⁹³ Mounce, p. 259

¹⁹⁴ Beale, p. 710

¹⁹⁵ Mounce, pp. 259-260

¹⁹⁶ Beale, p. 709

worship of Caesar, various tricks were used by these priests including ventriloquism¹⁹⁷ 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.¹⁹⁸ In Ephesus, a huge statue of Domitian¹⁹⁹ 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.²⁰⁰ 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.²⁰¹

Thus, according to Rushdoony, just as **the beast from the sea is one-world government** organized like the tower of Babel against the Lord and his people, **the beast from 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, Babel, and in the person of Nebuchadnezzar. But by worshipping himself, man also worships his own achievements in the form of wealth, science, or social engineering; thus his temple is the bank, the laboratory, the academic institution, or the halls of congress or parliament.²⁰² 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 (777, if you will) 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, educated 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, etc.? Some of them, apparently frustrated by the

¹⁹⁷ 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.

¹⁹⁸ Osborne, p. 515

¹⁹⁹ The current Roman emperor when Revelation was written

²⁰⁰ Beale, pp. 711-713, 717; see also Osborne, p. 513

²⁰¹ Rushdoony, p. 175

²⁰² Cf. Osborne, p. 522

failure of the evolutionary model to provide answers to man's origin, are now posing the theory that our DNA comes from another planet (the pansperma theory of origins), transported to earth via spaceship by more intelligent life forms. (I'm not making this up.) Even movies are being produced to propagate this myth. Ancient cultures did not have a monopoly on gullibility, nor can we prove that they were any more gullible than modern man—remember doubting Thomas and the skeptical disciples who refused to believe the women's report of Jesus' resurrection, and the skeptics on the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17). 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 and potentially dangerous to the future of society. “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.”²⁰³

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 jettisoning the cargo of the past and blindly accepting anything touted as “new”, although it is often a mere repackaging of the past (Eccles. 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 insidious²⁰⁴ because they are “atmospheric.” They tend to be **assumed** rather than **argued** [what theologians call presuppositions] 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.²⁰⁵

Adolf Hitler was able to convince the most educated military leaders in Europe²⁰⁶ that the most viable “solution” to the “Jewish question” was their utter extermination. But for them, the end justified the means of securing the future of the Aryan race which they believed 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.”²⁰⁷ The saying, “We need to make sure something like this never happens again,” commonly made by politicians, is a absurd. Something like Hitler's 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

²⁰³ Osborne, p. 514

²⁰⁴ Dangerous because undetected

²⁰⁵ Poythress, pp. 144-145, emphasis and words in brackets mine

²⁰⁶ One third or more of his German generals had Ph.D.'s, some from Oxford and Cambridge.

²⁰⁷ A saying I got from a friend of mine, Mike Boyett.

conflict, the unrest (and, I might add, the poverty) of Africa, and establish peace throughout the world, he would have no difficulty attracting the world's admiration in religious proportions.²⁰⁸ The peoples of the world, apart from true Christians, would gladly relinquish every freedom to such a leader or coalition of leaders.

The **mark, name, number, 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 the Father** (14: 1) 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 marginalized²⁰⁹ by the rest of society. There can be no neutrality in the war between God and Satan.²¹⁰ 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.²¹¹ 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. With the extensive information on each individual available even today through the internet, it will not be difficult for government authorities to monitor every activity of its citizens and prohibit financial transactions, purchases, correspondence, et al if they are not in compliance with the state. 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.²¹²

On a more subtle level, science professors in the West who do not accept evolution as dogma²¹³, or philosophy professors who dare to believe in the absolute truth and trustworthiness of the Bible, or psychologists who refuse to accept transgenderism and homosexuality, 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 kleptocratic²¹⁴ governments whose continuing existence requires bribery and theft.²¹⁵ Moreover, interest rates on business loans vary from 24% to 36%, depending on the principal 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, not through legitimate lending, but through usury, thus discouraging entrepreneurial activity and quashing middle and lower-income Africans. Although these systemic forces are not aimed specifically at Christians, it is not difficult to imagine a scenario²¹⁶ in which Christians become the main targets of governmental regulation and the denial of justice and capital.

