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## REVELATION 1

**1:1 “The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants the things that must shortly take place; and He sent and communicated it by his angel to his bond-servant John.”**

The words of the book we know as “Revelation” are words which communicate and reveal truth given to Jesus by God. The book is a revelation of Christ, that is, pertaining to Him and sourced in Him. Ultimately it is sourced in God the Father and so reveals that which He has decreed to be made known concerning the work of His Son. He means for it to be made known to those who are described as “the bond-servants” of Christ. Theirs is the privilege of knowing something of the mind of God regarding the future of the earth. This is the great privilege that comes with being in His service.

Christianity is the embrace of a personal God who is transcendent and immanent. Those two terms mean that He is above His creation and yet personally active in it. The world has been created by Him and He has ordained the events that occur on it. They are unfolding, and the stage is constantly being set for His purposes. We only await the appointed hour. Our hope is founded in this, that in the will and plan of our just, righteous, and good God, there are things which must take place on this earth. Meanwhile there will be much that is not just, righteous or good. All will be when His plan is complete.

God has chosen to reveal certain things that He intends to do on this earth. The reason for this is that He wishes to offer proof of His existence and His power to humanity. This is the reason for His unveiling of His plan, so that as it occurs it will inspire faith in Him among humankind (Isaiah 44:6-8; 45:20-25). The specific information that this book will make known came from God, was entrusted by Him to Christ, who then made it known through an angel to John.

John is the writer of this book. He is the apostle John who could have represented himself in several ways in this opening statement. He could have said he was an apostle, a member of the inner circle, or a dear friend of Jesus. He chooses to say only that He is a bondservant of Jesus.

**1:2 “who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.”**

John recognized what the angel said for what it was, the word of God. What follows is the result of John writing down the words of the angel and at times of Christ himself, and what his own eyes saw. All this John did under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The result is that we were given a complete record without error of all that God wished to communicate through John in the original document that became known to us as the book of Revelation.

**1:3 “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near.”**

John commends the faithful response of those who would read, hear, and heed the words which he passed along. It is one thing to read, another to hear. It is one thing to read and hear, another to heed. The message is one that we should take beyond the realm of our physical senses to ponder carefully. It is the greatest of blessings to arrive at the point of being obedient to the truth God has made known. This is ultimately because it is always the time when obedience is the essential thing that will bring great reward.

John says that the time is near, an idea that will be stated again at the end of the book (Revelation 22:10) What “time” is He speaking of, and how are we to understand the word “near” 2000 years later? The Scripture has raised the expectation of a future hope for humanity from its earliest pages (Genesis 3:15). The growing expectation was of a different age in which evil would be confronted (Isaiah 2:1-22), and God’s anointed One would rule on the earth (Isaiah 9:6-7). Jesus affirmed this idea to the end of His life (Luke 22:67-68; 23:28-30) As the book of Revelation unfolds it will show that this is the “time” it is pointing to.

John said this time was “near.” Now how are we to understand the word near? We can only say that this is given from the perspective of God. There are times in His revelation of Himself and His plan when He speaks according to our understanding and perspective. There are times when He speaks purely from His perspective. The latter is the case with these words. This is affirmed by Peter when he addresses the accusation that the promise of Christ’s coming is so delayed that it is reasonable to doubt its occurrence. His reply is that 1,000 years is as one day with the Lord, and one day is as 1,000 years (2 Peter 3:1-13). In other words, God is not a creature of time. Nearness of the events is an idea we should embrace to live prepared for blessing and accountability.

**1:4 “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;”**

The first message John bears is the message of grace and peace from the eternal and unchanging One. It is more than a casual greeting from John. It is from God. It is the assurance that the audience has special standing with Him.

God is noted here by a three-fold description. It utilizes the verb “to be” and suggests the name God Himself gave Israel as His personal name by which He was to be known by them, Yahweh. That name is formed from the Hebrew “to be” verb. This name denotes Yahweh as the eternal and unchanging one. It is particularly noteworthy that He do so at the start of this book that will divulge to us a great deal about what His decree is for earth and humanity’s future. Who He is will remain unchanged.

This declaration about God is repeated by God Himself in verse eight. In between we will see three sets of three statements about Jesus. In these three we see observations about who Jesus is, who He was, and who He will be. The book will close with Jesus making a related declaration of Himself: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” There seems to be in the construction of this section a special desire on John’s part, and the Holy Spirit’s, to affirm the divinity of Jesus. This will certainly help the reader “heed” not just read.

The audience is named as the seven churches that are in Asia. They will be named later by specific locality. There is the privilege of knowing that God's first word to them is of grace and peace, not of judgment and turmoil. The words to them would be personalized, and there would be a summons to higher, more holy ground. But this all comes in an atmosphere of grace and peace.

Why the seven churches in Asia? More will be said about this later. But it seems best to see in these seven churches conditions that are always typical of Churches and of Christians and in all locations. The specific challenges made to these seven congregations are such that they are every Christian's battle and therefore every church's battle.

We are told that seven Spirits are before God's throne. They are apparently seven spirits who attend Him, perhaps to transmit his word to the next level of spiritual authorities. A similar kind of idea is presented to us in the prophecies of Zechariah (3:9; 4:2, 10). Perhaps there are many more than these seven. Perhaps the choice to allude to seven such spirits here relate to the fact that there is seven churches John is writing to and these are angelic messengers, one assigned to each of these churches. They may be the same as the seven angels mentioned later in the book (8:2).

In the end we are uncertain about the identity of these beings. They are mentioned as part of the heavenly company, much the same as a family member might include the greeting of other family members along with their own in a letter. This is one of several glimpses Revelation provides into the creation of God in the heavenly realm.

Again, there would be corrective instruction to the seven churches from the heavenly company. The message would be hard and direct. The words would rebuke and call for change. But God's word to them was first of grace and peace. The Scriptures consistently represent that as God's approach to humanity until the specific day He has appointed for His wrath to be poured out.

**1:5 “and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us, and releases us from our sins by His blood,”**

John introduces Jesus Christ into his greeting to the seven churches. As noted earlier, the declaration about God in verse four is repeated by God Himself in verse eight. In between these two declarations beginning here at verse five we will see three sets of three statements about Jesus. In these three sets of statements, we see observations about who Jesus is, who He was, and who He will be. The book will close with Jesus making a related declaration of Himself: “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” There seems to be in the construction of this section a desire to affirm the divinity of Jesus.

Christ is part of this heavenly company that sends its message in this letter to the Churches and the greeting of grace and peace. He, the first love who some had turned on, the one whom some had become lukewarm towards, the one whose teaching some had not been faithful to, this one is first said to be the faithful witness. He was true to what God the Father had entrusted to Him. He was true not just in the words He would say, but He was true in His character to the character of God.

There would be much in His message to the Churches about death. Many good people would die over the years it takes for His plan to be completed. Many people would die in very violent ways. His authority extends to the dead ones. He was the first even among them. As such His authority extends over the souls of the dead.

Much evil would come about on earth through the kings and regimes that came to power over the millennia. The earth would convulse under the evil of tyrants. God's plan, which Christ bore faithful witness to, would eventually undo all the turmoil. But He has made it known that it is potent enough to even work in and through it. Ultimately, Christ has authority over all the other authorities. They will answer to Him and be brought into submission to Him. One so great extends to the churches the greeting of grace and peace.

In the last phrase of this verse John begins a statement of praise to God, which he will break into in the next verse, and then conclude. He begins His statement citing the love displayed by Christ and His work in our behalf. It is through His blood that we have been "released" from our sins. The word rendered released by the NASB is the word loosed. The imagery is of the untying of a fetter or the unlocking of a chain. That was our condition, and it would have remained our condition regardless of our best effort. We could not escape our captivity on our own. The just sentence of God stood against us and so because of that, His power worked against us. Only in the blood of Christ could our sentence be commuted. His love motivated this work for us. But as good a news as His love is, it would not have accomplished our release apart from His sacrifice of blood.

**1:6 "and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father; to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."**

John breaks into His statement of praise abruptly, as if a critical other thought had flashed into His mind. The thought is a profound one. It is that the Ruler over the kings of the earth has formed a kingdom of His own amid their realms that we are a part of. He has joined Himself to each of His subjects and by that they are joined to one another so that during evil earthly tyrants, and amid an unseen, sinister world of the most depraved spiritual rulers, He has a kingdom.

This kingdom is an order of Priests. In the moral muck of a world driven along by the lusts of those who deny His existence, there has always been God's order of priests.

These are given to carrying out His will regardless of the personal cost to them and the earthly loss they accrue. This kingdom of priests is not an earthly order, joined through their own efforts. They have no visible "look" or appearance, no standard daily routine. They are simply there, by Him and for Him.

This is Christ's great work, to invite humanity back into the very thing they forfeited in the fall, to be partners in Yahweh's rule over His creation. We who believe He immediately begins to work in and through all who believe by the leadings and directions of His own Spirit now joined to ours. It is a great privilege we enjoy. It is staggering the quality of life He offers to us.

To this one who has accomplished such a great coup, John proclaims, “to Him be the glory and dominion forever and ever. Yes! So be it!” To one who by such a gracious and loving means has proved His right to rule, John declares allegiance. It is the allegiance that all of humanity should embrace, certainly one that Jesus’ family should proudly proclaim. It is an amazing irony He has decreed, an astounding dichotomy He has brought about through a remarkable display of power. The Greek term *ναί*, meaning yes, appears with the Hebrew expression amen, reflecting the grand projection of both Old and New Testaments of the prophecy made to Abraham. Through his seed all nations would be blest.

**1:7 “Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. Even so, Amen.”**

It will be Jesus who will fulfill this prophecy spoken by Zechariah (Zechariah 12:10, see Appendix 3 for John’s use of this prophecy). All will stand before Him and meet Him face to face. It is the ultimate fear one has, of meeting face to face one whom they have alienated. To lose the battle one has initiated, and then, vanquished, to face the triumphant leader face to face is a horrible judgment. How much more so when the victorious One is the Sovereign of the Universe whose grace and offers of peace have been spurned. He, Jesus, is the promised one of the Old Testament who will fulfill the glories prophesied and bring about the justice and order that has been the hope of His people. It will be either a glorious or terrible day, depending on what we individually do in the present.

The prophecy captures the special emotion that will be Israel’s when they realize the horror of their mistake regarding Jesus, their Messiah whom they crucified. But the grief of the day will not be exclusive to Israel. It was after all, a Roman spear that pierced Him. Israel was only one of a myriad of earth’s people groups that have spurned Him and His truth.

The coming of Jesus Christ will be “with the clouds.” This is a frequent idea that occurs first in Daniel (Daniel 7:13), is affirmed by Jesus in His teaching on His return to earth (Luke 21:27), in His words to Caiaphas (Matthew 26:64), and is affirmed by the Angels at Jesus, ascension (Acts 1:9-10). This coming with the clouds is represented elsewhere to involve a snatching up from off the earth out of the theater of His judgment those who are alive on the earth on the appointed day of His judgment of the earth (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). The experience of seeing Him and recognizing Him for who He is will be the universal experience of all on earth. There will be no partial perception or understanding of the event. It will be clear, appalling, and sad to so many that have spurned Him and now recognize that their time has run out.

**1:8 “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”**

Using the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, the universal trade language of the day, God proclaims Himself to be the eternal One. In this book about times and time, about epic struggles, a book in which history is told ahead of time, God wants us to know that the time dimension originates in Him and that He Himself controls it.

We often say God is not a creature of time. Strictly speaking that is true in that He is not a created one and not subjected to anything. There is however a definite sense in which God willfully binds Himself to time. For example, God has a time for everything. Events don't happen randomly but according to a very meticulous plan carried out in time. He is not entirely separate from it in that He created time and so in some way it must come out of who he is but time itself is subject to Him and it serves Him. In time he has a great servant. Because He is not subject to it, it is His ally. Time is on no one's side except God. He was before it, is served by it, and is the only one who can alter it. He will be seen to be the focus of it in that everything that happens in time will be brought around to serve His purposes. So we can say that God created, and shapes times, stands above it and outside of it, but also that He functions in it and even obligates Himself to a time dimension in many of His promises.

There is much in the times that individual Christians have lived in that is uncertain and can seem out of control. Many of the events that Revelation will predict, will shake humanity to the core when they happen. The purpose of the unveiling of them before they occur in time is to show the truth of this verse. Time will roll along but it is directed by God so that it brings about His will. Due to the prophecy of Revelation, His people can be certain of that truth as they see the things He has ordained occur in time.

**1:9 “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos, because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”**

John presents himself instead of as an apostle, as “your brother and fellow partaker”. So he identifies himself not directly with Christ but with Christ's Church, not as having been with Jesus, but being in Jesus. He identifies three great things common to those who are in Christ. The first of these is tribulation, the experience of trouble because of one's identity in and work for Christ. The second is what John refers to with the word kingdom, the experience of the authority and benevolent reign of Jesus. The third is perseverance, the human quality produced by dependence on Jesus, the quality God desires most to produce in our lives.

John writes from the tiny island of Patmos to which he had been exiled by the emperor Domitian sometime during the years 81-96 AD. He is there not because of the emperor, but because of the word of God, at the decree of God, and from an earthly standpoint because of the testimony of Jesus. He is an old man now, alone in the sense of his exile and the lone one left of the original apostles.

**1:10 “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,”**

John was “in the Spirit,” or simply “in spirit.” It appears that by this he means in a heightened state of listening for the voice of God, intent and focused on what God’s heart might be, on what God wished to reveal of himself and His will to John. This state is mentioned at two other notable occasions in Scripture—of David in composing Psalm (Matthew 22:43), of Paul’s ability to be present in Corinth though not physically there (1 Corinthians 5:3-4). On both occasions there is inference that in such a state we can gain from God special wisdom. It appears to be the state described elsewhere as being full of the Spirit. This statement then from John is a signal to the readers that what he is passing along comes through the activity of the Holy Spirit that John was very conscious of. He says nothing more of concurrent activities, so we are left clueless as to particulars. He reveals only that it was on the Lord’s Day. We can speculate that John was likely worshipping and praying and doing the kinds of things that Christians do on that day though He was alone.

This idea supports further the idea that John was presenting in verses 1 and 2. In this book we have a work of the Holy Spirit, as we do in the rest of the Scripture so that it is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16). It is material originating in the being of God (1:1-2), carried by the Holy Spirit into the being of John, which the present verse speaks to. The result is that the words John’s own style and vocabulary inspired within him were the precise articulation of God’s heart and mind.

From behind him, John hears a loud voice. We will see later that it is the voice of Christ. It was such that by its volume and tone he was summoned to listen. The voice of heavenly beings may be musical in tone. We have surmised that this may have been the case with Lucifer (Ezekiel 28:13-15). In some sense John likens the voice he hears to a trumpet, yet the following verse will show that distinguishable and known words were uttered that John could repeat.

**1:11 “saying, ‘Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.’”**

John is told to simply record what he sees and send it to seven churches which are specifically identified. They are chosen ones to be the initial recipients of this revelation intended for Christ’s bondservants everywhere. They are perhaps chosen for their location, but more likely because they are representative. In these seven churches was a complete and perfect representation of the church in all ages. The problems and challenges they faced were characteristic of individual churches at all periods. Each church represents a season that all churches anywhere, anytime, go through. It is natural then to wonder if each church could represent an era in Church history, though admittedly these eras are tough to discern with precision.



John writes what he sees and so his testimony is given under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is expressed in his words and according to the human author's knowledge and understanding of things like the planet, the solar system, and technology far in the future. The vision was given so that a person such as John, with the limited scientific knowledge of the time, could understand it. This is not to say it is less true. It is to simply observe for example that John will pass information on to us about phenomena that would happen on the earth expressed according to his belief that the earth was flat and set on some form of foundation. Revelation is revelation about events of import to the entire universe, but it does not reveal many of the secrets of the universe itself which God left humankind to discover.

**1:12 “And I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;”**

The seven lampstands John sees are symbolic, and the nature of their symbolism is revealed shortly by the one speaking. He must “turn to see,” suggesting this image is a reality, not simply a “mind picture.”

**1:13 “And in the middle of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His breast with a golden girdle.”**

This “one like a son of man” was Jesus Christ. This term “one like a son of man” was used by Daniel to describe God's future world leader (Daniel 7:13). He was unknown to Daniel by name. To John He was not. It was the one with whom he had lived and walked 30 to 40 years earlier. He was in a glorified body now. Missing in John's words is the familiarity He had expressed toward Him in his gospel account. It is notable that there was a royalty, dignity, and awe to Christ in His glorified state that even those who were his closest friends revered. And so here in John's writing the awe is evident, and the familiar is unexpressed.

John describes Christ's appearance in detail. The revelation of Jesus Christ begins with an encounter with the risen glorified Christ, and though generally it came “by His angel,” it commences with He Himself. John's statement provides us with a glimpse of a resurrection body, though this body in this appearance of Christ probably involves elements that go beyond our glorified bodies. John notes Christ's clothing. It is possible that there is something symbolic in each of the details given, but this is not noted in the text. It is also possible that it is not symbolic, but simply the reality to which earthly symbols pointed.

Here Jesus is said to stand in the middle of the lampstands. They are gathered around Him. He is that which they illuminate, though He Himself in His glory needs no illumination.

**1:14 “And His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.”**

Christ in His glory clearly bears the form of man. Having become a man, He remains one forever, though in a glorified state. He bears the trappings of age without its limitations. His hair is white, and this is noted. John notices His eyes, distinguishable as eyes, yet in some sense like a flame of fire. Where he would expect eyes, John sees this which we can only imagine. There was perhaps a glow and movement to the pupils which John could only liken in human words and expressions to fire.

**1:15 “and His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.”**

There was a glory to Christ's body that can only be described as a glow, noted here by John as he describes Christ's feet. Bronze, when made to glow has a distinct red glow, different from iron. The form and shape of the metal remain visible, but the color is distinct and beautiful. It could be that the glorified body will be like this. Our bodies likely exuded glory, light, before the fall. The departure of this glory was likely the reason for Adam and Eve's feeling that they were naked.

Christ's voice, previously described in verse 10 as being loud like a trumpet, is here described as having the sound of many waters. Both things are true. It had been sudden in verse 10 and distinct, summoning John to action. It was like the sound of an alarm there. Here in a steadier dialog, it is noted as being what we might describe as “thunderous,” or “powerful and majestic.”

**1:16 “And in His right hand He held seven stars; and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.”**

It is difficult to imagine the entire image that John saw here. It is also difficult at this point in our knowledge of heavenly things to know when a reality is being pictured as it is, and when God has chosen to inject something that provides additional symbolism. We know by the later testimony of the text (verse 20), that the seven stars in Christ's hand are symbolic. The sharp two-edged sword is most likely also symbolic. Elsewhere His word is said to be like a sword (Hebrews 4:12). It is most likely that Christ wishes here to emphasize His role as judge of the earth. These details show that judgment comes through His word, that it holds the power of life and death, that it cuts to the heart of all matters, and that it is that by which all will be judged. This is never clearly stated by the text, but certainly the message of Revelation is a message of a sword—God's judgment against all evil. John also describes here the glow to Christ's face as being “like the sun shining in its strength.” The distinctions in the face were visible, yet there was a brightness to His countenance that reminded John of the sun.

**1:17 “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as a dead man. And He laid his right hand upon me, saying, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last.’”**

Again, there is that about the glorified Christ that produces stunning terror. All familiarity ceases. Any thought of affinity vanishes. It leaves one in need of comfort and re-assurance. Jesus lays His right hand on John. His gracious words are meant to comfort John and give him the confidence necessary to complete this extra-ordinary mission.

Jesus' words clearly declare his divinity. In an earlier statement “the Lord God” (verse 8), says He is the “Alpha and the Omega.” The short name “the Lord God” is likely the Greek equivalent to “Yahweh God.” God uses the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet symbolically to declare that He is the first and last. Here Jesus identifies Himself clearly in a way that equates Him with the One who had made this earlier statement, the Lord God. He says of Himself that he is “the first and the last.”

There is no need to fear when rightly related to the One who is the initiator of all events and the purpose to which they point.

**1:18 “and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”**

Christ presents Himself as the One who has overcome death forever and the One who has power over it and all the terror that goes with it. He has the power to free all who are caught in its clutches (Hebrews 2:14-15). It is likely in this statement that John is fully assured that He is speaking to the risen Christ.

**1:19 “Write therefore the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall take place after these things.”**

To regard as precious that which he would see and hear would be the only logical response on John's part to having an audience with the God/man. John is told to write down what he has seen because God wants them to be known, pondered, and understood. It is revelation of truth belonging to God, entrusted to Christ, and now passed along to Christ's bondservants (1:1).

Some have suggested that this verse provides an outline of Revelation. Chapter 1 contains the things John has seen, chapters 2-3 contain the things that are, and chapter 4-22 speak of the things that shall be. While the interpretation of Revelation has been vigorously contested among Christian scholars, there is no doubt that this simple statement is a legitimate way to understand the book. Understood in this way it harmonizes with the balance of the prophetic statements of the Bible. So we can approach the book in this way; it is occupied with what had transpired to form the Church, the current state of things as they were in churches at the end of the first century, and what had yet to take place in God's plan.

There was much confusion in the minds of early Christians. The Old Testament prophets had prophesied several events regarding Israel. Daniel had laid out a 490-year plan for the nation. The interpreters of all that information had projected a Messiah and a glorious political liberation of Israel. Jesus, however, did not bring that about. In His statements he had clearly stated that a portion of Daniel's prophecy remained to be fulfilled before the Kingdom would be established in the visible form Daniel had envisioned (Matthew 24:15-31).

The early believers had learned to see a rejected Messiah in the writings of the Old Testament. That much had been made crystal clear to them. They now rightly understood that in the rejection of Christ God's plan was perfectly served (Acts 2:22-24). But what of the “surplus” of things predicted by the prophets that had never been fulfilled? What about those statements that spoke of the Kingdom of God being established and filling the whole earth? (Daniel 2:44-45; 7:9-14, 26-28).

Revelation brings understanding regarding these things that had been projected clearly in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, but which remained unfulfilled at the time of Daniel. Revelation enlightens about the times of the Gentiles and then especially regarding the 70th week of Daniel and the time he described as the “latter days” (Daniel 2:28-43), when God would set up a kingdom that would be the end of all the other great kingdoms of the earth.

**1:20 “As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands; the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”**

Churches are lampstands, strategically placed in the plan of God to bring the light of truth to bear on the World. That is how God views them. It is the Divine design. Here, what John had seen is important and significant. It is God’s desire that this that John had seen be clearly understood and written down.

Now in the command to write down what he had seen, what is now, and what was to come, there might seem to be an imbalance. He had seen very little compared to what he would see. But what he had seen and what he was at that moment seeing was critical because it demonstrated God’s purpose in the Church that would be carried out for centuries in the world. It would make a statement about our agenda for our times. That the local Church, each one, is a lampstand by which God brings illumination is a critical and strategic matter.

Equally intriguing is the other statement here, that the seven stars are the “angels” of those Churches. There are two positions on what is meant by the “angel” of a church. The first is based on the legitimate idea that the word angel can simply mean “messenger.” Though this usage is rare in the New Testament, it does occur where a special human envoy carried a message at a critical turning point in God’s program among humankind. So this word is used of John the Baptist (Luke 7:27). It is used of the envoys John sent to question Jesus as to His identity (Luke 7:24). It is used of the messengers Jesus would send ahead of Him into town to alert the inhabitants of His impending arrival (Luke 9:52). So these could be special human messengers who would carry to each of these Churches God’s direction to them.

The second interpretation identifies these seven messengers as heavenly ministers appointed by God—angels assigned to each local Church. In the verses to come He is allowing humans a glimpse at the Divine orders being communicated to these seven “ministers” who would then set about to bring the things that would give health to these Churches. It is difficult to speculate on which of these positions makes the most sense. It does not seem germane to the interpretation of the letters themselves. It is a point of interest about which we have too little information to fully understand.

What we have here then is Christ allowing a human being, John, to be injected into the process of revelation, so that Christ’s mind is clearly expressed in human terms. This was because a human understanding of Christ’s mind for these seven Churches would be critical. In some sense the words of these letters apply to every church that would ever exist. They apply to stages and challenges in the lifecycle of each local church. They even apply to the eras and cycles that would come about in the overall history of His universal Church. So John is allowed to be a part of this process so that the thoughts of Christ, the Head of the Church, would be conveyed in human language to the Church for all time.

Now it is important to remember that these letters address whole churches. Only where individuals are addressed are there statements that relate directly to that individual’s standing with God. In a local Church there is a corporate standing relating to God’s blessing and usefulness so that God can reject a church while still embracing individual believers within it as His own. This is a critical matter for Church leaders to understand. It is what makes their work of keeping a church healthy so vital. They function as an immune system in a local body and if they do not lead diligently, the sickness that is naturally present will take over.

## REVELATION 2

**2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands says this:”**

This is the first of the seven letters written to seven specific local churches in Asia Minor. Each letter is addressed “to the angel” of that specific church. Again, it is difficult to say dogmatically what exactly is happening here. We speculate that in the realm of the unseen spiritual world, God was orchestrating a means either through angelic beings, special human beings, or both, to communicate His heart to each of these local churches, and then to His entire Church for centuries to come. The important thing is not who the messengers were. It is that these seven letters contain God’s perspective on the spiritual health of churches, and this has proved to be of great value over the millennia.

In this opening statement regarding the Church in Ephesus there is an important reminder for the reader of this book. It is that it is Christ who moves among the Churches, and it is He who is at work among them. He holds that which gives them practical ability in their mission in His hand or under His authority. Their forward progress is made possible only by Christ’s provision for them. What He says about their state and their health means everything.

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

It is Christ who knows our deeds. Others know what we say, but Christ knows what we think and do. Others might know the things we do outwardly, but Christ knows our motivations and therefore the true nature of our deeds. It is great when such a One commends the toil and perseverance of the Ephesians. Their persistent hard work is worthy of commendation from the One who understands their motive. Their intolerance is commended. They make distinctions among themselves for the right reasons, and when done in this way intolerance is virtuous. It is good to remember that there is no virtue in tolerating evil men within the church once they are known to be so.

Their intolerance of evil men extended to those who tried to gain influence and leadership by passing themselves off as apostles. Rather than being intimidated, or impressed by their flamboyance, the Ephesians put them to the test.

The test probably involved doctrinal issues as well as background. Having seen Christ and spending some measure of personal time with Him was apparently part of the test of an apostle (Acts 1:21-22; 1 Corinthians 9:1). There was also the normal test of certain signs of apostleship, extra-ordinary deeds that apostles did because of God’s hand being uniquely on them (Romans 15:18-19; 2 Corinthians 12:12).

It was an important thing to test any who claimed to be apostles in times when word traveled slowly, and before the age of photographs and security badges! There was gain to be had by passing oneself off as an apostle. Many were beginning to pass themselves off as spiritual leaders for personal gain. It was and is easy to want to believe, and not to do the hard work of testing. It is uncomfortable, and difficult, but leaders should be tested. The Ephesians had done the hard thing and are commended by the head of the Church.

**2:3 “and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.”**

The outstanding thing about the Church in Ephesus is that they kept on. The picture that is emerging of them is that they were not ruled by their emotions. They were able to steel themselves and keep doing what needed to be done. That is a strength that is deeply significant. All that comes about in our lives is aimed at producing this, the ability to persist (James 1:1-3). All that is a part of our makeup in the flesh works against this. So it is a great thing, a compliment of the highest order when the One who endured so much for us tells us we have persevered well for Him. This is God’s will for His children, that to which the Holy Spirit seeks to lead us. To persist says so much, yet it speaks volumes that such a people as this still had something they were neglecting.

**2:4 “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”**

As great as it is to have it said of you that you persist, as much as that means to God and as much as it is the sum of His will for us, there is something that renders persistent hard work hollow. God calls it, “leaving our first love.” He doesn’t describe it any more than that because that describes it best. It is neglecting the relationship between us and our Lord. It is allowing what use to be done in joyful response to an inner tug to become routine. It is repetitious habits carried out by rote. It is the thing that makes our persistence and endurance sweet to the Lord rather than a second rate, heartless performance.

The problem with us when we arrive at this point is that there are many noble-looking tasks that we are doing. But the reality is that He no longer has our heart or our open ear. He cannot use us to do any new thing, we are too caught up in our liturgy and in being today where He was yesterday. While there is a great deal to be said for the well-ordered spiritual life, its purpose cannot be lost. Routine that does not foster and strengthen our relationship with Jesus, that does not help us to hear more from Him is no longer a spiritual routine. It is religious routine. When that happens, as it often can in mature Christians, there is something between us and the Lord that must be taken care of.

**2:5 “Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first, or else I am coming to you, and will remove your lampstand out of its place—unless you repent.”**

The solution for all relational problems between us and our God lies in a very important activity. That activity is repentance. It is essential—the lifeblood of the believer. The essence of repentance is a change of mind. That is the meaning of the word itself. We must be ruling over our mindset and thinking process so that we pass sentence on the course we have taken and change our minds about it. When we see in ourselves heartless routine, we must change our mind, refusing to accept the spiritual climate that has come to be.

The story of two sisters, Martha and Mary is instructive on this whole matter. When we lose the affection, we once had for Christ, we can be certain that there are certain deeds that we are busy at that we must let go of. There are others that we must return to. That is the simple solution the Head of the Church gives to the people of Ephesus. In the lingo of the two sister’s story, Martha’s model must be set aside in favor of the “better way” of Mary (Luke 10:38-42).

This letter speaks to a particular church. While individual application can be made, it is a collective condition that the letter is addressing. Churches can be very busy. In their business they can be quite efficient and accomplish much that is good. Systems can be put in place and a very impressive look developed and maintained. It is not that this is necessarily wrong. We should work so hard and persevere so well as Ephesus! But a sense of joy, an awe of His grace, and tearful thanksgiving should constantly be springing up anew, or we have reason to wonder if God is present in it all in His fullness. A Church can become a place of business, where there is no fragrance of Christ. Repentance is the way out of these doldrums.

When this happens to a Church, it ceases to be a light. It may be a few things to the world, but it is not a light. It has lost its usefulness in pointing people to the truth. It may be commendable as an organization and for its contribution to the community, but not useful or healthy in terms of its spiritual work. God is no longer able to use it for the real works of grace He desires to do among humanity. That is what is pictured here by the idea of removing a church's lampstand from its place. Since the letter is not written to an individual, but to a group of believers, it is not speaking here about personal salvation. It is speaking about the health of their Church and warning them that as a Church they will lose their position of usefulness, their sphere of influence, unless they repent.

There is a fascinating perspective in all this, particularly in terms of how we think as Americans. We value busyness. The busiest person is often viewed as the most successful or the most important. Busyness adds to our sense of worth. Many are addicted to being busy. This mentality carries over into our Christianity. Our culture tends to mold us into people who do Christianity. The more we do it the better we feel. The curious result is that when we look at statements like this in the Scripture, when we think of Christ summoning us to rest, when we think of broader scriptural principles like shalom and Sabbaths, we find a strange irony. The need for repentance may just be greatest in those who are the busiest!

We must remember the simplicity of our early faith when our reflection and worship sprang out of responses in our heart. We should covet that spot and seek continually to occupy that ground through repentance.

## **2:6 “Yet this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.”**

The Nicolaitans were known for antinomianism, a rather purposeful disregard for all moral law under the guise of adherence to and advancement of the doctrine of grace. It was not just a belief that God's grace covered moral shortcomings, but the belief that God's grace was properly proclaimed by our sin. So sin should be intentionally indulged to demonstrate God's grace. Rather than being something God hated, sin had a somewhat sacramental role in the Christian community according to these teachers.

Here, Jesus says He hates their deeds. That is the bottom line. God's will be that we become a sanctified community and so reflect Him. The Ephesians did good in separating themselves from the Nicolaitans.

**2:7 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches. To Him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God”**

This is a critical truth. All who would listen to God need only to heed the leadings of the Spirit in God’s people. Do you want to know what God is saying today to our present world? Listen to what His Spirit is saying in local churches. There is truth always flowing from God into the world through His church.

This expression will be repeated in each of the letters to the seven Churches. It is an appeal to all to listen. At the same time, it suggests that there is a certain ability to perceive the voice of truth that not all have. So we note that it is an open invitation, but its sobering implication is that not all use their ears to hear the things of God.

The concept that not all have ears for the truth is not uncommon in the Scripture (Deuteronomy 29:4; Isaiah 6:9-10; Matthew 11:15; Acts 28:27; Romans 11:8). Expressions involving having right hearing speak of those who are teachable (Mark 8:18), who are genuinely seeking the mind and heart of God (Luke 8:18), who are striving to understand His ways to live wisely (Luke 14:35), and who have been acted on by God Himself (John 6:44; Isaiah 6:9-10).

Expressions like this are often markers in the text of Scripture when something profound has just been stated or is about to be stated (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43). There is in these instructions to the Churches concise, profound thought from God with respect to living in the present life, as the world’s course gradually unfolds in the centuries leading up to the great consummation. There is insight into the passing eras of time and the various spirits that define those times. These things said to the Churches constitute God’s direction as to what the focus of Christian people should be as we help to bring about His plan and advance His interests in the world. In addition to that, these things constitute the spiritual truth the Head of the Church wishes to have flow through the Church into the world. He is always calling people to Himself and His truth through His Church.

According to the God’s testimony through John elsewhere, the victory that overcomes the world is “our faith” (1 John 5:4). So these words recorded in Revelation are an invitation to all who “have an ear” for the things of God. They are invited to respond to what He has revealed and to trust in them. In believing we are doing the thing the enemy is seeking to stomp out and snatch away. In the act of belief or trust we have overcome all the obstacles thrown in the path by the evil one, and all the instincts of our fallen nature, and have laid hold of life.

Those who come to faith will be granted eternal life and will experience life in the Paradise of God. This phrase should not be regarded as a conditional one addressed to those who were Christians in Ephesus. It is addressed to the one “who has an ear,” an invitation extended to all who would recognize the truth as it was delivered to and through the Church. Heeding the voice of truth is believing, and in belief there is eternal life.



**2:8 “And to the angel of the Church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead and has come to life, says this:”**

The title or expression “the first and the last” is common in this book about time and history declared in advance. Jesus Christ is the creator of time. He is what time is about, the grand purpose for which time was established and He is the one it serves. He was dead. That event occurred in time. Physical death is the ultimate blow of time. He overcame it. Since He did, we should not be driven along by a fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15). Death and all other forces of time should no longer drive our thinking and shape our decisions.

**2:9 “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”**

The Church of Smyrna was getting blitzed. This letter to them is meant to be encouraging. They were a Church under the attack of Satan, who was using imposters and persecution to undo what God was doing in them. So this opening statement is not a sarcastic one, written to people who only thought they had it bad. It is a reminder to them of their true wealth, despite their horrible circumstances in the present world and in their present life. The one who has Christ has the love of God from which no earthly or heavenly force or ruler can separate him (Romans 8:31-39). Knowledge of the wealth of that position--that it means we have every good thing--strengthens Christians to endure every manner of evil that Satan sends against them.

The last statement of the verse reveals who Satan was working through, or at least one of the parties he was using to try to thwart God’s purposes in Smyrna. It is a tragic picture when God’s chosen instruments for revelation and salvation become His enemies. That was what certain Jews had been doing. In that lies a great blasphemy against the One who had given Himself for their salvation and glory. But that blasphemy is not unique to the Jews. Rather, they are in that blasphemy typical of humanity despite the grace extended toward them. This had already become a primary story line in the early Church. The Jews had become instruments of Satan in thwarting God’s Kingdom.

The synagogue movement, started in the wake of the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians, instructed a people in the ways of Yahweh and so kept them linked to Him and to each other. The movement had traveled full circle to this point where the Spirit of God now said it was an instrument of Satan and kept people in bondage to him. Such is the journey of human institutions if they do not heed what the Spirit says to the Churches. By saying they were Jews they were saying they were covenant people of Yahweh. They were not. Though they had the ethnicity, they did not have the Spirit of Yahweh in them—the circumcision of the heart. They were Gentiles by nature.

**2:10 “Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold the devil is about to cast some of you in prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

It is the most natural thing in the world to be fearful of the suffering that comes into our life. It is very unnatural to look forward to pain. But pain can be faced with courage. Through truth there are certain fears we can be free of. We can be free of the fear that things are out of control. We can be free of the fear that somehow our welfare and well-being have been brushed aside. We can be free of the fear that the outcome of events has been altered, that evil has triumphed over good, and that God Himself has turned His back on us. A suffering Church must exercise a very intentional faith and simply refuse to let go of its trust in God. The word to the Church at Smyrna is to fight such fears as they would a mortal enemy.

Satan’s moves are known to God. They do not surprise Him. Satan would be the source of a period of trouble that would come to the Church at Smyrna. God however, already knowing Satan’s plan, would counter by turning this into a test. A test in God’s way of thinking is not to determine what level someone is at, but to take them to higher ground. A test from God tempers further the character of the recipients.

When suffering comes about in the life of believers, a scenario of intrigue emerges from the spiritual world. Satan sends persecution through his agents with a view toward destroying faith and thwarting the work of God in and through Churches like the one in Smyrna. God allows Satan to do so and through the Holy Spirit reverses the effect so that the whole thing becomes a training regimen that strengthens their faith and His work. This is what God is speaking to in this verse. Suffering can be an opportunity for great reward.

The projection here is that the trial in Smyrna would be temporary, as indicated by the fixed time of ten days. The phrase may, in accordance with other biblical usage, refer to 10 years. It may simply mean a relatively short period of time. The point is that there is a limited time to the trials worked by the evil one. Time always runs out on Satan’s schemes, because God is the “first and the last.”

The greatest goal to which a human can aspire is to be faithful to death. Our individual challenge is never to achieve a particular work in a particular time. It is simply to be faithful to what He sets before us each day if we have breath. This is the goal that should drive our thinking and should take precedent over every other objective we might think He has placed in our minds and hearts.

The crown of life refers to reward given to the faithful by their Master. It is not simply the right to live eternally in His presence. That is guaranteed by Christ’s work. It is the crowning achievement of a life, that is, the experience of God commending our work, which He will do in some way in the presence of all if we are faithful.

It is not that such a reward is deserved. He is after all; the Lord of the universe and we are His creation and His servants! The reward is founded in His justice, even as punishment. It is His justice that leads Him to reward those who obey and serve faithfully, as opposed to those who are His disobedient children. It is not for us to determine precisely who is faithful, since we are not always aware of assignments given by God. Neither is it possible for us to speculate accurately on what the reward might be. But Scripture speaks persistently of the reward that He will offer to the faithful (Isaiah 40:10; Matthew 5:12; 1 Corinthians 3:8; Revelation 11:18; 22:12). The crown of life is imagery used here for that reward.

**2:11 “He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”**

Again, the invitation goes out through the Church to all who wish to hear and know the things of God. The Holy Spirit's words to the Churches are the way of life for humanity. What can be gained by listening is escape from all the damage inflicted by what is called here “the second death.”

The term second death occurs three other times in Revelation (20:6, 14; 21:8). It refers to that time when those who have rejected Christ will be eternally separated from God. It does not include physical death, only permanent spiritual death. The separation of our spirits and souls from our bodies, and our separation from life on this earth will be experienced by all men. But no man needs to experience eternal separation from God if they will listen to the conviction of the Holy Spirit regarding truth.

The Church of Smyrna was given these words and they are applicable to Churches everywhere that are experiencing special seasons of suffering. This will always be the rule for Christians as they are undergoing trial for their faith. It had special application to the Church of the second and third century, when persecution and trial became the universal norm, the policy of the empire. These words rallied Christians to rise to the occasion and scores received strength to die a martyr's death.

**2:12 “And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:”**

This is a message to a church that was being threatened. The threats were ultimately from without, from the domain of Satan, but they were also from within as agents of his had gained a foothold within the Church. The message is couched in kingdom terms, with references to the throne and home of Satan. Something about Pergamum was strategic in the spiritual realm. It was the stronghold of the enemy. Therefore, Christ reminds them of His might, the one with the sharp two-edged sword.

This sword John had seen coming from His mouth (1:16). Elsewhere we are told that Christ would slay the evil one's world leader with the breath of His mouth (2 Thessalonians 1:8). At the word of Christ, the enemy is vanquished. Christ need only utter the word, which He will do now evil no longer serves His purposes. He will not tolerate that which is against His will. Where He cannot act through us as His agents to right wrongs, He Himself will intervene.

**2:13 “I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”**

What exactly is being said in this verse about Satan's relationship to Pergamum is hard to say precisely. Whether it refers simply to the planet as being the domain of Satan, or to a special spot-on earth in Pergamum where Satan's stronghold can be argued. At the very least, Pergamum was a place of great spiritual darkness. Twice in the verse Satan's presence there is acknowledged. It was a place where evil had extra-ordinary power. The presence of a Church there is a great tribute to the power of God and His Gospel.

The church there, during this great evil had been true to Christ and the faith as God had entrusted it to them. He could still call it “My faith.” They were holding the course. And they were doing this despite the persecution that had taken at least one of their member’s lives. Antipas is unknown to us. He is referred to here in very endearing terms as “My faithful one.” This is high commendation. Like Antipas, the church was enduring, being faithful to the end. They were not wavering though they were living in the shadow of the evil one.

**2:14 “But I have a few things against you, because you have some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit acts of immorality.”**

The teaching of Balaam to Balak was that God’s purposes through Israel could not be thwarted, but they could be set back by leading His people to break the terms of their covenant with Yahweh through immorality (Num. 31:15-16). Balaam could not effectively curse Israel, but he did give advice on how they could be made to bring a curse on themselves.

This has been typical of Satan’s strategy against the people of God since time began. Thus, in Pergamum, where the stronghold of Satan was, this tactic was being deployed by him. There had come to be those in the church who were serving his purposes by teaching the Christians that they could be involved in idolatrous ritual. The result was that their Head, Jesus, had something against them. It is a huge blunder to think this would thwart the purposes of God, but that is the nature of Satan’s self-deception.