Society regards the Christian as a misfit, a misanthrope, a victim of insanity. The Christian does not accept the "obvious verities,"²¹⁷ and so cannot be trusted. Thus, a consistent Christian will find it

²⁰⁸ Osborne, p. 522

²⁰⁹ Shoved off to the side and isolated

²¹⁰ Osborne, pp. 517-518

²¹¹ Isolated from the rest of society

²¹² *Open Doors World Watch List*, cited in *Operation World*, 2001

²¹³ Fact beyond reasonable question

²¹⁴ Bureaucracies that steal from the citizens of a nation.

²¹⁵ See George Ayittey, *Africa in Chaos*, and *Africa Unchained*, also Dambisa Moyo, *DeadAid*

²¹⁶ A situation or set of circumstances

²¹⁷ Truths, realities

difficult to fit in and mix with pagan society. The difficulties may be subtle, as in ‘tolerant’ modern 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.²¹⁸

The number of the beast has been the object of much speculation, and scholars intent on interpreting the antichrist as a single individual from a single country have resorted to using the numerical value of names (“gematria”) for identifying this person.²¹⁹ 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. But just as in 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. Several interpreters point this out.

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.²²⁰

Nevertheless, let not the believer despair. Let him remember that the number of the beast is the number of MAN who 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!²²¹

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.²²²

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

²¹⁸ Poythress, pp. 146-147

²¹⁹ Osborne, pp. 518-519

²²⁰ Rushdoony, p. 176

²²¹ Hendriksen, p. 182

²²² Beale, pp. 724-725

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.²²³

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 marketplace), and socially (accused of being traitors to Rome, irreligious, 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 injustice, violent attack, or even death, all because they are Christians and unwilling 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.²²⁴

Excursus: 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.²²⁵

1. Chapter 12: **Vision One** of the Woman and the Dragon

¹**A 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 [D19]: 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 [D20]: cf. 12: 3

²²³ Thomas, 113

²²⁴ *World*, "The Edge of Extinction", May 17, 2014. *World* is the only news magazine that I know of which interprets world events from a Christian perspective.

²²⁵ 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 [D21]: 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 [D22]: 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 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**

Commented [D23]: Rev. 17: 15

Commented [D24]: Rev. 17: 18

Commented [D25]: Rev. 13: 1b the beast with seven heads and ten horns

Commented [D26]: symbols of ill-gotten wealth

Commented [D27]: mystery--something concealed in the OT and revealed in the NT

waters, Abundant in treasures, Your end has come, The measure of your end. (Jeremiah 51:6-13 NASB)

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 NASB)

The **golden cup** full of intoxicating **wine** (v. 7) anticipates 17: 2 and 17: 4b.

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.**"

...having in her hand a **gold cup** full of abominations and of the unclean things 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 illegitimately gained wealth, success, and immorality of the economic-religious system²²⁶ unrestrained by *Christian principles* of economics, morality, and compassion. Nothing from this text can be marshaled against free-market economics in favor of socialism. In fact, the very opposite. Any form of socialism is built upon the power of the government which enforces compliance. It is Rome's political system forced upon the nations 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. He will also destroy any other economic/religious seductress who attempts to seduce His people (His new temple) away from the true worship of God and who 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-temporal²²⁷ meaning of Babylon is any world-wide economic/religious system.

²²⁶ Beale, p. 847

²²⁷ Spanning many historical periods

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)

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 vassals²²⁸ were required to bring their wares into it. These are some of the many similarities between Babylon and Rome. Like Babylon, the international markets associated with Rome were not free markets. They were coerced into doing business with Rome.

Today, the **many waters** facilitating trade may correspond to any, or a combination of, **world-class cities** which serve as the **centers of world trade**. One can think of New York, London, Tokyo, Singapore, Beijing, 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 (for now)—and often mutual rebellion against God and His moral law typified in the tower of Babel (Gen. 11). Yet, **evil alliances never last**; and in the end God turns the nations against the whore of Babylon whom they destroy.