The “way” of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15), was to have a mixed agenda, to please God and gratify one’s flesh. The “error” of Balaam (Jude 11), was that he thought he could have a foot in both camps, giving advice on how to thwart God’s purposes and still have knowledge and relationship with God.

The situation at Pergamum was likely this: probably through some error in the concept of grace, some were teaching that Christians were permitted to engage in idolatrous feasts and in the immorality that went with them. Whether those who taught such things were intentional agents of the evil one remains uncertain, as it does in the case of Balaam. Like Balaam, they were at the least deceived. In effect Satan’s agents is what they become. The result is that all who follow them become the same, agents of the evil one who damage the Kingdom of God. The work of God is dealt a blow, though not ever thwarted.

**2:15 “Thus you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”**

As stated earlier (see at 2:6), the Nicolaitans were known for antinomianism, a rather purposeful disregard for all moral law under the guise of adherence to and advancement of the doctrine of grace. It was not just a belief that God’s grace covered moral shortcomings, but the belief that God grace was properly proclaimed by our sin. So sin should be intentionally indulged to demonstrate God’s grace. Rather than being something God hated, sin had a somewhat sacramental role in the Christian community according to these teachers. This was a bizarre doctrine, but understandably attractive to fleshly people.

The result was that whether by those who held to the teachings of Balaam or those who held to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, the believers were being tugged in the same direction—toward immorality. The distinction between a Christian and a pagan was in danger of being blurred and whenever that happens the credibility of the faith is undermined.

**2:16 “Repent therefore, or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.”**

The solution to all that the Lord might have against us is always repentance, a change of mind. Repentance involves ceasing from being cavalier and tolerant toward sin. Ideally, it leads to drawing lines and making distinctions to keep one’s moral bearings. More commonly repentance must be repeated multiple times (Luke 17:3-4). It is a powerful spiritual tool that creates reaction in high places (Luke 15:7,10).

Written revelation is provided by God because His first strategy in caring for His children in an evil world is to lead them often to repentance. Repentance comes through the light of truth that clearly defines our deeds in terms of right and wrong. It enables us to see them as they are and change our minds about them.

Christ’s coming that is spoken of here is likely not His second coming, since it is clearly contingent on whether the hearers repent. This coming is His activity of intervention in the lives of His own. He will not allow us to be unrepentant with no consequences. He will move against our actions for the greater concern of the health of His movement.

The text speaks of Jesus making war with the sword of His mouth. Jesus spoke the worlds into existence. It was good. This is the other side of God’s word. It is a weapon that is unmatched and unparalleled. He speaks and it is done. His word goes out and does not return until it has accomplished its purpose. God’s words, unlike ours which are just words, move unseen powers and the result is always that what He speaks comes about.

**2;17 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”**

These words that appear at the end of the charge to each of the seven churches are a reminder that in these messages to the Churches is God’s heart for His people. All who wish to know Him and His will, and all who wait at His gates for a word from Him should listen to what He is saying to and through His Church. These words will urge on all who heed them and push them forward in accomplishing His will.

To all who overcome the inertia of evil to achieve the victory that overcomes the world, which is faith (1 John 5:4-5), He will give “hidden manna.” Manna is mysterious. The word itself in Hebrew means “what is it?” Manna is God’s special food for the sustenance and health of His people in times of special need. It is referred to as the food of angels (Psalm 78:25). It was supplied by God’s decree to the Israelites in the wilderness.

There are two possibilities in terms of what this “hidden manna” is referring to. First, it could be a reference to the fact that this sustenance is spiritual in nature, therefore unseen. It will be supplied to all who live faithfully on this earth. They will be sustained in each moment by that which God will specially provide for them, whether physical, emotional, or spiritual in nature. “Hidden manna” then could be a figure for the grace that is ours in the moment through the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is the “food which you know not of” spoken of by Jesus (John 4:31), that strengthened Him for the work of God in the moment.

Second, “hidden manna” could be a reference to the tree of life, that which we will be allowed to eat from in heaven that will bring about the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2, 14, 19). The language of this verse certainly allows that this be some future event rather than a continuous, ongoing experience. The other things mentioned seem to be bestowed in the future, likely after the judgment seat of Christ. The only difficulty this idea raises is that it is given to “overcomers.” “Overcoming” must be seen then in the light that John cast it in when he wrote His epistle, where overcoming is defined as embracing the faith (1 John 5:4-5).

The giving of a white stone may be speaking of a stone worn around the neck as an adornment, like that of a priest. Or it could be speaking of an object worn like a present-day Olympic Medal, a symbol of achievement, in this case being one who has overcome. It seems quite likely to be given as a designation of one who has run the race well and deserves an eternal commendation.

To these who overcome a new name will also be given. It is most likely given by God in the way he has always bestowed names, with a special meaning that says something significant about the person and their relationship or role in God’s plan. It has special significance to the recipient that no one else fully comprehends. Perhaps it is a name that speaks of special moments in their journey that only they and God fully grasp the significance of. Perhaps it speaks of special lessons they learned along the way or some quality that characterized their life’s work. Whatever it is it is deeply personal and private. It speaks of the special intimacy that exists between the faithful ones and their God.

The charge to this church of Pergamum is applicable to all churches who face hard and difficult obstacles in the spiritual realm. In a sense this is always true of all churches everywhere. But it is especially true in unique cases where a church is marked out for special attack and persecution by Satan. This church symbolizes the Church during the age immediately after the edict of tolerance enacted by Constantine. Christianity at that time was suddenly mixed with the kingdoms of this world and it faced the continual challenge of remaining pure and true. It had to remain an instrument of God where Satan had his throne, right at the center of the Roman Empire. The danger would be in the mixing of errant doctrines with truth, the tolerance of pagan practices, and the enormous number of stumbling blocks that could find their way into acceptable Christian practice.

**2:18 “And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:”**

This church was one that needed to contemplate facing Christ as their Head and Judge. He is therefore presented in this way to them, as one with piercing eyes, aflame with judgment and with righteous indignation. He comes with feet aglow, perhaps symbolic of His walking the pathway of judgment. They needed to fix some things, or they would face the judgment of Christ—harsh consequences designed to get them to contemplate hard issues connected with what their church had become.

**2:19 “I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.”**

These are no small issues that this church is commended for. They are obviously living the life rightly in many respects. They are commended for four great crown jewels—love, faith, service, and perseverance. By any Biblical standard the presence of these qualities is noteworthy. Not only that, but people were also being led to higher ground. There was spiritual growth in them right down to the matter of how they lived—their deeds. It is a normal thing to start well and then lose momentum. It is commendable when one rises higher with passing time. So this verse brings to light the practical strength of this Church.

**2:20 “But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads my bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.”**

Despite the initial commendation, God is not pleased with Thyatira. A stern warning awaits them. The charge to them reminds us that we cannot get too pragmatic in our approach to Christianity. We sometimes believe that if we have some of the more practical, real-life things like deeds of love and faith, we have laid hold of God’s real heart for us. In this case these four great qualities are passed over very quickly. The letter directs them to certain doctrine and teaching that is going on in their church.

There is a very significant teaching error that they are allowing that God intends to judge severely if they do not judge it rightly. It is unknown if this is an actual woman named Jezebel, or if it is a movement led by an individual whose spiritual adultery is so significant that the name and particularly the sordid reputation of the Old Testament queen is descriptive (see 1 Kings 16:31; 18:13 and chapter 21). In either case the influence is being tolerated within the Church and the results are spoken against by the Church’s Head.

The person at the head of this movement claimed to have and utter the words of God, to be God’s spokesperson. But there was that in the teaching that gave the hearers liberty to do things that were beyond the will of God. It was most likely teaching that included a very radical view of God’s grace and a view that our sin can and does help to bring glory to God by highlighting His grace. This was a common theme in the false teaching of the day, as we are seeing in these letters. We are not certain of the exact strain of the teaching associated here with Jezebel, but like all false teaching and bad doctrine it eventually corrupts behavior.

It is a mistake to articulate a position that one is not concerned or “caught up” in doctrine. While understanding the danger of nit-picking on trivial doctrinal questions, to take the opposite approach places one in the position of not being caught up in the quest for truth, which is God’s primary means of redeeming humanity (Jn. 8:32).

**2:21 “And I gave her time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality.”**

Time to repent is freely given by God. It is His desire to bring all to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), meaning that He is always calling and summoning people to turn from their sin. In the case of this person in the church in Thyatira, He had allowed time, but it had become clear that this person was not moving in that direction. Jesus specifically states that “she” does not want to repent, that disobedience is “her” clear choice despite God’s patience.

**2:22 “Behold I will cast her upon the bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.”**

For the person who has had time to respond obediently and has not, there awaits this firm and hard discipline. Time eventually runs out and God’s patience runs out. At that point He takes a more stringent line, still trying to bring about a change of mind. In this case He chooses to allow sickness, a time of weakness, time to ponder one’s life and ways. To those individuals who have followed the individual’s example and are patterning their lives after hers, He promises great trouble.

The firm hand of Christ is on His Church. He is the head of it, and when it ceases to do His will, He will seek to fix the wrong. People in churches can experience great trouble from their Lord if they choose to live outside His will and choose to let other things and people take His place.

**2:23 “And I will kill her children with pestilence; and all the churches will know that I am he who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.”**

The offspring of this individual, whether physical or spiritual, will suffer because of the life they have been taught and that they have chosen to live. It is a sobering thought that by our pattern of life that we choose and lay out for others to mimic, we can bring about their demise. And theirs is not a peaceful death, but one at the hand of pestilence—what we would call plague and natural disaster.

The Head of the Church wants us to know these two things, that He knows the minds and hearts of people. Nothing is hidden from His view. He knows what we do and why we do it. He also wants us to know that our deeds will be rewarded by Him. So Christ teaches through leaders and people. Either they will declare these things about Him, or they will become living illustrations of the truth should they seek to suppress it. But the Head will always be demonstrated to be the Head.

The judgment of God is always based on deeds (Romans 2:6-11). This is true whether it is carried out in the present life or in eternity. Now fortunately, Christ righteous deeds can be credited to our account, and they are, now we believe. At the same time, our sin is placed on His account, and He bears our guilt. But the fact remains that God’s judgment involves an accounting of deeds. It is not about what we intended to do, or what we claim to have done. It is based on what we do.



Even in the case of Christians, their faithfulness will be judged based on deeds. Their eternal destination will not be at stake, but their inheritance in His kingdom will be. They will be rewarded as faithful servants, or the judgment will reveal that they have not been faithful. Either way, it is a recounting of their deeds that will bring the Divine conclusion.

**2:24 “But I say to you, the rest who are at Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who do not know the deep things of Satan, as they call them—I place no other burden on you.”**

There are two distinct groups in this Church. This is true of many churches today and has been true of the Church in general during certain ages in Church history. There are those who are led astray in rebellion and there is the faithful remnant. These special words are meant for the remnant, those who have not embraced the false leading of this individual.

There was present in this false teaching some motivation to learn what they called, “the deep things of Satan.” It is ultimately impossible to know why this term is used here. Nor is it possible to know how, given this moral label, a leader could hope to construe the truth and lead others to believe that it would be God’s will to know such things. Knowing the nature of the types of error that crept into early churches, this was likely another perversion of grace. The teaching probably went along these lines: we can enter the experiences of those most estranged from God, and His grace will cover us, and the scope of grace will even be highlighted by our lives! This is a great service to Him!

There were those who were not taken in by such twisting of the truth. To these Christ affirms that their service is noticed and approved by Him. In fact, so great is this service of theirs that it is enough. He requires no more of them.

**2:25 “Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.”**

What they “had” was a certain level of spirituality, a certain habit in their walk. They are told by Christ to hold it fast, not to let it slip away. There is inference in the context that this will not be easy in the current of the various influences of the day. Though generally God wants us to bring increase through what He has given us (Luke 18:11-27), there are times when all He needs from us is to hold what we have faithfully.

**2:26 “And to he who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.”**

From the earliest prophecies of Scripture God revealed the coming of One whose right it would be to rule (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17). As that promise was confirmed and more detail revealed, it became known that He would share His rule with the people of God (Daniel 7:13-18). Now in Revelation this Appointed One, Christ, is speaking of this sharing of His Kingdom that He has planned.

This promise is a free quote by Christ of the promise made by God the Father to Him, as recorded in Psalm 2:7-9. Christ will share His inheritance with those who have faithfully stood their ground with Him. As opposed to being overcome by the world's influence and the devil's schemes, they overcome. As opposed to patterning their deeds after one such as Jezebel, they pattern their deeds after Christ. As opposed to keeping His deeds for a season, they keep His deeds to the end. This is clearly the promise of reward from God for deeds done in accordance with Christ's leading through the Holy Spirit.

**2:27 “and He shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from my Father;”**

This verse continues to state a promise being made to those of Thyatira who overcome temptation and remain faithful to Christ. They will share in Christ's rule. So the rule being described here is being carried out by the faithful. Under Christ, they are the key instruments of Christ's reign over the earth.

This describes the complete, dominant authority with which Christ and His children will assume control and rule over the nations. The rod of iron, or iron scepter is symbolic of an unbending, uncompromising authority that they will exercise. The picture of clay pots being shattered by that rod is also vivid and speaks of the fact that nothing will stand in the way of Jesus Christ when He assumes leadership of the world. His is a rule that will shatter all the works and institutions of man that are not in line with what is true and good. It is a rule characterized by ongoing judgment. This is an example of the contrast being developed for the reader by the imagery of Revelation as over against that of the Gospels as they presented the incarnation of Christ and His earthly ministry.

**2:28 “and I will give him the morning star.”**

Elsewhere the term morning star is a term for Christ Jesus in the book of Revelation (22:16). It is a term that speaks of that which endures and that which inspires hope. Those who endure will have as their possession Christ, not only what He has, but He himself. It describes a unique partnership with Christ that those who endure will enjoy. If there are rulers, there are also those who will be ruled. Those who believe and endure will rule with Christ and they will help institute His rule over the earth, including the shattering of the nations and the destruction of all that is opposed to God. Then they will help administer His rule over the believing world and in this rule, they will enjoy unique access to Christ. He will have given Himself to them in view of their faithfulness.

**2:29 “He who has an ear let Him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

Once again, this reminder is stated that in these words is that which those whose hearts are inclined to God will want to hear. There is insight in these instructions for which their hearts long, the special instruction of Christ regarding specific practical scenarios that equip the hearers to understand their times.

The words to the church of Thyatira are applicable to all churches who face challenges to godly leadership. To all who face danger from within, which happens to all churches at one time or the other, these words declare the urgency of dealing with the matter swiftly and thoroughly, and the partnership they have with Christ in the matter. He is with them, and He has a will in the matter that He wishes for them to carry out. Those who prove faithful to His will and mind will be proving themselves faithful for the task of carrying out His role in His kingdom.

The words had special application to the Church as it began to become institutionalized and especially as the power of the papacy began to emerge, and all manners of immorality began to make significant inroads into the Church. They were words for the Church as it stood on the brink of corruption, at a season when they still had the spiritual fortitude to bring things back into line with their Head, just before the era when only a few would remain who had not soiled their garments.

## REVELATION 3

**3:1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: I know you deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”**

To a church which has very little to commend it and which needs to take quick action, the Head of the Church presents Himself as the One who has the seven spirits of God. Earlier these seven spirits of God are said to be “before His throne” (1:4), that is, before the throne of God the Father. We do not know much about these spirits except that they seem separate from the personages of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are likely special ministering spirits, much the same as special ministers who surround earthly leaders, available to serve in any circumstance that might arise. These could be those whose task is to minister with respect to the personal wishes of the God-head. The point in this case is to remind the church at Sardis of Christ’s authority, that they are hearing from the throne. Jesus is also presented as the one who holds the seven stars, the special messengers to the churches whom God has appointed to bring about His will and plan.

The nature of things at Sardis is summed up in the next line. They have a name that they are alive, but they are dead. The name of Christ is one that connotes life. Christ is nothing if not risen from the dead. He is the firstborn from among the dead. That which He has authority over is alive. To be a Christian church, to embrace that name, is to raise an expectation of spiritual life. Sardis had that reputation, yet it was their deeds that betrayed their true condition. They were in fact dead.

This is a condition that began to exist very quickly after the New Testament church was established. There were already churches like this, who had the reputation of being alive, but who were dead. They had apparently so neglected the things germane to the faith that the signs of true vibrancy disappeared, the very things that were the essence of spiritual life were missing. This is not to say there was not a great deal of activity going on. That may have been why they had a reputation for being alive. Their level of activity may have been impressive. But their collective life in the Holy Spirit had all the signs to the head of the Church of spiritual death.

**3:2 “Wake up and strengthen the things that remain, which are about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.”**

Jesus has intimate and full knowledge of the plan of God in the lives of His family members. He knows that in every case there is more to bring about before they can say as He did, “I’ve accomplished on earth the work which you have sent me to do.”

The solution to this condition that sounds like walking death is first, a new mentality. We must wake up! They were involved in what we could term spiritual sleepwalking. They needed to focus on that part of the truth which they were still alert and sensitive to. This is always the solution that guards against spiritual catastrophe--to be alert to what is happening and to recognize one’s deficiency.

The next step is action, the action of strengthening what remains of the truth. Fan the dying embers into flame, add fuel, encourage, and foster the truth of what remains. All this because there is more of God’s plan that needs to be completed, and more of Himself we need to enter.

We note in Jesus' words here that though He Himself is Head of the Church, He is Himself submissive to the sovereign One. Though of the same essence there is this statement that expresses practical submission to His Father.

**3:3 “Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.”**

The first statement in this verse gives definition to the idea of waking up. It is to be jarred into a state of remembrance of the truth one has been given and it is getting back to it. It is to begin to order one's life by it, to change directions from traveling away from it to traveling in the direction it prescribes. This is the only thing required by God to reverse the effects of prolonged spiritual apathy and to return to the place of His blessing.

The second sentence in this verse speaks of the consequences of remaining as they are. To remain in this state of spiritual apathy is to be unprepared for the Master's return. In the language of the Gospels, it is to not have one's lamp trimmed, full of oil, and ready for the return of the bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13). It is to have buried one's talents (Matthew 25:14-30). To allow oneself to exist in a state of sleep, or to allow a church to doze, is to have it be out of touch with the times. It is to be unaware of the significance and urgency of the hour. It is to be not working when the master arrives. To those in such a state, Christ's return will surprise them.

**3:4 “But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.”**

The Scripture uses the term righteous and its related terms in both an absolute and relative sense. In the absolute sense there is no one righteous among all the members of humanity save one. The Scripture is very clear on this, stating it adamantly in several places (Psalm 14:1-3; 53:1-3; 130:3; Romans 3:11-18; 7:18). So Christ is called “the Righteous One” (Acts 3:14; 1 John 2:1). He is unique among all those who have experienced human life. This does not mean that individuals do no good. It means that they cannot achieve a level of righteousness by their own moral capacity whereby they are judged righteous by God. We see this reality reflected in the language of Scripture.

At the same time, it is true that in Scripture people are described by God as being righteous though in the absolute sense of that term they are certainly not. There is clearly this relative usage of the term. Job is described as righteous and upright, and his deeds are cited as evidence (Job 1:1-12). Cornelius is described as “devout” and one who “feared God” before he came to believe in Christ (Acts 10:1-4). Paul describes his own behavior as being righteous (2 Thessalonians 2:10). John the Baptist is said to be righteous and holy (Mark 6:20). Simeon is said to have been righteous and devout (Luke 2:25). Church leaders are to be upright and holy (Titus 1:8). Christians are called to walk in a manner “worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1). These kinds of statements are common (see also Matthew 1:19; Luke 1:6; Luke 23:50). They seem to be describing one who embraces a pattern of deeds that corresponds to and is consistent with faith in Yahweh. The pattern is deeds inspired by belief, trust, and repentance. This “righteousness” is not such that it would save them apart from Christ's death. But God acknowledges and commends it, calls it righteousness, and urges it as a pattern to follow.

We have here in Revelation 3:4 another example of the absolute and relative language of Scripture. In this absolute sense, no human being is worthy of walking with Christ based on our own merit. Unfaithfulness and disobedience are universal, it is only a matter of degree. It is inaccurate however to say that our obedience is insignificant, and that any faithfulness we display will be unnoticeable compared to what Christ has accomplished. We must have the ability to speak of our depravity on the one hand, so that we clearly remember our own inability to save ourselves and to render to God that which would atone for our sin. We must also clearly see that through the Holy Spirit God imparts to us ability for spiritual work, and therefore when we are faithful, we can accomplish His will.

Those who are faithful are considered by Christ to be worthy of reward. That is an amazing thing! There is no doubt His grace brings about our works. But in His grace, He chooses to bless us for these. That is a remarkable tribute to grace.

There were a few in Sardis who had lived faithfully, embracing the faith they had come to believe and trust in. That had lived His way rather than allowing their actions to be directed by the world of their day. They had not been contaminated by the morality of their times, the complacency of their church or the deadly idea that they were alive just because they were in the Sardis church. Their faith was not a matter of having a membership, but of personal belief in the Christian message. They had not simply joined, they had believed. They would be declared righteous, clothed in white and given the experience of walking with Christ. They are worthy because they have trusted God's truth in life's practical detail and so appropriated God's grace.

**3:5 “He who overcomes shall 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.”**

Overcoming the spiritual slumber that so easily captures us is the most significant achievement we could rise to in this life. To those of Sardis who would rise to examine themselves and enter faith in Jesus Christ, white garments would be given. These are symbolic in Revelation of the forgiveness of sin and the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. To arrive at faith in Jesus Christ is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:3).

A key idea in this verse is the book of life. It is difficult to harmonize beyond a shadow of a doubt how this book of life works. This verse, along with Psalm 69:28, indicates that it is possible to have one's name blotted out from the book of life. We are told that the names of individuals are written in the book of life “from the creation of the world” (Revelation 17:8). We know that those whose names are not written in the book of life fall victim to the deception of Satan in the last days (Revelation 13:8; 17:8). We know that in the end only those whose names are found written in that book will be saved (Revelation 20:15; 21:27).

It is not easy to harmonize all these statements. The fact that the names are written in the book at the time of the creation of the world suggests the doctrine of election and predestination. But if we suppose this, that God chooses those to whom He grants salvation, and writes their names in a book, is He not able to bring that salvation about? Is he forced then by His justice to blot out the names of those who do not come to faith? The fact that they may be blotted out suggests the free will of man. But if salvation is purely our choice, how could our names be written in this book before we have lived? If we fall back on God knowing who will chose to believe, then how come He is wrong on some and blots them out of the book? There is not airtight argument that resolves these tensions.

The best way of grappling with the concept of this book of life seems to be this; the names of all who are given physical life are written in the book of life. So the book begins as a record of all who would be given physical life. Those who do not believe in Christ during their earthy lives are blotted out at the time of their physical death. So the book of physical life, becomes through actual life events the book of eternal life. This position is not without problems. For example, we still have the problem of Scripture that indicates that some of those who are alive do not have their names in this book (Rev 13:8). But this seems a lesser problem than the other problems raised in contemplating the book of life.

If we think of this book of life in this way, then we see the meaning of this verse. The names of those who respond to the truth, and thus overcome the world, remain in the book of life. These individuals are embraced by God the Father and His angels.

### **3:6 “He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

This statement reminds the reader that to any with a hunger to hear the things of God’s heart, they have only to listen to the things the Spirit is saying to the churches.

Like the other letters, this one to the church of Sardis is applicable to all churches. At any time in the normal lifecycle of a Church, unbelievers can come to be a part of it, and very fleshly Christians can even more easily. This letter calls them to repentance. It is applicable to churches who find themselves with the externals in place but not alive and connected to their head.

The statements to Sardis are classic in their application to the Christian Church before the Reformation. The church then was widely viewed as the dispenser of grace and eternal life, yet far off the path in terms of what God wanted. Only a few were spiritual, only a few searching for the mind of God. Most were resting in the church itself, or in the formalities of the Christian faith as the guarantee of their salvation. It was a dark hour. Life was found through the various awakenings brought about by the Holy Spirit and the receptive and repentant hearts of common people.

**3:7 “And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:”**

The idea of Christ’s holiness is mentioned frequently in Revelation. We usually associate this term with moral perfection, perfect righteousness, and the complete absence of all that is evil. While this is true, it is also true that holy comes from the word that means set apart or sanctified. When we speak of Christ being holy, we are speaking of His utter uniqueness. There is no one like Him by any possible means of comparison. He is utterly unique by every standard of comparison.

When we speak of Christ being true, we usually think of Him being free of deceit, or any kind of false information. We think of Him speaking truth as opposed to lies. That is all accurate and significant. We must also acknowledge that these things are accurate descriptions of Him because He IS truth embodied. He speaks truth, because it is who He is, He can do nothing else. So He is utterly unique in terms of truth in that if we observe anything to be true, it is ultimately because it came out of who He is. He is the first cause of all that is true.

To a church with only a little power Christ presents Himself as the Holy One whose decree could not be thwarted and whose power extends to all things. He declares Himself to have the key of David. This is probably a reference to His right to rule over Israel and the world. He is the sovereign Anointed One, with a dominion that would extend to all the earth in keeping with the promises made to David and Israel.

**3:8 “I know your deeds. Behold I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.”**

The One whose will would stand had placed before this church an open door. This is most likely a reference to opportunity to advance the gospel in keeping with the use of this expression in other Scripture (Acts 14:27; 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 3:12; Colossians 4:3). Christ says He knows their deeds, a solemn reminder given before He speaks to them of their opportunity. He neither under-values their performance, nor does He over-value it. He knows exactly what they have done, where they have been faithful and where they have fallen short.

Because they have been faithful to some degree they are blessed with more opportunity. The commendation seems to be somewhat restrained by the phrase “you have a little power.” They did not have the great power that comes with great faith, but they did have a little power. Theirs was perhaps not a visionary faith, but it was an obedient one, and an enduring one. It is uncertain why it is the case that they have a little power. It is simply stated as such. This could rightly be said of all churches compared to the power of their Master and Head, and even compared to all that Christ would wish for them. The power and faithfulness they had displayed is sufficient to open the door of significant opportunity.



**3:9 “Behold I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but lie—behold I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you.”**

The Synagogue had traveled a classic humanistic path. It began as an institution to keep a people connected to Yahweh and to instruct them in His ways. It became that which kept them from Him. It began as a tool to adorn godliness. It became a tool of Satan. An increasing number of those who bore the name of God's people were now lying, claiming to be of Him yet denying His Christ. They needed a work of God in their lives before they could truly become the people of God.

There are two possibilities about the last half of this verse. First, it may be speaking of the “opportunity” that Yahweh was placing before the Philadelphian church. It could be that through the church at Philadelphia God would do a very special work among the Jews. Many would believe in Christ and his church and come to believe and understand God's special love for and work in the Church. Knowledge of and submission to the work of God would be the marks of those who bore the name that means “he strives with God.”

A second possibility is that this verse is speaking of the eventuality that will come about when Christ returns to earth to rule. At that time the Jews will acknowledge that the Christian faith has been right and will accept it as their own (Zechariah 12:10-13:1). Their arrogance toward the Gentiles will be undone in that moment.

It seems most likely that this verse is referring to the former, that a special work among Jews would occur in this church. It seems unlikely that He would apply a world event that will come about in the future as happening due to this Church. Like the other letters, we have nothing in history that enables us to speak with clarity about events before these letters or after them in the churches and cities named.

**3:10 “Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell upon the earth.**

The church of Philadelphia had been faithful in their belief in Christ and in their embrace of His message. As Christ had persevered, they had persevered in His word to His church. Because of this Christ promises to keep them from the hour of testing. Whether this meant that they would not experience this trial or be given special strength to endure through it or during it is a matter of debate. The former would be the most logical, for the promise to keep them and help them endure through the trial is certainly a promise made to all Christians everywhere who find themselves tested and tried. This promise seems to be made as a special reward to them for their perseverance. Would it be logical to think God would reward them for their perseverance by allowing them to persevere more, or by easing their trial? While neither contradicts the nature of God, the most logical reading of these words would be that the experience of this trial, whatever it was, would not come their way.

In God's plan there was decreed an “hour of testing,” or trial which would be sent throughout the earth. The word used for test is not δοκιμαζω, a word that describes a test meant to praise or approve the quality of something. The word used is πειραζω. It means to put to the test or to tempt. It refers to a time of great spiritual struggle and danger that reveals the true nature of one's spiritual condition and confirms them in that condition.

It is said that this time of spiritual struggle and danger would come upon the “whole world.” This phrase does not demand that we understand it as coming upon all seven continents as we know them. Though it can mean that, it is used of the land of Palestine, and of the Roman empire.

The event was a specific one in the mind of God at a very specific and time. It is very difficult to ascertain if this prophetic utterance had a near fulfillment. There most certainly could have been events that were true trials and tests for those living at that time on the earth. But we know nothing of such an event or series of events.

Some have suggested that God was using these churches as pictures of specific periods of time in Church history, that the letters represent church history as it has come about. By such an interpretation, this church would symbolize the era of history that occurs just before the great day of the Lord. The hour of trial would be the “time of Jacob’s trouble,” the period of great tribulation that Jesus spoke of (Matthew 24:21). In that case the original recipients may have experienced some form of a “near fulfillment,” a lesser event which bore resemblance to the ultimate event pictured in this prophesy.

Apart from this interpretation this part of the message to the church of Philadelphia remains a riddle. We are left to conclude simply that there was not a prophesied world-class trial that encompassed at least the inhabitants of the Roman empire, which the local church at Philadelphia was in some way kept Romans. We must conclude that this event came and went without any sort of historical record.

### **3:11 “I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, in order that no one take your crown.”**

The only other time Christ tells a church He is coming quickly is in His word to Pergamum, where He promises to come quickly to them in judgment if they do not repent (2:16). The quickness of His return is also stated later in the book three times (22:7, 12, 20). The idea of quickness need not mean that He will come in a short time. It seems that the language was chosen to harmonize with the description of other Scripture of the suddenness or abruptness of the actual event of His coming (Matthew 24:36-51). In other words, once the time arrives in the plan of God for Christ’s return, it will happen very suddenly.

It is for this reason that the Philadelphians are told to “hold fast to what you have.” This is a way of saying, “Be faithful as you have been!” They are to be motivated by the potential of losing their crown. That their reward can be taken from them and given to someone else is the reality. This wording is strong evidence for the idea of eternal rewards given by God for faithfulness. The imagery does not fit well if the crown is salvation. In that case by one not enduring another would find their way into heaven. It is more likely that if one does not prove faithful in service, God will raise up another who will. His plan and purpose will be served and the faithful one will gain the reward that He gives.

**3:12 “He who overcomes, I will make Him a pillar in the temple of My God, and He will not go out from it any more; and I will write upon him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”**

It is most likely that this is a reference to the perfected state of the believer which they will enter beginning with the millennial reign of Christ. A way of viewing our future relationship with God is to see it as us being forever fixed in the presence of God, with fellowship that is uninterrupted by sin. Like a pillar in the temple of Solomon, the one who has overcome the world through faith finds permanence, and eternal position in the real temple of God from which he can never be moved. The imagery speaks of immutability and eternity.

The verse goes on to describe things given that express the permanence of one's destination in Christ. They are all tokens of love; the special love God has for us. They are intimate and personal expressions that we will eternally bear, symbols of the covenant that God has entered with us. We will bear in our glorified bodies the mark of God's ownership, and the mark of citizenship in His kingly city. We will bear our new name, given to us by Christ, that name which only we and our heavenly Father will fully understand. All of this will be like rings given in love, to be worn as symbols of Yahweh's deep and abiding love for us. Again, these things will be experienced by us beginning with the millennial reign of Christ. They will be on display, and of practical use during that reign of Christ on earth.

**3:13 “He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

Again, this statement appears, as it does at the close of each church's message, a reminder of the wisdom and insight which these messages to the seven churches will bring to all who seek after the heart and mind of God for their times.

This message to the Philadelphia church has great application to Churches everywhere and at every time who find themselves faced with an open door, great opportunity regarding the gospel. Amid great opportunity such churches, for various reasons, often find themselves with only a “little power.” But in faithfulness and persistence they can finish what God has marked out for them to accomplish. The message is particularly applicable to the present Church age, a time of unparalleled mission opportunity, great spiritual handicap, all on what appears to be the eve of the time of Jacob's trouble—worldwide, unparalleled tribulation. Christ implores the Church of our day to hold fast. He will provide for our safety and welfare as creation rushes towards its appointment with its Creator and Designer.

**3:14 “And to the angel of the Church of Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God says this:”**

To a church oblivious to its own state and condition, Christ presents Himself as “the Amen,” the “so be it” one. He is the one who brings about the will of the Father, the implementer of the divine decree. He is the faithful and true Witness, the standard by which they should judge their own spirituality, the goal to which God has sought to move them. He is the Beginning of the creation of God, not the first thing created by God, but He Himself the instigator, the agent by which God's creative work was carried out. All that had a beginning had its beginning in Christ.

**3:15 “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I would that you were cold or hot.”**

Christ knows (οἶδα), by His nature and instinct, our deeds. This means He knows what we do and why we do it. He alone knows how much good or bad we do. He knows the bad deeds that might appear to be good. He knows what we do when no one is watching. He knows what we are thinking as we do our deeds, what we'd really like to say or do as we are doing them. When we don't know our deeds, when our perception of them is faulty or off base, He knows our deeds. In the case of the Laodiceans, they had gotten to the point where they did not know their own deeds. They were not evaluating themselves rightly. He was.

What Christ knows about those of Laodicea is that they have arrived at that humanly-sacred-divinely-repulsive spiritual position we call middle ground. They were not coldly resistant to the things of the Spirit nor to ideas of virtue and truth. Nor were they caught up in them. They were getting on with life. Religion had its proper place, they had achieved “balance.”

It is, however, a point of indecision to be in that place. It is ascent to the sacredness of a thing, but not making the practical decisions implied by that sacred truth. Christ's work is to bring mankind to a decision. This is His will and His plan regarding every member of humanity, that they arrive at a decision regarding Him. This is the meaning in the metaphor of hot and cold. Hot is to be living by the implications of the truth about Christ. Cold is choosing to suppress that truth and erect one's own truth system by which to manage life. He wants no one on the fence, and there will be no one on the fence when He is done. This is His work.

**3:16 “So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.”**

We often apply this verse to individual people. But it is addressed to a church and is probably a reference to their loss of position as a church. It is possible for a church to lose its usefulness to God when it becomes tentative and indecisive where God's agenda and heart are at stake. A church can come to the point where it compromises the truth instead of operating by faith. In such cases God allows it to continue to exist but He does not accomplish a great corporate work through it. He is faithful to faithful individuals, but the Church is set aside.

**3:17 “Because you say, ‘I am rich and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,”**

This is ultimately the sin of the Laodiceans, arrogance. Their arrogance has given birth to oblivion so that they have lost touch with the true nature of their spiritual state. They think they have arrived among the spiritually elite when they are spiritual paupers. Their great sin was that they thought they had no need, nothing to learn, no area in which they needed to grow, nothing from which they needed to repent, when there was much in them that God desired to change.

**3:18 “I advise you to buy gold from me refined by fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see.”**

Because of this arrogance and complete oblivion to the true state of things, God has a course of action they need to pursue. There was that which they needed to buy from Him. What they needed would cost them. This is not to say it was not “by grace through faith,” but it is to say that sin builds idols according to earthly values that must then be destroyed. These idols must become a loss to us in order that we might lay hold of that for which we were laid hold of.

Gold refined by fire is likely a reference to their need to seek from God those experiences that would make them more what He wanted them to be. They needed to value above all else a life that had been, through trial, shaped and molded into what God wanted it to be. The consistent search for God’s agenda and heart is what makes for spiritual heat. It is not an easy thing to seek one’s own humiliation, nor to be reminded of your own need and shortcomings. But it is the nature of “the life,” and any other path one chooses is not “the life.”

There must be a healthy search for trial in one’s life. Not a spiritual masochism, nor a fabricated ploy for the purpose of self-pity, but a healthy search for life events through which God is trying to root out unholiness, spiritual sloth, moral compromise, impurity, greed and all the rest of the workings of the flesh on our lives. Then we will no longer be just lukewarm, but we will lay hold of true spiritual wealth. But such a thing does not come freely to us. It is purchased. We pay a price.

It is a shameful thing when Christians do not have the deeds that match their confession. There is no greater shame than when it is decisively and rightly said of someone, “you are a hypocrite!” It is moral and spiritual nakedness. But there is no need for it. God has ordained good works for us (Eph 2:11). We have only to begin listening to His leading through the Spirit and we will be directed to His work for us. To do so is to prepare for that day when the true nature of all things will be revealed. Again, there is a price to pay. It is that which we must give up getting the white garments, deeds that are devoid of all impurity.

Our natural thought processes tend to make us see ourselves wrongly. We tend to judge success wrongly, equating it with character. Our mistaken idea is that because someone or something is growing, growing financially, or growing in influence, it must be pure and good.

There is “the anointing” from God, the Holy Spirit, that enables us to discern rightly in such matters beginning with ourselves. But we must be willing to look beyond the surface, accept the judgments, and obey the implications or we will quench the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the eye salve God provides.

The eye salve that God provides come to us when we give up our right to justify ourselves and turn over to God our desire to make ourselves look good to get the praise of men. His judgment of us, our deeds, our thoughts, our motives, becomes “the official line” as far as we are concerned. When we begin to do this, we begin to see, and when we begin to see we can walk in the path that is ordained by Him.

**3:19 “Those whom I love I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore and repent.”**

A principle that is clearly stated several times in Scripture and which is born out in many passages is this, that God acts aimed at correcting His children, and He does so not to punish them but with an eye toward the future, to change their behavior and alter their course. Because of this His children should always be zealous, anxious to know what He is doing and to be in tune with it. They should be ready to repent, to change their minds and to take a different direction.

**3:20 “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me.”**

This verse, often used as a picture of salvation, is here used of a group of Christians who have shut Christ out, who need to repent and be restored to fellowship with God. God is outside their church. It is an appeal to those whom Christ is reprovng and is a further description of what it means to be zealous and to repent. The act of repentance is an act that has tremendous power. It is all that is needed on anyone's part to bring about intimacy with God.

To all who recognize Christ's stirrings in their life and respond to them as truth to be obeyed, Christ give Himself freely in total exchange. This verse shows in a very graphic way that it is possible to arrive at a point as a Church where Christ is left on the outside looking in. Once that has occurred anything is possible. It also shows that the ongoing practice of hearing Christ's voice, recognizing when He is speaking and responding to Him is the issue in maintaining the spiritual health of a church. This is all that was needed in Laodicea, simply to hear and open.

**3:21 he who overcomes, I will grant him to sit down with me as I also overcome and sat down with My Father on his throne.”**

God's plan and Christ's desire is that our experiences follow that of Christ's. The design is for us to overcome by faith the world, even as Christ did, and so to inherit the right to rule with Christ. The plan in the creation of man was that man should rule over the earth. Christ, the God-man, saved that inheritance for us. He gives it to all who believe in Him and overcome through faith the schemes of the evil one. All who have faith enter that kingdom, all who have faith and overcome are co-rulers with Christ over the kingdom of God. In this way man's God-given role of carrying out God's rule over the earth is restored for all eternity.

The message to the church of Laodicea has application in all ages to the Church, for it is our ongoing challenge not to slouch into a lukewarm state. It has great application to individuals as well, though it must be remembered that all the letters are written to churches, and the individuals are addressed as one. The letter has special application to the Church of the last days, which will have been affected dramatically by the great apostasy.

**3:22 “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”**

For the last time this invitation is given to all who long to know the heart and mind of God. His will and desire for the Church is uniquely revealed in these seven letters. To understand them well is to be well equipped for the challenges to individual faith and to be prepared for the various eventualities of church life.

## Revelation 4

**4:1 “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, ‘come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.’”**

At this point with the concluding word to the seventh church, John’s audience with Christ ends. As he looks, perhaps in reaction to the fading away of the images described in 1:12-16, another sight becomes visible. It happened perhaps as he looked up from his writing. What he sees he simply describes as a door standing open in heaven. Whether that door he recognizes as being in heaven because the first scene still is before his eyes except for Christ, or simply because he must look upward to see it is unknown. He simply affirms that it is an open door in heaven. By this we can understand that John was being given access to what is normally closed to humanity.

The first voice, the voice of an unnamed angel directs John to the next thing that God wanted him to do in the process of making known to the bondservants of Christ what was to “take place shortly” (1:1). He directs him to come through the open door in heaven. Just how John would do that is made known in the next verse.

The rest of the angel’s words are interesting because they provide a clue as to how the specific directions given to the seven churches are to be interpreted. The angel says that John is about to see what will take place “after these things.” This confirms to us the idea that the individual instructions for each of the seven churches relate to the mission of the church between Christ’s first and second coming. In those instructions the direction of Christ for His church is brilliantly and concisely recorded through distinct situations in each of the seven churches that represent accurately church life, mission, and general activity. They are so accurate that they can be seen as reflecting church ministry since the church was established. They can even be seen as a general outline of church history given ahead of time. The instruction given in them, and the challenge of them will continue to occupy the Church until the earthly work of the Church is complete and the time of the consummation has arrived.

**4:2 “Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.”**

Being “in the Spirit” is a condition described elsewhere in the Scripture where God gives an individual an experience that their senses perceive fully while their body remains in each location (Matthew 22:43; 1 Corinthians 5:3-4; Colossians 2:5). It is not like a dream, the product of their own minds that happens as they sleep. Nor is this a daydream. It happens because of a special work of the Holy Spirit, a miracle in which they experience sights, sounds, tastes, smells that are foreign in terms of where they are bodily. This is how John is enabled to “come up here,” to go through the open door in heaven to where the future was being played out on the big screen.