The **abundance of treasures** (Jer. 51: 13) refers to the wealth and riches of ancient Babylon foreshadowing 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 coerces 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**.²²⁹

...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

²²⁸ Countries in submission to Rome

²²⁹ Poythress, p. 159-160

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: 16.²³⁰

It is the antitype of the *typical culture of Cain’s descendants* to the seventh generation in Lamech—successful in building cities, developing animal husbandry, metallurgy, musical instruments, and writing poetry—poems about murder (Gen. 4)—foreshadowing the “rap” music of the US glorifying violence. Cain’s descendants nevertheless developed a *counterfeit culture*²³¹ culminating in the tower of Babel and man’s second major attempt to become his own god (Gen. 11).²³² 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 illusory hope of becoming independent of God. 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.

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. (1 Tim. 6:10 NASB)

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, (1 Tim. 6:17-18 NASB)

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 life-styles and world-views. It is an internal danger, subtle and deadly. Islam will win a relatively small number of converts from materialistic, western nations, but it will not seduce many of the 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.²³³

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).²³⁴ 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.

²³⁰ Hendriksen, p. 201, emphasis mine

²³¹ For an extensive discussion about counterfeit culture, see *LifeWork*, Darrow Miller, as well as Francis Schaeffer, *How Shall We Then Live*

²³² Rushdoony, *Thy Kingdom Come*, on chapter 17

²³³ 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.

²³⁴ Poythress, p. 161

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.²³⁵

Despite her fine clothing (v. 4), the woman is still a whore. She stands in contrast to the mother in Revelation 12 whom God clothes with the sun and moon, who gives birth to the 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.*²³⁶ 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 [D28]: Rev. 17: 8

Commented [D29]: 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 usual 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 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^[237] 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.²³⁸

²³⁵ Poythress, pp. 162-163

²³⁶ Mounce, pp. 308-309

²³⁷ 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.

²³⁸ Poythress, pp. 164-165, emphasis mine

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 pretentious. The United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, all have made veiled promises of ending world poverty and 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: 8.²³⁹

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*.²⁴⁰ 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).

²³⁹ Mounce, p. 312

²⁴⁰ Remember the number of the beast, 666, a trinity of failure short of the perfection of 777.

Commented [D30]: Rev. 13: 3 See comments on D41 Rev. 17: 11

Commented [D31]: Rev. 17: 7; Rev. 13: 3 This may be a reference to the beast which appeared to be slain and was resurrected.

Commented [D32]: Rev. 13: 10, 18; 14: 12; 17: 9

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.²⁴¹

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.²⁴²

Beale interprets the marvel of the world (**will wonder**) as the *apparent lack of effect* which the resurrection of Christ had on the first century Roman world and continuing to our day.²⁴³

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.²⁴⁴

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.²⁴⁵

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, Mugabe’s regime in Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, the newly formed and quickly conquered Islamic State in Iraq (ISIS), Bashir’s regime of Sudan, 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 in the death of Christ. They are not deceived by the apparent success of Satan, ungodly world governments, or oppressive

²⁴¹ Hendriksen, p. 204

²⁴² Mounce, p. 312

²⁴³ “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. See Alvin Schmidt’s *How Christianity Changed the World*.

²⁴⁴ Beale, p. 866

²⁴⁵ 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).

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**;

five have fallen,

one is,

the other has not yet come;

and when he comes, he **must remain a little while**.

Commented [D33]: The seven heads, mountains, kings are all the same entity

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**? 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** may be 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).²⁴⁶ 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 Constantine²⁴⁷ who was supposedly converted at the sign of the cross in the sky with the words, “In this sign, conquer”, an event with 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.²⁴⁸

Arguing similarly, Beale says 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, and 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.