John in spirit arrives in heaven. The first sight he sees is that of a person sitting on a throne. So he has arrived not just in heaven, but in the very throne-room of heaven in the presence of the Almighty One. He is in the presence of the Eternal One, the One unbounded by time, where he will be given access to some of the secrets of time.

**4:3 “And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance. And there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.”**

Some of the highest quality of jasper in the world comes from Turkey, which John was near as he received this revelation on the island of Patmos. In John's day such stones were valued not only for their beauty, but for what was believed to be special healing power. There is testimony for example, that jasper stones were believed to have the ability to draw the poison out of snake bites. Considerable lore regarding the various deities involved such stones. This was a common means of explaining appearance and activity of deity in John's time, and so it is natural that the sights he sees triggers expressions he and his readers are familiar with that may be lost on us.

The appearance of God seated on His throne is compared to these gemstones, both from the quartz family. Both would have been known and understood by the original readers. By the color or by the glow, God's appearance at this point reminds John of the appearance of these. The primary thing John is expressing is beauty, and it is a beauty which by its color, or perhaps variation of color, reminds him of these stones.

God's covenant sign is found in His presence, a rainbow, its colors perhaps recognized by John or maybe just its shape. In describing it he speaks of it being like an emerald, which was rich green in color. The emerald occurs naturally in a six-sided shape, and perhaps this rainbow had this 3-D aspect to it that John notes, so that it surrounds the area over the throne rather than simply arching over it in two dimensions.

**4:4 “and around the throne were twenty four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty four elders sitting, clothed in white garments and golden crowns on their heads.”**

The function and role of these individuals will become clearer as the book progresses but several things are apparent here. First, they sit on thrones that surround God's throne. They have a role which relates to His rule, leaders in a lesser yet significant way. Their white garments suggest purity and holiness. They wear golden crowns, which also suggest that they have some special role and authority.

Who the Elders are is a mystery. We know that the 12 apostles were promised thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel during the “regeneration,” the time of Christ's kingdom on earth (Matthew 19:28). One of those betrayed Christ and seemingly forfeited his position, or never really had it to begin with. If the eleven are part of the twenty-four, John would be one of them, and seeing himself ahead in time. It is an interesting scenario.

We know that there were 12 tribes in Israel and so the question is raised are their representatives chosen by God from each of those tribes, who are combined with the twelve apostles of the Church? Later in Revelation we see the names of the twelve apostles on the foundation stones for the wall of the new Jerusalem (21:12-14), and the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on the gates of that city.

These could also be heavenly beings, though John's recognition of them as Elders would seem to lead us away from that conclusion. So it is difficult to establish their identity at this point with any degree of certainty. It seems reasonable to identify them as resurrected men who have been given a special role in the rule of God over His kingdom. It is noteworthy to state that Elders are a constant in God's kingdom, seen in Israel, in the Church, and in Heaven.



**4:5 “And from the throne proceed flashes of lightening and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;”**

Energy of the visible, physical sort is said to be emanating from the throne. It is difficult to imagine why, but it is doubtless that its purpose is more than mere special effect. John compares it to lightning and thunder. This could be exactly what it was, or it could be the only way John had to describe electro-mechanical energy when he saw it. It is typical of the activity of God and the presence of God whenever men have witnessed it.

This is the second time the seven spirits are referred to by John (see 1:4). They are perhaps the angelic inner circle, special ministering spirits who carry out God’s plan and bring about His special influence. They seem to be identified as separate from the God-head, occupying critical roles, perhaps like our president’s Joint Chiefs of Staff. Since generally spirits cannot be seen, John is seeing something like a theophany here, the flames of fire being the visible manifestation of these seven special agents. It is possible as well that these seven spirits are to be identified with the seven angels referred to in 8:2.

**4:6 “And before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.”**

As with many of the things John describes, he uses terms and things both he and his readers are acquainted with to communicate what he is seeing. What exactly the reality is remains uncertain, as with many heavenly things. What he seems to be communicating here is that the approach to the throne is a large, shimmering, transparent expanse.

He then introduces the four living creatures. They are curious in terms of their appearance with physical attributes that offer great opportunity for speculation. Here it is noted that they are full of eyes, as if to suggest that nothing escapes their notice. They do what they do before God’s throne, constantly in the presence of Him and constantly seeing the sights surrounding His throne.

**4:7 “And the first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.”**

The likenesses refer most likely to the heads and faces, since all have six wings, and all are covered with eyes. They are so unique in John’s eyes that they are seen simply as living creatures and warrant the further explanation that captures primarily their unfamiliar appearance.

The likeness to a lion, calf, man and eagle, could have some symbolic significance. They may signify truth about God Himself, suggesting that like the lion God is powerful. Like the calf, the animal of sacrifice and service, God has Himself become the sacrifice for and servant of man in Jesus Christ. Like the man, God become a man to redeem the primary object of his affection, His ordained image-bearer and ruler of the earth. And like the eagle God is regal, majestic, self-sufficient, a ruler of His domain from on high.

God's artistry and his love of subtlety in revelation, and His silence about any symbolism in these creatures may mean that we are free to draw numerous meanings from their appearance.

However, the silence of the text may also mean there is no symbolic meaning in them. They are simply special creations of God meant to serve a distinct function that is unknown to us. This is the more likely way in which we should treat these creatures since nothing concrete can be gained through creative speculation. We will see that a little more understanding is gained when we examine the activity of these four living creatures that John reports later (6:1).

**4:8 “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.’”**

John adds to the description the fact that each of the creatures has six wings. He also restates the fact that they are full of eyes, noting that they have eyes within, probably meaning under their wings. But more notable than what they look like is what they do, and the fact that they do it all the time.

There is in God's presence this constant witness to His holiness, His lordship and sovereignty, His omnipotence, and His eternity. Each phrase is profoundly true. When in the presence of God, we are in the presence of One who is holy, distinct from all. He is so distinct and different that His uniqueness is stated three times in this phrase uttered by the four living creatures. He is the Lord God. There is no one higher to whom He must answer and no one higher to whom we must answer. We confront in Him the One who has sufficient might and power so that nothing is impossible for Him to bring about. He cannot be thwarted or delayed. We stand before the One who embodies past, present, and future. He is the One that time and all things that have ever existed serve.

The four living creatures have as their function constant and continuous service, of which worship is a part. This is the duty of all created beings, but the worship of these is unique in that it appears to be confined in this moment in time witnessed and reported by John to the restatement of these critical truths about God. It is as if all the “seeing” imaginable results only in the re-confirmation of these great and cardinal truths about God. We will see that these creatures do other things, but for now in the scene before John they do not stop speaking of the holiness of God.

**4:9-10 “And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who rules forever and ever, the twenty four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives for ever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,”**

These verses describe more of the worship scene that is happening in heaven. Clearly the worship of God is a primary thing that God wants John to see occurring in heaven. It is the common activity that unites the Kingdom of God wherever it exists among all the different kinds of beings that compose it.

Though there are authorities in heaven, there is One who is sovereign. There is One to whose grace all reward and position is owed. It is one of the great beauties of heaven that this understanding and recognition is not lost. Pride does not do there its work of self-exaltation. There is in the presence of God diversity, even diversity in rank and privilege, but it is selfless, even as Christ was selfless. The great call of Christ to serve one another that is so elusive on earth is the reality of heaven. All acknowledge the source of their blessings and do so as a part of their normal existence. The meaning of this and the feelings of being in the company of One so great never diminishes as do all experiences even of Him in fallen life.

**4:11 “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed and were created.”**

Many have orchestrated glory, honor, and power for themselves during world history. Many have received it without deserving it. Sin does this. It re-arranges the objects of creation's worship. God is worthy of our worship because He is responsible for our life-breath. We would have nothing apart from Him. Being right with God always has the effect of restoring order to our worship, of bringing us to the point of worshiping the creator rather than the creature. In heaven worship is flowing in the right direction from creature to Creator.

## Revelation 5

**5:1 “And I saw in the right hand of Him who sit on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.”**

In the right hand of God, the side on which Christ is often pictured as seated, John sees a book. With our knowledge of the overall content of the book of Revelation and of the rest of Scripture, a good way to understand this scroll is to see it as one that contains God’s decree, his order and plan for the consummation of the ages. Even more precisely, is the script for the 70th “seven” prophesied by Daniel. In the language of Daniel, the 70th “seven” is the time leading up to the moment when the stone, uncut by human hands, is hurled at the kingdoms of the world and crushes them and then becomes a great mountain that fills the earth (Daniel 2:34-35). In plain language, it is the time leading up to the moment when Christ returns to earth, subdues it, and establishes His rule over all the earth’s kingdoms.

The events have been scripted in a book which has been sealed. The word of God through this imagery is pictured as such that when the seals are broken it goes out and becomes reality. John has been fast-forwarded through time and is viewing the heavenly scene at that moment in time ordained by God for the beginning of the final chapter of the story, the last of the last days. So right is the time, that with the breaking each seal something of the power of the decree escapes and is fulfilled on earth. Events defined in the book, ordered by God in eternity past, begin to take place on earth as per the plan. The rest of John’s letter is about the gradual opening of this book and its impact on human history.

**5:2 “And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?’”**

God has a plan that will restore His loving rule to earth and to man. Because of sin and the demands of His justice, it cannot just happen. There is an issue of worthiness that must be settled. God’s love has brought about a plan, but His justice must be satisfied before the plan can be executed. The angel’s question is posed regarding both heaven and earth. Who by virtue of their personal holiness, and who by virtue of their authority is qualified to bring about the execution of the Divine will?

This is a question not just about moral qualification but about divinely appointed right, office and privilege. The original plan of God, that humanity rule the earth, had been forfeited by humanity. Who would rise from humanity so that Creation could be restored to God’s original intentions for the blessing of humankind? Fortunately, God Himself had made that provision.

**5:3 “And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book or to look into it.”**

Before the blessing of God could be known to man, one who was worthy had to be found. This person had to be worthy morally, without imperfection. They also had to be worthy in the sense of what they had accomplished on behalf of God and humanity. In heaven, many were available who had no sin, but none who had served to justify humanity and so make Yahweh’s heart a reality. They were in one sense personally worthy, but they were not worthy in terms of what they had accomplished in humanity’s behalf. None were found, in all of heaven and earth and beyond.

**5:4 “And I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;”**

It is a great blessing, John knew, to bring about the will of God in the lives of people, and the deepest of tragedies when this does not occur. The significance of the moment is not lost on John. So great is his confidence in God's goodness and love, so great his love of revelation, that he weeps and weeps greatly at the prospect of such a great opportunity passing by. He senses the moment's significance. It was nothing less than the realization of the promise of victory given to Eve in the aftermath of the fall (Genesis 3:15). It was the blessed hope John had longed for since he asked of Jesus, “Is it at this time that you will restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6)?

**5:5 “and one of the elders said to me, ‘Stop weeping; behold the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.’”**

Christ, the seed of the woman, the anointed one was appointed for this very purpose; to represent humanity and to rescue them from their alienated position. He is the lion, the ruler from Judah (Genesis 49:10). He is the root of David, the one of David's seed who is holy, from which would spring renewal. He would lead a remnant of Israel, pure and holy before God.

Jesus the Christ has overcome, the only one who has overcome the world and therefore is worthy to bring about on earth among men the consummation, the next stage in God's salvation of men. He would bring the times of restoration and the triumph of the kingdom of God revealed to the prophets.

**5:6 “And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the world.”**

Christ, the lamb of God, but also God incarnate stands in the middle of this assembly before the throne. He bears the form of a lamb, but no ordinary lamb. His wounds were such that one would expect Him to be dead, yet He was not.

The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes which John says are the seven Spirits of God. This is the third time in the book thus far the seven spirits of God are mentioned. The added truth of this passage regarding these seven spirits is that they have been sent out into all the world. So they come from God so are in some sense of Him, yet they are also shared by Him with man. Here they are pictured as an essential part of the Lamb.

**5:7 “And He came, and he took it out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”**

Jesus, the Lamb of God, not only stands in God's presence but He is able to approach the throne and present Himself as the ultimate champion, the one able to answer the cosmic call and challenge of the strong angel for a worthy person to open the scroll. It is the picture of boldness and confidence.

**5:8 “And when He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints.”**

At the time when Christ steps up on behalf of all creation there is this moment of deep worship in heaven. There is music and there is this somewhat puzzling reference to the prayers of the saints.

What are these prayers? Are they the prayers of those on earth being offered simultaneously with this heavenly worship? Are they the prayers specifically for God’s “kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven,” that have been offered over time? It is impossible to say with certainty.

It is probably most reasonable to assume that these are simply prayers offered in time past to God, answered according to His will and plan. They are prayers of all different sorts, and perhaps God in some way and in some form unknown to us hangs on to these prayers as we might important letters or even love letters. Then, in keeping with this and other Scriptures, they become that which is used as a part of the heavenly worship of Him. They are an exotic aroma of a faraway place, the proof of His kingdom functioning amid the realm of darkness.

This picture of incense burning in heaven pictures prayer as a sweet fragrance to God. Prayers have been orchestrated by His Spirit amid the kingdom of evil. They are proof that He is, and that He is sovereign over all creation. They are a testimony to His glory and goodness. Humankind is uniquely loved by God, His special creation. They are the objects of His relentless love and affection. Such proof of their redemption and rescue is to God a sweet aroma.

**5:9 “And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy art thou to take the book and to break its seals; for thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and nation.”**

This new song extols the work of Christ that He faithfully persevered in and carried out in God’s behalf among sinful people in a sinful world. It speaks first of our justification, the act of Christ shedding His blood to give us legal standing with God. It speaks of a transaction whereby we can be declared righteous and our standing in God’s eyes changed, transformed from debtors to those with credit. It speaks of the universal appeal of the Gospel and the widespread appropriation of Christ’s work, the power of which is felt across ethnic, cultural, and political lines. No barriers have proved too formidable to check its spread.

When this song speaks of Christ purchasing people with His blood, it is not referring to a ransom paid to Satan. It is referring to the payment of Christ’s blood presented to God to meet the just demand required by His own standard of justice. His life is offered as the substitute for ours, so that we can be justly forgiven. We would not want a universe where God compromised justice. The sacrifice of Christ allows the justice of God to remain unblemished while offering salvation to humanity. The result is that God’s plan can move forward to its just conclusion. Christ is the one who is worthy to bring that conclusion about.

**5:10 “And thou didst make them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”**

These phrases are added to the thought of the previous verse and complete the words that we are given of this heavenly song. The previous lines spoke to our justification, our being declared righteous through the sacrifice of Christ. This verse speaks first to the work of sanctification Christ is doing in us. His daily care for us involves the Holy Spirit convicting and encouraging us so that we submit to God’s authority in our lives. As we do so our lives are filled with acts of service to Him. We are a kingdom of priests to God through this ongoing work of Christ (1 Peter 2:4-9).

The last line of this song speaks to the end that God is taking us toward. It is that toward which creation itself pointed, that we should subdue and rule over Creation (Genesis 1:26-28). He will restore that which evil temporarily robbed us of.

Many among Christians have let go of the full implication of this statement. All believe we will be glorified. Most simply believe we will finally be ruled by God, which would certainly be wonderful and in a sense “good enough.” But the text here says we will reign, not simply be reigned.

Most spiritualize this idea of us reigning. Some say we will reign on the new earth. Some harmonize this phrase with other Scripture and conclude that we will reign with Christ on this earth. This latter view seems to harmonize best with the very beginning of the story told in Genesis, where our purpose is said to be that of ruling creation. It also harmonizes with the end of this book of Revelation, which speaks to Christ ruling on the present earth (Revelation 20:1-6), and then speaks of the destruction of this planet (Revelation 20:11-21:1).

So from beginning to end we have statements about the rule of Christ and His people on the present earth (Daniel 2:44-45). This appears to be the plan of God. Its purpose is to prove that the evil one, evil, or any other being or force cannot thwart what He Himself set out to do in creating humanity. This song completely summarizes this great journey of humanity that the grace of God and the work of Jesus Christ enables.

**5:11 “And I looked and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,”**

Whenever a human is allowed a glimpse of the heavenly company, there is a sense of absolute awe over their number. There have been only a few such incidences. One of these is recorded in the Old Testament in the story of Elisha’s servant who saw the heavenly host in the mountains surrounding Samaria (2 Kings 6:17). We are left to surmise from descriptions like these that the number of angels and ministering spirits is staggering.

**5:12 “saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.’”**

Christ is worthy of all the things that God in His grace and mercy blesses humanity with. The heavenly company, having watched His work from their vantage point and with their faultless perception of good and evil, give testimony by these words to Christ’s sinlessness. Of no other being could it be said in the presence of God that they are worthy of such things. Their receiving such things would be a gracious act. Here it is deserved. By His obedience and by His laying aside of all rights to such things, Christ receives that which sinful men covet, and in their coveting strive for.

**5:13 “And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, ‘To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.’”**

This is the fulfillment of God’s plan of the ages, stated as well by Paul (Phil. 2:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:25-28; Ephesians 3:10), and other Biblical writers (Psalm 46:10; Isaiah 45:6, 20-25; Habakkuk 2:13-14). It is a look forward now to which all events have pointed. It is the expression of the truth to which all lessons point. This is the knowledge that brings about wisdom. It is the testimony of the creatures and even inanimate objects, of both friend and foe of God. It is that God is to receive glory above all that is, for He is the Creator and Sovereign over all that Isaiah

The words reflect the cosmology of the ancient world, and so the earth is represented as flat. This is the language of accommodation, where in the interest of making a greater point, an existing belief is not corrected. This is a tactic that we would expect of revelation. Written revelation is God seeking to make clear by using the language and ideas of humans, the truth about Himself. In this case that is the truth that He is sovereign overall. It matters not if the earth is flat or a sphere, He is sovereign over it. And so, in the imagery, the earth is represented as flat, according to the view of those who for many centuries would read this account.

There is in this testimony of creation also a witness to Christ’s equality with God the Father, which since other Scriptures of this sort testify of God being alone and unique as creation’s Sovereign, can best be explained by the doctrine of the trinity. It will be the impetus of all created things to submit forever to the reign and rule of the Father and Son when the time comes.

**5:14 “And the four living creatures kept saying, ‘Amen.’ And the elders fell down and worshipped.”**

With this statement the description of heavenly activity in the throne room ceases. The primary activity, as it has been outlined in both chapters four and five, is that of worship. The four living creatures say “Amen,” meaning “so be it.” This reflects creation’s groaning for the consummation (Romans 8:19-23). The elders acknowledge the truth of creation’s witness by obeying in worship. The testimony of heaven to us is of God’s worthiness. Those presently experiencing His rule are continually witnessing through acts of worship that all He has revealed of Himself is right. He is a gracious and good king. His rule is not like that of earthly rulers who will promise everything and not deliver once in control. His rule is all His word has made it out to be and more.



## Revelation 6

**6:1 “And I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, ‘Come.’”**

The vision of John now begins to deal with activity in heaven which results in specific events on earth. The scroll, probably God’s written plan and decree for the final chapter of earth history, has been sealed up. That is symbolic of the fact that its events cannot come about until the proper time, the time selected by the Sovereign One. It is as if there is such power in the Word of God that with each breaking of a seal that word breaks forth and an event transpires on earth. The word becomes a reality and earth history is made.

The events are preliminary. They will simply set up and prepare for the ultimate decree of the book, the arrival of the great day of the Lord when He deals with evil on earth (Isaiah 2:12-22). Though preliminary in this sense the events are significant and cataclysmic in terms of their impact on earth. And so, the events that will bring about the peace of the universe begin to be played out and wreak havoc on a minute speck of a planet within that universe, earth.

Looking ahead, there will be six seals broken that appear to allow evil to take its course in the world. They allow the evil one a measure of freedom to seek to establish his own rule in the earth, to rally sinful and rebellious and unbelieving men to his side. This will draw lines confirming who’s who in terms of the children of God and the children of the devil. Then when the lines have been drawn a seventh seal will be broken and God’s wrath against evil will begin to be poured out. As the book bursts open the kingdom of the evil one and of evil men will be swallowed up and forever destroyed by the kingdom of God.

With each of the first four seals one of the living creatures gives this command to come. It could be a word to John to observe, though he never states that the word is addressed specifically to him. It is likely a declaration made to the events and personages themselves, pictured here by horses, to come about. It is divine permission being granted and restraint being lifted so that they can do what God has allowed them to do. It is a signal that the time is right for them. It is the authoritative voice of heaven granting permission to those forces which will bring about very specific events on earth.

With this we understand better the role of the four living creatures. They are vested with God’s authority and are not simply worship fixtures of some sort. They minister His will and administer in some way His plan as the appropriate times and seasons arrives.

**6:2 “And I looked, and behold a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he went out conquering and to conquer.”**

This is the first of what is referred to in Christian thought as the four horses of the Apocalypse. These animals represent events that will come upon the world as a part of the last days of the earth’s kingdoms. Before God acts, world events will be allowed to run their course. The consequences of man’s rebellion against God will be allowed to reach their fruition. Humankind rebelling against God’s rule is left with the rule of unrighteous men and ultimately with the evil one, the leader and instigator of the many tyrants of history.