²⁴⁶ Mounce, p. 314

²⁴⁷ Mounce, p. 315

²⁴⁸ 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 [one who is given a legacy] 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.²⁴⁹

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 Rev. 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 [D34]: 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.²⁵⁰ 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 **come[s] up out of the abyss** (v. 8) 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 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)

²⁴⁹ Beale, p. 685, emphasis mine; also quoting Caird, *Language and Imagery*, p. 229

²⁵⁰ Mounce, p. 316, so also Hendriksen, p. 205

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)

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, 11.²⁵¹

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 [D35]: Distinct from the seven kings of whom five are fallen, one is and the other is yet to come. Rev. 17: 10

Commented [D36]: Rev. 18: 10,17,19; 17: 12

Commented [D37]: The one purpose of the ten kings is to give their authority to the beast, the red dragon

Commented [D38]: 17: 17

Commented [D39]: Rev. 19: 19

Commented [D40]: 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.²⁵² 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...”²⁵³

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. What are the consequences

²⁵¹ Beale, p. 877, emphasis mine

²⁵² Beale, p. 878

²⁵³ Hendriksen, p. 205

of two generations of children forcibly immersed in godless evolutionism and “values clarification” (in which young people with little knowledge and experience are encouraged to “clarify” what is morally right or wrong according to their own personal preferences)? Answer: rampant teen pregnancy, drug abuse, suicide as the second leading cause of death among teenagers, gender dysphoria²⁵⁴ leading to sex-change therapy and surgery resulting in more suicide ten years afterward, random school shootings (evoking the naive question, “How could this happen?”), and a host of other problems. 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”, to the word “woman” which they are now unwilling to define. 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 and Revelation 16: 14.

"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." (Rev. 17:12-14 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. (Rev. 19:19 NAU)

...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. Thus, in v. 17a, the kings **execute** God’s purpose through their **one purpose** (v. 13) of giving their power to the beast.

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." (Rom. 9:17 NASB)

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, as if God and Satan are fighting it out to see who wins. The victory of God was never in any doubt at any time in the history of man.

²⁵⁴ The condition of feeling one's emotional and psychological identity as male or female to be opposite to one's biological sex

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.²⁵⁵ As in Daniel 7 (the type) 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)

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."

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** (v. 15) 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."...[Think of Stalin’s collectivization, costing 30 million lives and Mao Tse Tung’s (Zedong’s) cultural revolution, costing 40 million lives. Xi Jinping will be next, hopefully before China takes over Africa and the United States. DM] 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

Commented [D41]: Rev. 17: 1

Commented [D42]: Therefore, Babylon represents all world powers

Commented [D43]: 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 [D44]: 17: 13

Commented [D45]: Rev. 17: 16 The harlot reigns over the same kings who later turn against her

²⁵⁵ Mounce, p. 318

give way to jealousy and hatred, so that “at the climax their mutual hatreds will result in mutual destruction.”²⁵⁶

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.²⁵⁷

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.

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 in chapter 18 the numerous references 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).

"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." (Rev. 18:3 NASB)

"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.' (Rev. 18:7 NASB)

²⁵⁶ Mounce, p. 319, citing H. Lilje and Leon Morris, emphasis mine

²⁵⁷ Beale, p. 885

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

"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, (Rev. 18:9 NASB)

¹¹"And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more (Rev. 18: 11)

By way of contrast, **heaven, saints, apostles, and prophets** are commanded to **rejoice** over the destruction of Babylon.

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." (Rev. 18:20 NASB)

Likewise, in Isaiah, Israel is commanded to rejoice over Babylon's future downfall to the Medo-Persian Empire.

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.

Rev. 19—the destruction of the beast, the false prophet, the kings of the earth and their armies

Rev. 20—the destruction of the dragon (Satan) and the nations deceived by the dragon

Rev. 21—22—the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven symbolizing the union of the new heavens and earth

The fall of Babylon at the end of the age is the *antitype* (NT fulfillment) of the fall of Neo-Babylon, the empire of Nebuchadnezzar, the *type*. If we wish to go back even further, it is the antitype of the Tower of Babel in which mankind attempted to mass together to build a name for themselves in opposition to God's command to spread out and fill the earth. Nebuchadnezzar's fall in Daniel 4 is a foreshadowing of Babylon's national destruction in Daniel 5, foretold in Isaiah and Jeremiah. 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. The present-day site of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon is a field of ruins fit only for archaeologists.

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

In Revelation John most likely has Rome as his target (I will not get into the debate with preterists who believe he was speaking of Jerusalem), but not only Rome, but all of man's *proud cities* throughout the history of the world boasting economic systems—whatever they are—which often tramples upon the rights and needs of others and favor only a small minority of the world's population. It should be remembered that Nebuchadnezzar ignored Daniel's admonition to champion the rights of the poor (Dan. 4: 27).