The white horse represents a great conqueror who will be allowed by God's decree to come upon the world in the last days. By Satan's schemes this individual is given a crown, power and right to rule. He is a warrior who gains power through military might and conquers lands and sets his sights on gaining great control.

Though this king is not specifically identified in this text, it seems that he is the "little horn" of Daniel 7:8, 20-28. He is the one who will put a stop to sacrifice during Daniel's 70th week (Daniel 9:27). He is the ultimate fulfillment of the phrase used by the angel in Daniel's vision, "Then the king will do as he pleases" (Daniel 11:36-12:3), a phrase that likely spoke of both Antiochus VI Epiphanes in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC and this last great world leader. This leader will be spoken of more in chapter 13. His defeat by Christ and the triumph of God is referred to in 19:11-21.

So one of the first events that will mark the "last act" of the earthly kingdoms is the arrival on the scene of this ruler, "the man of lawlessness . . . the son of destruction . . . whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth" (2 Thessalonians 2:3-10).

**6:3 "And when he broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, 'Come.'"**

Again, there is the heavenly command, this time by the second living creature, for another horse and rider to emerge. The time is right for the events represented by these to come about on the earth.

**6:4 And another, a red horse went out; and to him who sat on it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men should slay one another; and a great sword was given to him."**

The second rider obviously represents the war and strife which will be part of the last days. There have always been wars and rumors of war on earth (Matt 24:6-8). But peace has always eventually prevailed or at least ceasefires. In this case it is not that war happens in a part of the world while the rest lies in peace. It is that peace is taken from the world. So the strife will escalate into yet another world war. It will not be a matter of God killing men, but of men, under the influence of the spirit of the times killing each other.

There are two statements that indicate that this only happens by divine permission. These are in addition to the fact that it only happens because of the breaking of the seals on God's book by Christ and the command of one of the living creatures. The first statement is that the power to take peace from the earth was "granted" to the rider. The second is that he is "given a sword," and is thus enabled. Ultimately, God is the one who grants the power of the sword.

So at the opening of two seals, a conqueror comes on the scene on earth and the world is thrust into war. The picture of this era is not of a world cooperating towards a new world order, or of a harmonious conclusion to live in harmony. It is of a conqueror in the classic sense, resistance on the part of some against him, and all-out war with all its horrors.

**6:5 “And when He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, ‘Come.’ And I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.”**

The third seal is broken by Christ, the command is given for the third horse and rider to emerge by the third living creature. This time John sees a rider with a pair of scales. Scales were in those days the critical element of commerce, that by which buying and selling were transacted. This rider represents impact that would happen on the practical side of life. A consequence of the reign and the activity of the conqueror would be negative economic impact.

**6:6 “And I heard as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.’”**

John notes that he hears “as it were a voice in the center of the four living creatures.” There is something about the sound that is a voice and yet it is not quite normal. It is fruitless to speculate as to why John says what he says here, but it is interesting. Perhaps John hears in advance some type of market report as it would be heard at the time of these events on earth. If the events occurred from our time it is easy to imagine what various “clips” could have been played here for John. Any of such electronically enhanced sounds would have sounded different to him.

Most significant is the content of the message of the voice. It gives prices of common goods at inordinate prices. A day’s wages would buy a quart of wheat and three quarts of barley. In our day, when a common laborer’s daily wages in the U.S. would buy him scores of bushels of both, this is hard to imagine. It speaks of inflation, of famine, and food shortages that normally accompany war. This is brought out by the last phrase, a word of instruction that would be important to invading and occupying troops at a time of food shortages, don’t destroy essential food supplies! Food becomes the most treasured currency in the times of the end.

**6:7 “And when He broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, ‘Come.’”**

The fourth seal is opened by Christ and the fourth living creature takes his turn at uttering the heavenly command. This brings on the scene the last of the “horses of the apocalypse.” This is the last of the seals opened that is accompanied by the command of one of the living creatures. This command is likely added to the imagery to make it clear that these horses were not controlled by the rider but could only be set free to do their work by He who is the Sovereign of all. The order for their work comes from the Creator of all that Isaiah

**6:8 “And I looked and behold an ashen horse; and he who set upon it had the name of Death; and Hades was following with Him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword, and with famine, and with pestilence, and by the wild beasts of the earth.”**

The horse is appropriately colored, pale, grayish, like a corpse. Into the world during this time will come death in a new way. Death has always been a part of earthly life since the fall. But this will be a different experience of death. There will be an inordinate amount of it and it will be tragic death. It will result in the eternal loss of many souls as well, expressed by the words “Hades follows.”

Hades, since the death of Christ, is that temporary abode of those souls awaiting their judgment and the second death. Death with a unique viciousness will be unleashed on the world by this spirit who has been restrained by the decree of God from working its full horror up to this point. Now it is given more rein. This is one reason why no human life would be left, if these days were not limited or cut short by God, as Jesus had said (Matthew 24:22).

The second sentence in this verse shows that death’s authority still has a limit. But it also shows that what authority these spirits (them) are given, they apparently fully take. This is the ultimate mission of the evil one and his angels, to destroy and to capture eternally. There is a firm sense in which it is proper to say that up to this point in the opening of these seals the world has not yet experienced the wrath of God, but only the wrath of the evil one against man. It is brought about by his desire to rule the earth, and his determination to remove and corrupt man, the God-appointed ruler of the domain. He is trying to steal that right.

We see in all the events depicted by the four horses that God’s love has protected and preserved even the wicked and rebellious. His wrath needs to do nothing except cause Him to stand aside and let the one whom men are serving rule to a greater degree. At that point great horror comes upon the subjects. It is God’s way of letting transgression and transgressors run their course, and for some to have their fill of their own ways and turn to Him.

Death is given authority over one fourth of the earth’s population, everywhere, or it could be a fourth of the world’s area. In the latter scenario, the area of the Old Roman Empire is in mind, the focal point of world events of that time according to other Scripture. Either scenario is very imaginable considering all the other events that are projected in Revelation. It will be a time of death that will parallel the days of the black plague.

**6:9 “And when He 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;”**

At the breaking of the fifth seal, there is no living creature to give a command. We are simply given a description of a scene in heaven that reflects what has happened on earth. It is as if this seal required no special command. It simply came because of the previous ones. In it the results of God’s removal of some of the restraints of evil begin to show. This is a key mark of the great tribulation spoken of by Christ (Matthew 24:21).

This is the first mention of the heavenly altar that to which all other altars of the Scripture point. We are unsure of its function except in this instance where it serves as a way of showing the sacrifice made by martyrs on earth for the kingdom of God. It shows that God views such sacrifice in the holiest of ways, and though He holds the power of human life in His hand he does not trifle with it. Though He views the present life of fallen creation in a fallen world as of less ultimate value than eternal life, He still treats it as very precious. The giving of one's life for the purpose of the truth is a sacred act of worship and service in His eyes. This is reflected in the presence of these souls underneath the altar. They are underneath the altar, perhaps because that's where the sacrifice ends up, though in different form, after it has been made.

**6:10 “And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long O Lord, holy and true, wilt thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’”**

It is the nature of God's character to avenge injustice, especially that which is carried out against His children. These souls cry out in unison for God to do so, but it is revealing the words they chose in doing so. The words are first a testimony to His longsuffering nature. When men are in the presence of God, if there is a complaint it is that He is too gracious. It is not that He is self-serving, arbitrary, or unloving. God's grace moves Him to wait and to refrain. Second, the words are a testimony to the fact that even in allowing apparent injustice, God is proclaimed by victims to be holy and true. These who themselves experienced this life's ultimate trial, on the other side of it proclaim God as true. They see Him pure in motives, thoughts and deeds and they proclaim it. They see him as devoid of deception, the One who does not mislead either intentionally or in ignorance, the One who fulfills His word.

This incident provides insight into the intermediate state, where the soul is present with God, capable of petition, conscious in some sense of earthly affairs, conscious of time in some way, at rest, and entering the heavenly experience of some sort.

**6:11 “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, should be completed also.”**

The scene is in the last days but not at the very end. Many have suffered but in God's plan more will suffer in their bodies to complete the work in the body of Christ began by the suffering of Christ Himself. Each of these are given a white robe, a token of the purity placed on their account through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Two details are puzzling. One is why souls are given robes. Some have proposed that these must have had some bodily presence. The word soul as it is used in the New Testament allows for the presence of a body here. But then one faces the problem of explaining when and how these were resurrected if they had bodies, and why they are told to continue to rest, a euphemism that usually refers to the intermediate, bodiless state.

A second problem detail may shed light on this problem. The second problem is this, how could souls be seen as John did? This may be explained simply by saying God made them visible in some way. This would explain how they were then be clothed in robes. It is more likely thought that because John was “in Spirit” he could see such spiritual realities. He is describing such realities because they were visible to Him in this vision, even though in his normal human state of existence he would not have been able to see souls, or perhaps many of the other features of the spiritual realm he saw.

**6:12 “And I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earth quake; and the sun become black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;”**

The Lamb, Christ, opens the sixth seal and his prophetic words while on earth begin to come true. “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among the nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea (Luke 21:25). There are unmistakable signs that false Christ’s cannot duplicate, before the actual “sign of the son of man” (Matthew 24:29-30).

These signs in the sun and moon may be separate signs, or simply be the consequences of the cataclysmic earthquake and accompanying volcanic activity and its effect in the atmosphere of the earth.

In Biblical prophecy the sign of the sun and moon being darkened is presented as the sign of the day of the Lord (Isaiah 13:10; Joel 3:15). It is also said that the moon will turn blood red (Joel 2:31, quoted in Acts 2:20). This day of the Lord is the day appointed by Yahweh when He will dramatically confront the earth with their sin and rebellion against Him (Isaiah 2:12-22). Time will run out on unbelievers. The day of man, when the pride and arrogance of humanity passed unpunished will be over and the day of the Lord will begin. The sixth seal marks the beginning of this age. It will cut short the great tribulation the period of intense agony of God’s people. At the time of the breaking of the sixth seal cataclysmic events interrupt the flow of the world ruler. It diverts humanity from all that they are seeking to carry out. It results in the rapture of the saints (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 2:1-17). Through all this the world’s great men will understand that they are about to face the full fury of the almighty God (Hosea 10:8; Luke 23:30; Revelation 6:16).

**6:13 “and the stars of the sky fell to earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.”**

We see in the teaching of Jesus regarding the last days the projection of stars falling from the sky and the use of the fig tree as a figure of speech (Matthew 24:29-35; Mark 13:24-27; Luke 21:25-31).

Speculation has long persisted on earth about the effect of meteors and asteroids, even relatively small ones, colliding with the earth. The projected consequences are in harmony with the descriptions in Scripture of conditions that will prevail in the natural realm on earth during the last days. Before any of this scientific information was known or pondered, many Christians believed that this was a literal description of a physical occurrence that was a part of God’s plan in His judgment of the planet. It is nothing less than a massive upheaval in the natural realm that John is seeing here that will interrupt all phases of normal life on earth. It is all a final attempt by God to bring humanity to repentance and the acknowledgement of their Creator.

**6:14 “And the sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.”**

John observes some phenomenon in the sky that he describes in this way. Whether it is some change that comes in the atmosphere, or some layer of the atmosphere, or different phenomena in outer space, is unclear. It is easy to allow that some very extensive changes would come about in the sky with all the other phenomena occurring. The word for sky is heaven, referring to the immediate atmosphere in which the birds fly and the realm of the stars. John is likely referring to something as simple as the behavior of the night sky, that the stars became invisible as when a scroll is rolled up and the writing is invisible. That scenario would be expected considering the other events here.

The exact meaning of what John is describing is complicated by his choice of expression, particularly as in the NASB rendering where the sky is said to “split apart” as when a scroll is “rolled up.” That’s an unusual combination of expressions. One would think that if a splitting action was being described, the scroll opening might be more descriptive. The verb means to separate, and John may simply be saying that the stars were separated from our view as if rolled up inside a gigantic scroll. In their understanding of the stars, this would be a logical way to describe their disappearance. One must place themselves in the mindset of the cosmology of the day, the belief in a flat earth, to understand the intended meaning of this and similar expressions in Revelation.

So violent are the earthquakes, the impact of meteors, possible volcanic activity, that there is extensive movement in the features of the earth. It is noticeable especially in the islands and the mountains, the very places we would expect to see the greatest impact of such catastrophes. Again, the cosmology of the day is reflected in John’s statements.

**6:15 “And 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;”**

The fear of humanity at the outset of this great judgment of the day of the Lord is mentioned in other places in Scripture (Isaiah 2:10-22). Some of these same thoughts were stated by Jesus to bystanders as He carried His cross to Calvary (Luke 23:27-31)

No one escapes the impact of these supernatural events. There is something fearsome about what men describe as the “wrath of nature.” When it happens there is no human means of shielding oneself, regardless of status. All suddenly become equal. They are weak, powerless, vulnerable, and afraid. So the great and the small are reduced to the same lot, to seek refuge from what they have always previously seen as the “wrath of nature,” but they have additional information about these events. A person is behind these events, who is the power behind the power of nature.

**6:16 “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;’”**

There is at some point revelation to the people of earth so that all these phenomena come to be at least partially seen for that they are, a confrontation with a far greater, more powerful being, the Anointed One. They can identify the throne and the lamb, though the full reality of who they are they will perhaps know only as strange beings. The words they utter accurately identify them. But it may be that they do not realize the One on the throne is the Father and the lamb is the Son.

There is to some degree and in some way knowledge of the One on the throne and the Lamb. But curiously and illogically this knowledge is not accompanied by repentance. Escape is sought but repentance is not. Men will do anything to escape His presence but are unwilling to give Him his rightful place.

It is a striking scenario that the movers and shakers of earth are so shaken themselves, yet so set in their rebellious state. And so, they turn to the earth they perhaps by this time worship, to save them from the wrath of their Creator and Redeemer. By this time, they might view God as some alien being, so great is the deception they have given themselves to.

Now, what caused this sudden knowledge and understanding on the part of the earth's great men and kings of the one on the throne and the Lamb? Could it be that the rapture of the Church has occurred? It is possible that the “sign of the son of Man” has appeared to those on earth (Matthew 24:). It is possible that in the darkness of the earth, brought about by multiple natural disasters, Christ has returned to rescue His Church and that before the great outpouring of God's wrath there has been some visible manifestation of God on His throne, prepared to preside over the judgment. This would explain the shift that has transpired in which men suddenly understand and are aware of impending doom, as noted by John in the next phrase.

**6:17 “For the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?”**

There is recognition of the source of the events, there is even recognition at least in a partial sense, of the significance of the events. There is recognition of human inadequacy. But that does not mean they see God as the Almighty One. There could be a mass movement of millions into the faith at this final hour, but these words do not demand that. The events that John sees later do not support this either (9:20-21). We can only surmise that the deception will be such that they view God as mightier than they, as a higher power, as angry with respect to them, and yet simply like an alien enemy rather than their maker, redeemer, and judge. The fact that humanity has the understanding demonstrated in these verses makes their blasphemy and continued rebellion during the opening of the seventh seal even more offensive. One can only marvel at the power of the lie.

This declaration marks a shift. To this point the events being carried out on earth are the results of evil being allowed to run its course unrestrained. God in His wrath allows that to happen and has allowed it to happen to various degrees throughout earth's history (Romans 1:18-32). But man has in this not yet faced the direct wrath of God. That will begin to happen on earth with the opening of the seventh seal, though it would be right to say that the sixth seal provides the introductory look and gets humanity's attention.



Man is about to face the “day of the Lord” as it is called in Scripture. This is the day proclaimed by all of Scripture when God will confront evil in His justice and might (Isaiah 2:12-22). He will execute vengeance on creation and bring them to a point of accepting Him as the master. They will do so, or they will die in rebellion.

The testimony of Scripture is consistent about astrological phenomenon that will occur in conjunction with the advent of this day. The darkening of the sun and moon are consistently given as signs of the arrival of this day (Isaiah 13:9-10; 24:23; Joel 2:31; Matthew 24:29). John’s statement that the moon is turned to blood (verse 12) is precisely what had been described by Joel when he prophesied regarding the arrival of the day of the Lord (Joel 2:31). Joel’s statement was cited by Peter as he spoke of the events of the age and its culmination (Acts 2:20). It is not an overstatement to say that an unmistakable sign of the arrival of the day of the Lord is a red moon and a darkening of the sun.

## Revelation 7

**7:1 “After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind should blow on earth, or on the sea, or on any tree.”**

Once again, God reveals an event in harmony with the cosmology of the time so that John does not see a globe. It is as the earth was understood in the day a flat table land with four angels at the four corners of it.

It is hard to imagine an earth with no wind, and it would be especially devastating given some of the environmental issues that happened at the opening of the fifth and sixth seals. This is nothing less than total disruption of the planet's weather patterns. The exact means of God achieving this, what exactly He will do to make this happen is unknown to us. The effect would be devastating. There is no indication as to how long this condition would occur, but its effect would be dramatic even if it lasted a very short time.

**7:2 “And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,”**

A further element regarding the mission of the four angels is added here. They are given authority to harm the earth and sea. The interruption of the wind would cause great environmental damage. There is probably no greater impact that could be brought on the Earth's land mass than to do something to the sea, as we have come to understand relatively recently.

Here the significant thing is that something must happen before this judgment is allowed to proceed. An angel carries a seal, meant for the marking of men and women to identify them as belonging to God.

**7:3 “saying, ‘Do not harm the earth or sea or trees, until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads.’”**

Yahweh's long projected confrontation with evil, known in the Bible the day of Yahweh, would have profound environmental consequences. It is about to commence. The judgment is halted until certain people are marked out among earth's inhabitants. They are described as “bond-servants of God.”

This brings about several practical dilemmas of interpretation. First, if the Church has been raptured from the earth as previously suggested, and that Church includes all living believers, who are these bondservants of God? Second, what exactly are these individuals marked out for? Solving the second dilemma first will help resolve the dilemma of how it is possible if the rapture has occurred, for bondservants of Christ to be present on earth.

What then are these individuals marked out for? Two explanations are possible. The first is that they are people who have already come to faith, who now are marked out by God so that His judgment will not harm them. So they have been present and will continue to be present during a series of events that will take a great toll among humanity, but they will be protected super-naturally. So they are marked out for protection. The second explanation is that they are not bondservants or even believers before this act of sealing. The sealing represents their call to salvation and the imparting of the Holy Spirit to them. Several times in the New Testament this is what the act of sealing when carried out by God refers to (2 Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). These people, soon-to-be new believers, will guarantee the presence of faith on the earth, instruments of God's eleventh-hour appeal to humanity during this final hour of God's judgment. They are marked out as instruments of truth for the benefit of those who repent. This is the focus of the sealing, with escape and protection from God's judgment a secondary matter. This second option seems the best explanation.

As for the first dilemma regarding whether the rapture of the Church has happened, if the sealing being described is the act of bringing a core of people to faith it allows that the rapture of the Church has happened. No Christians were left on earth due to the rapture. But God, through a special work of the Spirit, will bring to faith a new core through whom the gospel will have a presence during the day of Yahweh.

Not believing that a rapture of Christians has occurred leads to some other problems if we look ahead in the text. If the rapture has not yet occurred, and the number of those sealed is to be taken literally, then either through persecution or apostasy the number of believers world-wide has been reduced to a very small number. In addition, no believers are to be found among Gentiles. The scenario that the rapture of the Church has happened, and that God is beginning with a new core seems more likely.

**7:4 "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."**

God puts His mark of ownership on a very special group of people totaling 144,000.

Several questions about this come to mind. By the time of Christ ten of the tribes of Israel were "lost." In the 21st century all knowledge of who belongs to what tribe has long evaporated from a human point of view. Of course, to God such knowledge is not lost. The records of heaven remain accurate. With our knowledge of DNA analysis, this is all easy to imagine.

There is a wide difference of opinion over whether this section of Scripture is to be taken literally. The fact that this verse states that the 144,000 include individuals from every tribe of Israel, and then that the tribes are specifically named in the following verses would seem to argue for a literal interpretation.

However, God may have preserved these bloodlines, He seems to be willing to make this prophecy and so must have the desire to perform. We know He has the ability. The idea that this is to happen makes a great statement about God knowing those who are His own children. As a mother knows her own children and can pick them out, God knows His own and has kept track of the detail of their lives through the eons of time.

The usual approach to these verses is to take them in some allegorical sense. Some very imaginative explanations are in print. While such interpretations are always possible in apocalyptic literature, it need not be assumed that the detail renders this prophecy unlikely. Given the power and knowledge of God, and the fact that the whole book has shown that God is working by a meticulous and probably even a written plan, such ability to know who has been generated from what tribe would be a small matter. References to God's "books" throughout Scripture indicate record-keeping. It can easily be imagined enabling this event to be brought to pass in the plain-literal sense. It would be a great display of His omniscience and omnipotence to bring about such an event as this.