'Therefore, O king, may my advice be pleasing to you: break away now from your sins by *doing* righteousness and from your iniquities by showing mercy to *the* poor, in case there may be a prolonging of your prosperity.' (Dan. 4:27 NASB)

But not only was Nebuchadnezzar disinterested with the poor, Israel and Judah were likewise disinterested. Prophesying to Judah, Ezekiel says,

"As I live," declares the Lord GOD, "**Sodom, your sister** and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. ⁴⁹"Behold, this was the guilt of **your sister Sodom**: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy. ⁵⁰"Thus they were haughty and committed abominations before Me. Therefore I removed them when I saw it. ⁵¹"Furthermore, **Samaria [another name for the northern kingdom of Israel]** did not commit half of your sins, for you have multiplied your abominations more than they. Thus you have made your **sisters [Sodom and Israel]** appear righteous by all your abominations which you have committed. (Ezek. 16:48-51 NASB)

Many economic practices of large international corporations as well as smaller businesses demonstrate no concern for the poor. Most wealthy individuals have no interest in the poor; they are only concerned to make more money.

The righteous is concerned for the rights of the poor, The wicked does not understand *such* concern. (Prov. 29:7 NASB)

Since the poor have nothing to offer wealthy unbelievers, and since many wealthy people adhere to the "religion" of evolutionism (the survival of the fittest), then it should not matter that poor people or poor countries perish to leave room for more successful people or cultures—Hitler's "final solution" for the entire world. But Christianity believes that all men and women have dignity and that they have value not for their possessions, education, or natural abilities, but simply because they are made in God's image. Being in His image, all men have wonderful potential to worship and serve Him; but that potential is hindered not only by individual sin, but often by *systemic* evil outside of the individual's control. Christianity teaches that those who are strong have a moral obligation to help the weak.

"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)

He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need. (Eph. 4:28 NASB)

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 first-century Rome, has developed economic relationships with all the conquered nations of the earth who have been forced to trade with Rome. The nations discover that trade with Rome has also made them wealthy (although Rome always gets more than it gives); but the **wealth of her sensuality** includes the enjoyment of wealth at the expense of other human beings (vv. 12-13). The Roman Empire was built on the backs of slaves, and many of the possessions enjoyed by developed nations are available because of cheap labor in sweatshops. Millions of Asians work for a few dollars a day to provide clothing for western consumption. Even designer dresses are produced in Asian countries by people who are working for meager wages. Here is some information about sweatshops from BrandonGaille.²⁵⁸

- An estimated 250 million children ages 5 to 14 are forced to work in sweatshops in developing countries.
- Products that commonly come from sweatshops are clothing, coffee, shoes, toys, chocolate, rugs, and bananas.
- The price increase to the average consumer if sweatshop salaries were doubled: 1.8%.
- Consumers say that they would be willing to spend 15% more, on average, to guarantee workers wouldn't need to work in sweatshop conditions.
- The people who are forced to work in sweatshops must usually spend the majority of their paycheck on food in order for their household to survive.
- Women sewing NBA jerseys make 24 cents per garment – an item that will eventually sell for \$140 or more.
- The percentage of sweatshop employees that are women: up to 90%...
- In Bangladesh, the average worker's hourly wage is just US\$0.13, which is the lowest in the world.
- The average worker's hourly wage in Vietnam: \$0.26.
- Only 4 out of the top 10 nations that have the highest number of suspected sweatshops have an hourly wage that exceeds \$1 per hour.
- Costa Rica has the highest average hourly wages for apparel workers at \$2.38 per hour.
- It takes an apparel worker in a sweatshop an average of working 70 hours per week to exceed the average income for their country
- Children are as young as 6 or 7 years old when they start working at a sweatshop for up to 16 hours per day.
- In Asia, children as young as 5 were found to work from 6 in the morning until 7 at night for less than 20 cents per day.
- A shirt that sells in the United States for \$60 can cost less than 10 cents in labor...
- Many Nike sweatshop workers die by the age of 15, which is acclaimed correct by the ASSL League.
- It is estimated that 1.3 million children in Bangladesh are working full-time in order to help support their families.
- The number of children in Bangladesh who have never enrolled in school: 1.5 million...
- Sometimes workers are forced to be active for 48 hours straight and any breaks that are allowed are required sleep breaks.