**7:5-8 "From the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Rueben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand, from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand, from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand, from the tribe of Zebulon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed."**

In this listing of the tribes of Israel there are three noticeable abnormalities. First, there is no mention of the tribe of Dan. Second, Joseph is mentioned where the normal way of defining the family of Joseph is by the designation of the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. Third Manasseh is still listed. So the overall listing is of the twelve tribes, but the designations appear abnormal. A simple way of stating the problem is to say that Manasseh is listed in place of Dan. Some have suggested that Ephraim and Dan were the principal promoters of idolatry and are left out here (Judges 18:30). But in Ezekiel 48:2, Dan is the first listed in the distribution of the land among the tribes in the kingdom.

It is best not to read too much into these abnormalities, especially when the other lists of the tribes in Scripture are examined. There are at least eighteen lists in Scripture of the twelve tribes, some say as many as twenty-nine (examples: Genesis 29-30, Genesis 49, Numbers 13; Deuteronomy 33, Joshua 13-19; 1 Chronicles 4-8; Ezekiel 48:1-27, 31-34). Jacob considered himself as having 14 sons, clearly adopting Joseph's two sons Manasseh and Ephraim (Genesis 48:5). Their names often come into play in the listings of the tribes. One or another of the 14 names associated with the tribes are generally omitted. What we are saying is that it is not at all uncommon for the listings of tribes to have such variation in them. One could say that it would be difficult to establish from Scripture what the official list should be, though it is at times it is stated in very definitive language (Genesis 49:28). The important thing in all the listings is that there are twelve tribes. Even after 10 were lost, Scripture considers the tribes to exist, though scattered (James 1:1-2; 1 Peter 1:1).

There are considerable difficulties in interpreting this passage literally. But it is very difficult to imagine why it would be so stated and recorded if something other than a literal interpretation was intended. It is hard to imagine it as a literary device that draws attention to anything but the fact that twelve thousand are sealed from each of the twelve tribes! And again, it is getting easier to imagine this literally happening with our understanding of DNA analysis.

**7:9 “After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;”**

The identity of this great multitude is a subject of debate and will be more precisely revealed by one of the Elders in verse 14. For now, it is important to note the details cited here.

Five observations are made by John in the text. First, this great crowd of people are seen by John “before the throne,” that is, in the presence of God. This happens after John has been watching activities occurring on the earth. This multitude appears before the throne sometime after the breaking of the sixth seal. The breaking of that seal would have been the last time John’s gaze would have been on the throne.

Second, John states that it is a great multitude which no one could count. It is not that the number is impossible, but that the task of counting would be so difficult and challenging that it would be impractical. John could not estimate the multitudes size.

Third, it is a very diverse crowd as opposed to the ethnic-specific sealing of the 144,000. This contrast is very stark in that the preceding verse has meticulously stated the precise ethnic composition of a group still on earth. This heavenly multitude is composed of every race and culture. This assures that it is composed of earth’s people, not heavenly beings. It is interesting that in some way their ethnicity is still distinguishable to John when presumably these have been “glorified.”

Fourth this diverse group are all clothed in white robes. Their diversity is in a sense covered by their clothing. The giving of white robes has been mentioned in conjunction with the fifth seal (6:9-11), to people who had not yet been resurrected we surmised. The symbolism in that case and in the case of this huge multitude is that they have been made righteous and that their adoption as children of God has been finalized.

Fifth, palm branches are in their hands as instruments of celebration and worship, as they cry out together the words of the following verse.

**7:10 “and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.’”**

What can only be described as a cheer goes up from the mammoth crowd as they express joy and gratitude for their salvation—the rescue and restoration to wholeness that they have experienced. It is a tribute to a work wondrously and completely done. The full meaning of the “cheer” is probably something like this: “Glory, honor, and praise for our salvation, to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.”

**7:11 “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 worshipped God,”**

The worship is taken up by both the earthly and heavenly company as here all the angels prostrated themselves before the Lord. If indeed the multitude of people before the throne is the raptured and resurrected church, and if these angels are all the angels, the number of total participants in this great throng would be staggering!

**7:12 “saying, ‘Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’”**

The angel’s song of worship begins with “Amen!” affirming the worship of the saints. Their own strain consists of seven great characteristics ascribed to God. It is possible that these relate to the seven spirits of God, though that is pure conjecture since no mention is made of it in the text.

**7:13 “And one of the elders answered, saying to me, ‘These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and from where have they come?’”**

This question posed by one of the twenty-four elders indicates that the identity of the huge multitude was something God wanted John to know. It is significant enough that He did not want it left open to speculation. So this Elder raises the issue through this question so that the answer will be firmly settled in John’s mind and in the readers’ mind.

The question has two parts pertaining to who the multitude is and where they have come from. The first question is clear enough, the second is interesting in that John has already recognized them as “earthlings” from every tribe and nation. The question seems to be driving not so much at location, but as to what historical era or series of events they have come from on earth. The answer in the next verse indicates that this is exactly the piece of information the Lord wants us to know about this multitude. He wants us to know the earthly experience they have come out of.

**7:14 “And 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.’”**

John defers at this point to the Elder who answers the question he himself has just put forward. Thus, we are provided with a heavenly answer to the question and are not left to speculate and debate the identity of the multitude.

This multitude is identified as the ones, not part of the ones but the total group, who came out of the great tribulation. What is this “great tribulation?” There is a period that Jesus prophesied would sweep over the entire earth of unparalleled trouble (Matthew 24:15-21). It is the time He said would be cut short for the sake of the survival of humanity.

Jesus referenced signs spoken of by Daniel the prophet as identifying the arrival of this period. Jesus says that great tribulation will commence when “you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel standing in the holy place.” Either He Himself, or Matthew adds this parenthetical phrase “Let the reader understand.” The prophesy of Daniel informs the reader about this sign. This phrase speaks of a great world ruler, a servant of the evil one, who will attempt to set up a kingdom on earth that will annihilate the kingdom of God.

In terms of the vision of John in Revelation, we should probably understand the first seal and the rider on the white horse who is given power to conquer as speaking to the arrival of this world ruler on the scene. According to the prophesy of Daniel, this ruler’s kingdom will take an abrupt turn in the middle of its third year. Through this ruler’s ties with the spiritual forces of evil, great tribulation will come about on the earth.

This is captured by the horrors we see at the opening of the 4th and 5th seals in John's vision. The Lord will intervene and confront this great evil empire, which is what the Day of the Lord is all about. The opening of the sixth seal then marks the end of the great tribulation and the beginning of the day of the Lord. The earth has been convulsing under the wrath of the evil one. Now it is the time of the outpouring of God's great wrath, the day of the Lord.

The people in this great multitude are said to "come out of the great tribulation." They appear to be bodily present. The text does not say how it was that they came out of that tribulation and now appear in heaven.

What is the best explanation for how these people came to be bodily present in heaven at this time, just as the Day of the Lord arrives on earth? There are two ways this could have happened. First, they could have died. We know there is a great deal of death happening on earth currently. So many will die, including those killed for their faith, a fact already spoken to at the breaking of the fifth seal. In the case of physical death, they would have arrived in heaven slowly, the multitude gradually building. Presumably they would have been there in spirit only, as were the martyrs at the breaking of the fifth seal. However, this multitude appears to be in heaven in bodily form worshiping and active in heavenly affairs. The description of them contrasts sharply with the description of the martyred dead whose souls are in heaven, who are told to rest a little while longer (6:10-11). This contrast in the text is distinct and appears to favor a different explanation of how these arrived in heaven.

A second way they could have arrived in heaven is through the rapture of the Church, an idea that we have mentioned already. The thought is that at the opening of the 6<sup>th</sup> seal the living believers are taken from the earth, and the dead believers are raised from the dead and the two groups arrive in heaven together as taught by the apostle Paul (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The primary problem with this idea is the statement of the Elder. He seems to be saying that all this multitude came out of the great tribulation.

Which of these two explanations is most likely? Whichever one is chosen; some thorny problems are left to deal with. If we suggest that these entered heaven through death, how is it that they appear to be resurrected? When will the other saints of other eras be resurrected? Are their multiple resurrections and raptures? If we suggest the Church has been raptured and that saints of all eras are present in heaven, we must deal with the Elder's statement. So it is a matter of choosing which difficulty one is going to deal with.

It seems that the best explanation of the presence of the tribulation saints in heaven is to say that the rapture has occurred. The difficulty posed by the Elder's statement can be dealt with through several explanations. First, the focus of this portion of the revelation is the great tribulation, and so that is the focus of the Elder's definition of the multitude. Others are present, but he chooses to define the crowd by this group who are a significant part of it. A second explanation could be that it is very true that if there was a rapture, then according to Paul's teaching there was also a resurrection from the dead. And the fact is that these resurrected bodies did rise from the earth during the time of the great tribulation. Might this be the simple explanation of what the Elder's view of these new arrivals was?

Whatever explanation one gives of this multitude, portions of it might sound weak and wanting to some. The plain fact is that in response to his own questions about this multitude the Elder only answers that they have come out of the great tribulation and have washed their robes white. This is all we absolutely know to be true of this multitude.

**7:15 “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 shall spread His tabernacle over them.”**

This multitude is before the throne not for judgment, but because their robes have been washed white. Their privilege is to serve. That is a fact that the elder wishes to make clear to John, and it is a glorious fact. Their service is continuous and ongoing. They have come into their reward for their faithfulness.

The imagery behind the spreading of His tabernacle over them is powerful. The incident of Boaz and Ruth comes to mind. God will be shown to be our kinsman redeemer and will certainly exercise that right. His role as our kinsman redeemer provides a dramatic contrast with what is happening on earth during the great day of the Lord, when the earth’s great men are hiding from the wrath of God. The believers of the era will be rescued and protected from judgment.

**7:16 “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun bear down on them, nor any heat.”**

For these, all the worries and trials associated with earthly life are gone, because their kinsman redeemer has acted in their behalf. The curse of sin has been removed from them; the experiences associated with that forever behind them. No longer would their sustenance come from the earth by the toil of their hands and sweat of their faces (Genesis 3:17:19).

**7:17 “For the lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to the springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”**

God’s provision for our redemption is Jesus, and He will lead us into our eternal experience of it. There will be that which He gives us that will insure our eternal life. This is an interesting thought. Whatever this is, presented to Adam as a tree, in the book of Revelation as a river streaming from the tree, God has for us an ongoing source of eternal life, that which will bring healing to the nations (22:2). Whether this is an ongoing action of His symbolized by these things or an actual potion of some sort that will be a part of our diet is unknown. We do know that rather than toiling for our daily provision to sustain a life that slowly ebbs away, we will be given by Christ that which sustains life eternally. His own saying about Himself, “I am the bread of life” will be fulfilled. The tears we have at that point, of regret, of grief, will be taken away. We will be strengthened forever with a perspective and knowledge of truth that helps us cope properly with those things. We will experience fully through that healing His forgiveness and grace.



## Revelation 8

**8:1 “And when He broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”**

We are not told by the text what the purpose of this silence Isaiah Three elements may explain it. First, it may be that this silence reflects some final withdrawal of God from the affairs on earth. Such a withdrawal would be felt in the beings of every person and would explain the kings and great men crying out in fear. At the same time the forces of evil at the withdrawal of God would take even more unrestrained action.

Second the silence in heaven is an appropriate pre-cursor to what is about to follow on earth, the outpouring of God's wrath. It will be a solemn occasion, a fearsome and a momentous one when that moment arrives for God to carry out His wrath against rebellious man and all the forces of evil. If great men have understood the stakes in great battles to meditate and pray on the for-night, how much more the forces of heaven who will carry out this great and holy mission.

The silence may also be a witness of the justice of God's wrath. He does not enter the expression of wrath impulsively. He does not enter it without this great reverence and concern for His creation. There is pain in justice, especially when those on whom it must be carried out are so loved. It will be carried out fully, even relentlessly. But this silence may speak of the reluctance that has accompanied the grace that has delayed the moment so long.

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, and this pause reflects the great day of Yahweh.

**8:2 “And I saw the seven angels who stand before God; and seven trumpets were given to them.”**

We are redirected by John to the seven angels. These are given trumpets through which they will summon into action the appropriate forces for the seven-stage attack on the forces of evil. Each stage of the attack will be carried out completely and thoroughly. There will be no effective resistance to it. There will be no front on which the objectives of Yahweh are not thoroughly met. The trumpets will be used to sound the order for the myriads upon myriads of angels that compose the forces of heaven. Each is fully prepared and drilled for this moment. There will be no hitch in the plan and no breakdown in its execution.

**8:3 “And another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censor; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.”**

The prayers of the saints are like a continuing aroma in God's presence, pleasing to Him. A prayer rightly prayed is always a giving up of one's soul to God. As the process of carrying out God's wrath begins “much incense” is placed on the altar. It could be that this represents more prayer on the part of God's people, prayer that will continually remind God of the injustice accorded them by evil, prayer that witnesses of the justice of His acts against evil. It could also be just incense.

Whatever it represents, this speaks of that which pleases God and even appeases God. As Moses knew the fury of God's wrath and how to minister in its presence, we must assume the angels much more intimately acquainted with God, minister in the same way.

This is not to suggest that they control His wrath, for it is never out of control. It is not to suggest that they appease it outside of His will. They simply know what ministers to Him at such times. So here an angel comes whose mission is to provide this soothing aroma. It will serve as a testimony to His righteousness and justice in the moment of His great indignation.

**8:4 “And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.”**

Again, we do not know what exactly this incense represents except that it is that which pleases God. We surmise from this verse that it is something distinct from the prayers of the saints, but that it is similar in its effect. It is a memorial to the justice of that which is about to be carried out on earth, a thing to remember as one views and contemplates the horror of divine judgment poured out on the earth. It is a reminder of what makes it all so necessary, just, right, proper, and fair.

**8:5 “And the angel took the censer; and he filled it with the fire of the altar and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.”**

There is that in the same power that brings about the sacrifices offered within the Kingdom of God, which demands judgment and brings it about on earth. For most of time those who have sacrificed to God have warned the world to flee His judgment. Now, from the altar on which all their sacrifice was made comes the fire that announces the commencement of God's judgment of sin and evil, and He begins to shake the earth once more.

**8:6 “And the seven Angels who had the seven trumpets prepare themselves to sound them.”**

With this precursor all is ready, and all seven of the Angels are prepared to issue their summons. They will sound in close succession, except for the seventh and final angel. At their trumpet command the plan will go into motion with no break in the ranks and no slowing of the pace. And so, as part of the seventh seal come seven phases of God's judgment.

**8:7 “And the first sounded, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”**

By this time there has already been the famine brought by war, a fourth of the earth's inhabitants killed, a collision of multiple heavenly bodies with the earth, tidal waves, earthquakes, and great phenomena within the solar system. Great men have no answers and are simply reduced to hiding out. Now the serious wrath of God begins with this widespread devastation. The earth, already reeling in terms of environmental damage and loss of human life is dealt another blow.

It is unknown if this is John's perspective of some event that would be familiar to us, or if God unleashes some power that lies beyond our current understanding. Whatever it is that occurs here, the results are devastating on the planet. The loss of a third of what forest is by this time left, the loss of crops included in the burning of "all the green grass," would devastate a healthy planet, much less one in which delicate ecological balances have already been upset.

**8:8 And the second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood.**

At the sounding of the second trumpet, this that sounds like, yet another asteroid strikes the sea. It is difficult to translate into our day and terms what John might have meant by "the sea." The world to John was flat and there was the Mediterranean Sea and the ocean that surrounded the great land mass. That sea ran to the edge of the earth. What exactly did John see as he looked on these scenes? We can only surmise once again, that the vision was given to and interpreted by John in harmony with what he knew of the earth.

This great object, whatever it was, hit the large ocean that surrounded in his mind the great land mass. We can project that this body will hit one of the major oceans and one third of the ocean mass on the planet will be severely damaged in some way. The turning of the sea into blood may be a description of the actual color brought about by the damage, or simply God's way of revealing the "death" of a third of the ocean. At any rate the environmental impact of such an event we are just beginning to be able to forecast. The planet's whole order would be altered.

**8:9 And a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died: and a third of the ships were destroyed.**

Again, this is not hard for us to imagine today with our growing and expanding knowledge of the universe, and facts about the earth's past which are coming to light. The "thirds" of this judgment can be taken literally but could be symbolic of a large portion. The exact extent of the damage would certainly be known precisely by God, and He could by this statement be making it known to man ahead of time as He does to prove His existence and power (Isaiah 48:3-5). We would, in fact, expect that He would know just how much damage the earth could sustain without bringing about the destruction of humankind (Matthew 24:22).

**8:10 And the third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water.**

This great star may be an actual star or meteor, or it may be a spiritual being who then brings about this judgment on earth. The term star is used in the sense of a spiritual being elsewhere by John (9:1; 12:7; see also Luke 10:18). The clear identity of this star, whether a being or an actual star is not known, but it is given a name. The result of its coming to earth is that a third of the world's fresh water supply is polluted. The third may be one in three rivers and springs throughout the world, or all the rivers and springs in one area of the world that total one third of the fresh water supply.

**8:11 And the name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood; and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.**

Bitter does not simply mean bad tasting. There comes to be poison in the water that results in great loss of life. It is somewhat fruitless to speculate on what this judgment is. God's powers are so vast and His knowledge of potential weaponry so great. But with our crude understanding of the power of the atom, and the unsafe environmental conditions that can result when fission occurs, it is not hard to imagine how God Himself or some spiritual being could bring this type of scenario about.

Wormwood is the name designated to this star in John's hearing. Whether this is the name it will be given when it falls by man, or if it is simply the heavenly designation is unknown. Either or both are possible. What is known is that in Scripture wormwood speaks often of the bitter and poisonous results of sin, and particularly of the disastrous fruit of rebellion against the covenant (Deuteronomy 29:18; Proverbs 5:4; Jeremiah 9:15; 23:29; Lamentations 3:15, 19; Amos 5:7).

This is perhaps the imagery that will be reflected on by the Jews. We must remember that 144,000 have been intentionally set aside and protected on earth during this judgment for a witness. It may be that the name Wormwood will arise from these. It is a most appropriate name as the Lord's wrath brings about a very bitter end to man's sin and rebellion.

**8:12 And the fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were smitten, so that a third of them might be darkened, and the day might not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.**

This event occurs which effects one of the critical elements of life on this planet, the sun. There are several ways available to God to bring such a thing about. The immediate result is a loss of light, but there are longer term effects that would be devastating if these conditions continued. Things like ocean temperature, land temperatures, polar ice caps, photo synthesis all come to mind. If the length of this event were not limited, life as we know it would become impossible. Because after this time God has more to carry out on earth before its complete destruction, things that have been promised to the elect, the days of this type of environmental trauma are shortened (Matthew 24:22).

However, God does this great judgment, it is said that there is darkness for a third of what would normally be daylight. This seems to be a statement about time, indicating hours of daylight lost not intensity of daylight, though we would not want to hold rigidly to that. If it is a third of the hours lost, this could be accomplished through the presence of something in an orbit that blocks the light of the sun for a third of the day, an eclipse of some sort. It could also be that through something as simple as volcanic ash and debris from the other catastrophes that a third of the sun's light is blocked from the earth. However, this phenomenon is achieved, we know today much more about the seriousness of it that was known in John's day.

**8:13 And I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe, to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound.**

It is unknown exactly what the eagle represents, except to say that it is some heavenly messenger who communicates a message that it seems those on earth can hear. Through all the judgment, there seems to be the attempt on God's part to let those on earth know what is happening. This is obvious from the end of the 6th seal (6:15-17), when the great men of earth clearly understand that God and Christ are about to inflict them with great punishment. It is likely that the trumpet blasts are audible and perceived by humankind. It is likely as well that this eagle represents God's attempt to break through whatever delusional action is being successfully carried out on earth to keep humankind from submitting to God. It is hard to imagine how men could fear the wrath of God and the Lamb so and not repent and submit. But perhaps they have come to believe in one of even greater power to whom they are looking for salvation from God and the Lamb. The heavenly messenger pronounces woe three times, in conjunction with the fact that three trumpet blasts remain. The message is that despite the enormous havoc brought about by the first four trumpet blasts, judgment has only just begun. It is about to get much worse for earth's inhabitants.

## Revelation 9

**9:1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.**

The greatest agony was yet to come for humanity according to the announcement of the eagle. They were about to experience the greatest pain one can suffer. It is not that inflicted by natural disaster, or the disease, pain, and grief that come with it. The greatest agony is spiritual agony, that inflicted by spiritual beings who can oppress the spirits of humankind. That is the sort of agony this judgment will inflict, and God is not the agent who inflicts this unparalleled suffering.

This fallen star is the responsible person, none other than Satan himself. Other passages (Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:18; John 12:31; Revelation 12:7), indicate a great spiritual conflict will occur that will result in the final exclusion of Satan from heaven. The losses inflicted on him in this great battle will signal the beginning of the end for him. He is allowed by God to gather all his strength on earth for a final show-down. He is given the key to the abyss, the place where demons too wicked to be allowed freedom, so great would be the damage and hurt they work, are confined (Luke 8:31). God allows this great event to unfold on earth by His decree. So it will be that Satan, he to whom evil men look for their hope and salvation, comes to be the liar, thief and destroyer God has given ample warning about. Those who did not believe the truth will experience the full horror of the lie. It is a severe appeal to their senses to repent.