Some economic abuses have occurred inadvertently through charity. Millions of bales of used clothing donated to charity shops in the US have been sold to traders in African countries who sell used clothing on the market. In 2016 alone, 3.67 billion dollars of used clothing was sold in markets

²⁵⁸ BrandonGaille Small Business and Marketing Advice (brandongaille.com).

around the world, 35% in Africa. Such practice has, in turn, obliterated the cotton and textile industries in African countries. Kenya, particularly, once had thriving cotton and textile industries employing thousands of farmers and textile workers.

...the East African Community (EAC), which comprises Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda, announced they would ban second-hand imports from 2019 to protect their own clothing manufacturers. But then, under pressure from the United States, countries in the EAC reduced tariffs and withdrew the proposed ban. Rwanda, however, refused to back down.

And in March 2018, the US temporarily suspended Rwanda from an arrangement allowing sub-Saharan countries preferential access to the US market. But Rwanda stood firm and maintained its import tariffs, saying it wanted to build up its own "Made in Rwanda" textile industry. And, as a result, it lost some of its duty-free privileges on exports to the US.

However, the planned import ban by East African countries wasn't supported by everyone in those countries, particularly those whose livelihood depends on the sector.²⁵⁹

The abuses cited above are not purely capitalist abuses. They are abuses partially orchestrated by governments which have the power of controlling economic transactions through tariffs. Christians must be involved in correcting the abuses attending a capitalistic system. Notice that I said, "abuses". Capitalism is a system of economics—the only system of economics based upon individual freedom that has the capability of producing world-wide wealth. But capitalism is not a religion, and like every God-given thing (e.g., money, sex, and power), capitalism can be misused to abuse others. Only the Christian faith *applied* to the capitalist system will yield an economy which is just and fair for everyone. Doubtless, if people working in sweatshops had anywhere better to go, they would not be working in sweatshops; but often other options are either few or do not exist. They are stuck working for pennies an hour for people who are becoming rich with their labor. It is legal, but not moral. And God will judge.

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)

²⁵⁹ BBC News, July 27, 2018

"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)

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. (1 Jn. 2:16 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 a pagan land; but no one worshipping pagan deities 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 (including homosexuality), 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. An alternate translation is “duplicate”, thus indicating the righteous equivalent, but later the verse reads, **mix twice as much for her**. However, 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	A	
even as she has paid,		B
and give back to her double	A	
according to her deeds;		B
in the cup which she has mixed,		B
mix twice as much for her.	A	
7 "To the degree		
that she glorified herself		
and lived sensuously,		B
to the same degree		
give her torment and mourning;	A	
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.²⁶⁰ She is not like a widow who loses her one husband. The Empire of Rome lasted for many centuries, and it seemed as if Rome 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 to 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.

²⁶⁰ Mounce, p. 326

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 more 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,
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 [D46]: 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,²⁶¹ 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 developing economic and political alliances 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.²⁶²

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.

²⁶¹ Mounce, p. 328

²⁶² 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 (1) the **Euphrates** and its tributaries facilitating trade with the nations during the zenith of Babylon's power, as well as (2) the **Mediterranean Sea** facilitating Rome's commerce. **Waters** refer to trade with nations. But this is the same trade also described 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." (Rev. 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).²⁶³ Everything on the list seems legitimate except the last item, cargoes of **slaves and human lives**.

The list of goods begins as we would expect, with **gold and silver**, the most important mediums of exchange. Precious stones are next followed by exotic linens, silk and scarlet, exotic woods, ivory, etc. Then he lists spices, perfumes, and food items. Everything is listed in descending order of importance.

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.²⁶⁴ Therefore, the lives of human beings other than Roman citizens were cheap. Their lives had the same function as all the other commodities, namely, to make the status quo Roman life as comfortable and pleasant as possible. Moreover, the deaths of others were small sacrifice for the acquisition of all the other valuables mentioned on the list.

Thus, the mention of slaves at the end of a catalogue of luxuries enjoyed by wealthy people, slaves who are exploited by worldly merchants, rather than at the beginning...provides the whole list with an important theological statement. John is not simply commenting on the slave trade, and the unjust attitude toward human beings adopted by those who regard them simply as merchandise...By placing slaves and their unworthy treatment in an emphatic position at the conclusion of his list, the seer is attacking every aspect of the secular traffic of the seas. He is thereby denouncing the 'inhuman brutality, the contempt for human life, on which the whole of Rome's prosperity and luxury rests. (Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, p. 371)

Many of the luxuries, and even common items like cell phones and electronic tablets that people enjoy today are made with minerals provided through the dangerous labor, even death, of African laborers. Efforts have been expended to ban conflict diamonds and other minerals from various countries, but this is a difficult process when there is so much wealth and power demanding their supply.

Therefore, the whole list in vv. 12-13 is suspicious, not for its content, but for its extravagant and profligate (wasteful) 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 a predatory empire with increasing addiction to wealth and debauchery.²⁶⁵ 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's umbilical cord. This close relationship—which could not be achieved through the external coercion²⁶⁶ 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 crashing and burning of

²⁶³ Osborne, p. 637

²⁶⁴ Beale, p. 910

²⁶⁵ Homosexuality was rampant in Rome among the elite.

²⁶⁶ External force

its economy. “Thus, chapter 18 focuses on the economic sins of Rome and the luxurious ostentation that brings about the wrath of God.”²⁶⁷

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 minuscule²⁶⁸ \$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 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 thiyne 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 (rigorous self-denial of material things) 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 (Matt. 19: 21) 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 Empire²⁶⁹ 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 conquered 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 arms and legs—imprisoned in their own filth, vomit, and excrement. Many of the women were raped. The sickly were chained to heavy weights and to each other and thrown off the ship together to drown—thus lightening the ship’s load and ensuring 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 relatively few white Southern farmers could become rich from slave labor on their vast plantations. Some Christian plantation owners were actually compassionate to their slaves who did not wish to leave their masters after the Emancipation Proclamation.²⁷⁰ Many slaves were also converted to the Christian faith while sitting in the balconies of Southern churches built for this purpose. God used man’s wickedness to

²⁶⁷ Osborne, pp. 637-638

²⁶⁸ tiny

²⁶⁹ Mounce, p. 331

²⁷⁰ A decree by President Abraham Lincoln freeing all slaves within the US.

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. Thousands of civilians also perished.

But 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, and other places where these goods and services are produced. Many modern laborers in developing countries are working twelve or more hours a day in poor working conditions under abusive managers.²⁷¹ 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) implicated in the crimes of the abusers? Are they 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 which had collapsed, killing over 1,100 workers who were earning only two 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 was marketed in Walmart, the largest retail outlet in the world. I personally prefer buying my T-shirts 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 two or three dollars 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 substantially more for my clothing—which I purchase infrequently—to ensure that Walmart makes regular inspections of all its garment producers, that they ensure 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? Nevertheless, at the end of the age Christ will return to pronounce judgment upon any infraction of his law concerning business and labor.

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. So what can we do? We can begin by dealing with ourselves and the many subtle ways we allow our integrity to be compromised upon the altar of consumerism, potential wealth, and pleasure. If enough Christians in a given society were troubled by such things, it would eventually impact the laws of their own nation and the world.

Only a few men, William Wilberforce primarily, with the help of Thomas Clarkson, were able to end the English slave trade in 1807. Elected to English parliament in 1780, he admitted that “The first years in Parliament I did nothing—nothing to any purpose. My own distinction was my darling object.”

²⁷¹ Mostly 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, “You 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. Even so, abuses in labor remain common in the US.

But he began to reflect deeply on his life, which led to a period of intense sorrow. "I am sure that no human creature could suffer more than I did for some months," he later wrote. His unnatural gloom lifted on Easter 1786, "amidst the general chorus with which all nature seems on such a morning to be swelling the song of praise and thanksgiving." He had experienced a spiritual rebirth... He abhorred the socializing that went along with politicking. He worried about "the temptations at the table," the endless dinner parties, which he thought were full of vain and useless conversation: "[They] disqualify me for every useful purpose in life, waste my time, impair my health, fill my mind with thoughts of resistance before and self-condemnation afterwards"...

In particular, two causes caught his attention. First, under the influence of Thomas Clarkson, he became absorbed with the issue of slavery. Later he wrote, "So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did the trade's wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for abolition. Let the consequences be what they would: I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition."

Wilberforce was initially optimistic, even naively so. He expressed "no doubt" about his chances of quick success. As early as 1789, he and Clarkson managed to have 12 resolutions against the slave trade introduced—only to be outmaneuvered on fine legal points. The pathway to abolition was blocked by vested interests, parliamentary filibustering, entrenched bigotry, international politics, slave unrest, personal sickness, and political fear. Other bills introduced by Wilberforce were defeated in 1791, 1792, 1793, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1804, and 1805.

When it became clear that Wilberforce was not going to let the issue die, pro-slavery forces [the beast, DM] targeted him. He was vilified; opponents spoke of "the damnable doctrine of Wilberforce and his hypocritical allies." The opposition became so fierce, one friend feared that one day he would read about Wilberforce's being "carbonated [broiled] by Indian planters, barbecued by African merchants, and eaten by Guinea captains."

Slavery was only one cause that excited Wilberforce's passions. His second great calling was for the "reformation of manners," that is, morals. In early 1787, he conceived of a society that would work, as a royal proclamation put it, "for the encouragement of piety and virtue; and for the preventing of vice, profaneness, and immorality." It eventually became known as the Society for the Suppression of Vice.

In fact, Wilberforce—dubbed "the prime minister of a cabinet of philanthropists"—was at one time active in support of 69 philanthropic causes. He gave away one-quarter of his annual income to the poor. He fought on behalf of chimney sweeps, single mothers, Sunday schools, orphans, and juvenile delinquents. He helped found parachurch groups like the Society for Bettering the Cause of the Poor, the Church Missionary Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the Antislavery Society.

In 1797, he settled at Clapham, where he became a prominent member of the "Clapham Sect," a group of devout Christians of influence in government and business. That same year he wrote *Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians—a scathing critique of comfortable Christianity that became a bestseller*.²⁷²

²⁷² *Christianity Today*, *Christian History*, date unknown

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). 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 vision of 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**
became rich by her wealth,
for **in one hour** she has been laid waste!'

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**

Commented [D47]: Rev. 17: 12; 18: 19

Commented [D48]: Rev. 17: 12

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 timeframe 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: the glorification of self.

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.²⁷³

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.²⁷⁴

²⁰ "**Rejoice over her,**

O heaven,
and you saints
and apostles
and prophets,

because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."

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 justified in the manifestation of 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). The differences between the suffering of the wicked and that of the

²⁷³ Beale, p. 924

²⁷⁴ Beale, pp. 921-923

righteous in this present life were small enough to prompt the preacher in Ecclesiastes to conclude that the fate of both righteous and unrighteous was the same.

It is the same for all. There is one fate for the righteous and for the wicked; for the good, for the clean and for the unclean; for the man who offers a sacrifice and for the one who does not sacrifice. As the good man is, so is the sinner; as the swearer is, so is the one who is afraid to swear. (Eccl. 9:2 NASB)

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 of injustice.²⁷⁵

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.²⁷⁶

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

²⁷⁵ So also Osborne, p. 655

²⁷⁶ Cf. Beale, p. 919

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.²⁷⁷ 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 entails is impossible to determine. The collapse will be sudden, in **one hour** (but probably 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".²⁷⁸ 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 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 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); but even hard work is no guarantee to prosperity if a nation or people is cursed for disobedience to the law of God.

Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain. (Ps. 127:1 NASB)

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 citizens 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 claim to ensure ongoing prosperity. But we have seen in the US that this manipulation of money and credit has benefitted

²⁷⁷ Beale, p. 919. See also earlier discussion.

²⁷⁸ Mounce, p. 335, emphasis mine, citing Caird

Systematic Theology—Eschatology

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. 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.