**9:2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.”**

Again, it is unknown exactly what this place is, or where it is. It would be difficult to imagine what sort of barrier would keep a spirit confined, but that is within God's ability to create and perfect. Here smoke pours out from the pit when it is opened, and the light of the sun is affected, and the atmosphere is affected. What exactly this all represents is difficult to apprehend and it is probably simply a figure which indicates that this act will have a dramatic effect on the world.

Suffice it to say that this event, coupled with the dramatic effect of the events of the first four trumpets will further the pain and agony of the times. The great tribulation will become significantly greater as the earth reels under the wrath of God and the evil one.

This event sounds like the venting of a volcano. While we must resist saying it is that, knowing what effect such an event has on the overall environment of the earth helps us imagine what impact this opening of the bottomless pit could bring about just in the physical realm.

**9:3 And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them, as scorpions of the earth have power.**

John sees animals that look like locust, but their behavior and habits are quite different. They have power far beyond that of normal locusts. The question is does this represent an Egyptian type of plague of some creature which is unknown to us? It is possible that such a creature was created by God for just this day and purpose, so terrible that it has been confined by Him only for this event. Though there is no biblical evidence that such a thing is true, the description of them given later in verses 5-10 makes them unlike anything we know.

Or does this imagery represent a demonic type of plague, where the locust represents demons who then carry out the actions described in the ensuing verses? It seems likely that the latter explanation fits best with an element of the former. So what may be happening is that there are indeed actual insect type creatures that descend on the earth, but they are inhabited by demons and so have power beyond what we would normally expect. This is how they are said to be “given power.” The “locusts” are inhabited by demons who reside in the bottomless pit, and so carry out behavior which would normally lie beyond their power. We know from the Bible that demons can and do inhabit animals (Luke 18), and this could well be the scenario that will develop at the blowing of this fourth trumpet.

**9:4 And they were told that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.**

Someone gives an order to the locusts. It involves some completely unnatural boundaries for mere locust. How can locusts be kept from green plants, and attack specific humans? This is further evidence that we are dealing here primarily with demonic powers.

It is an intriguing idea that those locked in combat against God still take their orders from Him. It lends credence to the idea that Satan is a defeated foe, that he knows it, and that he is only trying now to take as many souls down with him as he possibly can. Deceived ones will carry on the battle against God, but they will learn later that their commander in whom they are trusting has deceived them. He has long ago been defeated and is in fact subject to God. The punishment of men for not believing the truth is to be destroyed by the lie.

The locust carries out behavior that is unthinkable for locust, passing up grass, trees, and vegetation and instead feeding on man, and only those without God’s seal on their forehead. Very “un-locust-like” behavior happens because of the demons present within them.

The 144,000 are unharmed due to God's seal on them so that in the moment of Satan's greatest power God still has a witness. Though it is not actually stated, it seems best to conclude that these who are said to have God's seal are those who received it in the first part of chapter seven, the 144,000. They are still present on earth during the great tribulation and were not a part of the great multitude that came out of the great tribulation. This indicates that they were not believers yet when they were sealed, but likely became believers in that act of God. They were chosen of God, coming to faith quickly and probably are marked out not as the only ones who will come to faith during the great tribulation but as those who will be God's special agents and witnesses to promote faith and bear witness to truth during the time in which great effort will be made to stomp out faith on earth. It is quite possible that many will come to faith through their witness but will be killed immediately because of their faith. These who are sealed will be protected by God to provide for humanity one last opportunity for repentance. Those without the seal are subject to the terrible torture of the locusts.

**9:5 And they are not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like that of a scorpion when it stings a man.**

There are several interesting things about this verse. One of these is the time frame mentioned, five months. We do not know how long the "day of the Lord" is for sure. But this assures us that it is not a 24-hour day. It could last considerably time. It is not known if the locusts hang around for 5 months or if they do their damage which afflicts the body in some way for five months. That is somewhat unimportant. The point is that they do not kill but instead torture.

Again, we see that they are given perimeters in which they can operate, and again we see that their behavior goes far beyond what would be expected of locust. They do actual physical harm to the body of men, but wherever demons are present bring emotional and spiritual torment which brings about and exaggerates the physical pain.

**9:6 And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; and they will long to die and death flees from them.**

The wording of the text would allow for a few scenarios and wide speculation, but the simplest interpretation would seem to be that man will certainly try to escape the pain of life on earth through death because of an inner longing for the relief it brings. But death will in some sense escape him. Throughout history humanity has been able to arrange for their own death should that absurd thought become attractive to them. It is perhaps the most inexplicable of God's miracles that at this time in His future outpouring of His wrath men will seek death, will long for it, and death will flee from them. In the ultimate show of His strength God will demonstrate His sovereignty by somehow removing humanity's free will in the matter of death.

From our present vantage point where we are very close to a declaration that terminally ill people have the right to end their lives, that we have the right to end an unborn child's life, this will be an amazing thing for humankind to come up against, the inability to end their lives. Yet, could there be any more powerful demonstration given as to who is really God than this? And could there be any greater demonstration of Yahweh's desire that people come to repentance rather than run from it?



**9:7 And the appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads, as it were, crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.**

The appearance is here noted, which makes us believe that either they are a critter unlike any we have ever known, or what John is seeing is a visible manifestation of a spiritual phenomenon. Because the nature of revelation is to bring understanding, it seems unlikely that we are to simply spiritualize and let imaginations run wild with this detail of their appearance which the Holy Spirit took special pains to note. If this is merely a visible manifestation of a purely spiritual phenomenon, why would the appearance be important to note? Yet John, writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit notes the appearance. As stated earlier, it seems best to view these critters as made for just such a day, as “instruments of wrath, fitted for destruction” (Romans 9:22), turned loose by God, empowered, and controlled by the evil one, so as ultimately to bring about God’s will and plan.

**9:8 And they had hair like the hair of woman, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.**

As the details unfold it becomes obvious that they are locusts only in the sense that they are many in number and they are systematically destructive. So far we have a critter that can be made to obey verbal commands, that brings about affliction on people that lasts for five months—affliction so severe that men want to kill themselves—that have on their bodies what appears like the armor placed on horses before going into battle, who appear to wear crowns of Gold, who have faces like men, hair like women, and teeth like lions. One can only imagine the fear they would inspire just because of the unfamiliarity of their appearance, apart from their ability to inflict tortuous damage.

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

Two more statements are made by John describing these locusts. They had a protective shell shaped and positioned in such a way that it reminded John of a soldier’s breastplate. They were many in number and as they flew and moved about the sound was a thunderous roar. John’s description is couched in battle terms because that is how he sees the events unfolding. They are part of a cosmic showdown between good and evil.

**9:10 And they have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.**

This is another point at which these critters’ behavior and appearance varies sharply from mere locusts. These locusts have tails with stingers. John says, “like scorpions.” Perhaps they were sectioned, carried up over their bodies like scorpions in an aggressive mode and with a very visible stinger on the end. Something about their sting is such that it is not fatal but effects its victim for five months. The reason is perhaps such that it affects the neurological system or the nervous system. John does not go into details, but it is not difficult, knowing what we know of certain types of venom, to imagine such symptoms.

This obviously is a species unknown to us presently, and it will be likely unknown to people when it invades. An anti-venom would take long enough to develop that it is likely that humanity would be stuck with simply enduring the symptoms. The disruption to world economics, to communication, and to peacetime activities such as research, by the other plagues that have come on the earth by this time, as well as the overall chaotic conditions would also mitigate against adequate treatment.

It is appropriate to note as well that this five-month period is mentioned again, which favors the idea that each of these great judgments are drawn out over time. They are most likely not simply a matter of hours or days.

**9:11 They have a king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.**

Satan is said to be the king over these locusts, reinforcing the idea that these are not mere insects. Their appearance is intimidating, but at that point they are simply insects, bugs to be swatted and squashed. The fact is that they are inhabited by spiritual beings, those confined in the abyss because they are so evil that the damage they would inflict on humanity has been unacceptable to a merciful God. So great is Satan's hatred for humankind that with God's permission he unleashes his demented ones to do their will and that is the part about this plague that is beyond scary.

**9:12 The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.**

As awful as this judgment has been it is merely the beginning. So great is the danger for man in these final judgments that they are called "woes." This is a word that in the Greek is an onomatopoeia. It sounds like a scream of agony. It is a dreadful thing to contemplate the depth of humankind's guilt, who by a pure, unmitigated standard of justice deserves this. The depravity of the forces of evil who would inflict this kind of suffering on people would be more regularly seen were it not for the restraint of God. The wonder of God's grace is that it keeps this experience from being commonplace in an evil world.

**9:13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,**

With this declaration of the two woes remaining, the sixth angel summons the next event to begin. With the sound of his trumpet an order comes from the golden altar. How exactly the altar produces intelligible speech is unknown but is not a major issue to God. In 14:18 we will be told that a voice of an angel comes out of the altar and that could be the case here.

It is appropriate that a voice comes from the altar, since the service and prayers of the saints offered on that altar have been so resisted by humanity and those acts so often publicly belittled and punished. And so, from the altar before God, that through which the worship of the redeemed flowed into God's immediate presence, comes the call for judgment. It is the voice of justice, for if there had been redemption offered and if it has been accepted and experienced as true by millions, it calls for the condemnation of those who resist such mercy and grace and so stand against what God desires.

**9:14 one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”**

Four evil, fallen angels were at some point and for some reason bound at the great river Euphrates. It may be that at the time of the fall of man they were bound there, or it may be that at the time they were created they were bound there. The latter is not likely due to what is said in the next verse about them. It is difficult to say if the location mentioned is to be taken in the plain-literal sense or the figurative-literal sense. There is no reason to take it figuratively. It seems that however God has bound them, these four angels are kept restrained in this location until the timing is right for their release. Whether they are kept in the earth or on the earth in this location, this is where they are, and they will bring great horror on humankind. When thinking of the river Euphrates one thinks of the land of Ur, the land of Abraham’s origin. One thinks of Babylon, the land of Israel’s captivity and the spiritual darkness of the area at the present time.

**9:15 And the four angels who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they might kill a third of mankind.**

Here we see that in the plan of God these special angels, instruments of God’s wrath and destruction, had been created by God for a very specific time in His plan, an hour of a specific day, month, and year. This is not to say that God created evil, but that God created them and gave them great power knowing that they would choose evil, become dangerous to His subsequent creation of earth and man, and so need to be bound and thus restrained from doing their work until such time as God’s plan would call for their horrible and vicious deeds. That work would bring about the death of one third of humanity. Humanity’s choice of evil would result in them experiencing the full horror of evil’s power so that they will experience consequences of their own choices. That which they have chosen instead of God is revealed to be the many-headed monster that destroys many of them in this great plague that is about to be unleashed.

**9:16 And the number of the armies of the horseman was two hundred million; I heard the number of them.**

Some suggest this is an earthly army summoned in conjunction with other events on the earth that are happening, that will be spoken of later in Revelation. In some sense it is empowered by these four angels. Others say that this army represents a special plague on earth of beings empowered by demons, much like the locust. Either is possible and the identity will be clearer as the book goes on. It seems most likely that because a specific number is mentioned, the army is a human one. But as the verses that follow describe the actions of the army it sounds more like an army of creatures unknown to us.

In any event the number is a staggering one. John wants us to understand that it is a real number. He notes that the number was not one that he arrived at by his own calculation, but one given to him by heavenly authority.

The shift from the subject of the four angels to this great army is immediate and abrupt. Whether the army spoken of is human or demonic it appears with the four angels and is somehow summoned, empowered or lead by them.

**9:17 And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions, and out of their mouths proceed fire, and smoke, and brimstone.**

John begins to try to communicate what his eyes saw. Whether it is to be taken figuratively may be open to debate. What is certain is that John goes to great length to describe what he himself saw. There is a sense in which he himself is perplexed at what he is seeing, but he reports how it looked to him, likely uncertain of what it all meant.

If we view this great army as a human one raised in conjunction with other earthly events of the time, we are left to speculate at this point about the things reported as to their appearance and power. Either John saw ahead in time to a kind of human army equipped in a way unknown to us or there is here a myriad of spiritual symbols, each potentially meaning several different things. We must certainly entertain the idea that this is an army of demons made visible. We could even speculate on the countries or empires involved based on the color they wore—blue, red and yellow!

We must concede that when any human describes that which is foreign to all human experience, the description is bound by its very nature to raise in us a host of unanswerable questions. If we stick with the idea that whatever the nature of this army it is certainly real, and it is marshalled by the four angels, for a precise purpose at a precise time in God's plan. For now, we are free to let the words mean what they say. We will understand it when we see it.

Based on John's description, these creatures are the incarnation of humanity's worst nightmares from the fire-breathing dragons of lore to the aliens of Hollywood. They are creatures of bazaar appearance, strange powers, fearful aggression. They are what we would expect were God wishing to scare humanity into repentance through revelation of the true nature of evil and hell.

**9:18 A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire, and the smoke, and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.**

These are strange creatures indeed, with power to bring about three plagues on the earth which in some sense proceed from their mouth. The sheer volume of the horseman, 200 million, would give them great power to inflict harm on a very large segment of humanity.

The plagues are said to be fire, brimstone, and smoke. While most have taken this to be symbolic language, along with the next verse, it is not hard to imagine God being able to create such a creature if Hollywood can! Nor is it difficult to imagine the horror worked by such a creature if it came under demonic control. The fire, smoke, and brimstone should be viewed simply as what they are said to be, rather than a description of earthly weaponry, which interpretations become hopelessly outdated in a very short time.

**9:19 For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads; and with them they do harm.**

The explanation of these creatures is straight-forward enough, the explanation that makes it all clear is elusive. The riders are not said to have power in this case. The power of the army is not in the riders but in the horses. This is not to say that the rider is not in ultimate control. It is to say that the actual thing that causes harm is seen by John to be in the horses. So after saying in the previous verse that the plagues proceed from the mouths of the horses, John now indicates that the tails of the horses also do harm, being like snakes.

It is assumed that he is saying that they have a venomous bite, like that of a poisonous snake. The easiest thing to do when confronted by a detail in Scripture that is unexplainable in terms of present experience is to view it as a symbol. While this may be the case here, time alone will tell. There is nothing that demands that we do such a thing. The simple explanation is that the four evil angels, special creations for the hour of judgment, unleash on earth these special creatures made also for the hour, day, month, and year. Though such an interpretation can only be envisioned through a “Sci-fi” mindset, it has the advantage of letting the words speak for themselves. That is always the goal we should reach for in interpreting the Scriptures.

**9:20 And the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk;**

This verse reveals an important and amazing truth, that God, even on the day of the outpouring of His final wrath against man, is still looking for repentance. It is His desire that all repent. He watches for it to the end. Humanity still has opportunity for salvation right to the end. It is of course, indicative of the level of Satan’s deception in the end times that there is such an absence of sensitivity to the truth. Gone is the “fox-hole conversion,” that human tendency to turn to God in times of trouble. The worship of demons, that which gives power to idols, continues even amid phenomena that are totally out of harmony with normal human experience. Where one might expect repentance there is spiritual status quo.

**9:21 and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.”**

Having cited the fact that man does not change his objects of worship, John now states that their behavior does not change. Amid the grief, the chaos, and the collapse of everything worldly, life goes on, complete with crimes carried out against one another. From a practical standpoint God’s anger brings no change and with that one more possible excuse that could be used by humanity to explain their rebellion on judgment day is removed. In these events God has spoken. His feeling regarding sin has been made known. A foretaste of the nature and degree of divine judgment has been experienced. But among humanity life simply goes on among those left on planet earth. This seems to indicate a slip backwards in the overall spiritual sensitivity of the earth. Before the opening of the seventh seal of God’s book, that initiated this string of horrible judgments on the earth, we see even great men cowering in the presence of God and the wrath of the Lamb (6:15-17). Now however they seem to be entrenched in their unbelief even in the face of the horrible realities of evil.

## Revelation 10

**10:1 And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven clothed with a cloud; and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire;**

John introduces yet another angel with a description of his appearance. The description indicates that the angel's appearance must have been different from the others. John notes that this angel is strong, not that the others were not, but this one is exceptionally so.

He then notes the features of this angel, and one immediately observes the contrasts in his various features. His form shines brilliantly like the sun, yet a rainbow is about his head. He is clothed with a cloud, yet he has feet like fire. There is both harshness and softness to this angel, a reminder of God's judgment and his gracious promises.

There seems to be a uniqueness to this angel, and as will be seen in the text, his announcement will be historical, one of the most significant news items ever to be reported. As opposed to simply "sounding a trumpet" in heaven, this angel comes down out of heaven to the earth as it is experiencing plagues. There is a break here in the sounding of the trumpets. The sixth angel has sounded his trumpet. The seventh will not sound his trumpet until 11:15.

**10:2 and he had in his hand a little book which was open. And he placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land;**

The little book is for John. It is an open book because God wishes to make known to John events that would be a part of earth's experiences, events that had been decreed by God. The angel brings the book to earth and stands on the earth because the information in the book is for all the earth and will affect all earthly creation. The book represents additional information that is disclosed to John relating to earth's destiny. That information will equip John to "prophesying again" (11).

The picture of the angel standing with a foot on land and the other on the sea speaks to us of why John immediately referred to this angel as strong. One gets the picture of an angel immense in size.

**10:3 and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peels of thunder uttered their voices.**

This angel, as opposed to the others who have sounded trumpets, first cries out. We are not told if any word or words were said. John's description seems to indicate that they were not. The angel simply makes a loud noise.

Then we are introduced to the seven peels of thunder, who "utter their voices." It is unknown what these are or from whom they emanate except that they probably come from the throne of God as per 4:5. They apparently articulate thought not just noise as the next verse will indicate.

**10:4 And when the seven peels of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, “seal up the things which the seven peels of thunder have spoken, and do not write them.”**

The peels of thunder were intelligible speech that John understands. He begins to write down the words as per the instructions given him earlier (1:11,19). He is instructed instead not to record these things and so we do not know what was said. It may have been seven statements, or one statement said in unison. It could have been simple statements of worship or information that was beyond what God wanted us to know. It seems most likely that it was the latter. It was a message His plan did not allow to be recorded and so John is given this command.

The phrase “seal up” is a significant one in prophetic writings. It can convey two things. One thing it could convey would be placing a seal on something to deny access to it, under penalty. A second idea would be to place a seal on something to assure its authenticity without denying access. Here it is used in the first sense. So it is apparent that John knew more than he was allowed to pass on to us.

**10:5 And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven,**

We see here this strong angel, with apparent power to act on the earth in behalf of God, adopting the posture of taking an oath. What the angel is about to utter then, should be seen as certain.

**10:6 and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that there shall be delay no longer.**

For centuries there has been delay. It has not occurred on the whim of God, but according to the standard of His justice. His mercy has granted evil more time both for the purpose of saving evil people and to affirm God’s reputation of great loving-kindness. His judgment has been delayed. It is His right as creator to both delay judgment and to bring it about, and it is His right and privilege to determine the timetable of each. John reinforces that right by citing the principal parts of the planet’s geography as the fruit of His creative genius.

And so, in the process of time will come the hour, day, month, and year when this great angel will announce that there will be no more delay. The time will arrive for the Creator to enter judgment with His creation. The time of accountability has arrived in the story John is seeing.

**10:7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.**

This verse reveals some very significant ideas. It is precise in terms of establishing a general time frame. It is in the days when the seventh angel is *about* to sound. It is at that time that the mystery of God is finished. The mystery of God is ultimately embodied in Christ. It is that which is known about God along with what that information reveals to be unknown about Him.

A mystery comes about because of what is known. It is explored and understood better as one examines the facts that are relatively apparent. In the days leading up to the voice of the seventh angel the final chapter in that mystery will be concluded. The facts will all be in and the totality of God's dealings with man will be manifested. This is not to say that more will not happen in terms of God's dealings with humanity. It is not to say we will not learn more as we contemplate history. It is to say that the full range of things, from creation, the invasion of evil, redemption, and the final judgment of God will have been experienced by humankind. Thus, human experience will include all that was formerly only known through the proclamation given by God to the prophets.

Yahweh has proclaimed it all to the prophets and through them to all who care. So it is knowable to all. But in the days leading up to the voice of the seventh angel humanity will have experienced it all. With that voice the time when God and His ways are apprehended and embraced only through faith will be gone and all men will know the actual presence of God. They will come face to face with the reality of all of it. By that time they will not simply have read of His hatred of evil, they will have experienced it. They will not simply have read of His salvation they will have witnessed it. They will not simply have read about Him as a judge, they will have entered His judgment and experienced His condemnation.

By that time all sides of God will have been knowingly ratified by human experience. In our day this is not true. We have never experienced the wrath and judgment projected by the prophets, nor the salvation that they also projected for all who believe. In the end it will be just as He gave ample warning of.

**10:8 And the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, "Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land."**

This unique voice that John had first heard at the very beginning of this vision, a voice which sounded like a trumpet, he hears again giving him a specific order. He was to take the book from the strong angel.

It is an extra-ordinary offer to be given a book from heaven. This is written information from "the other side." It is also interesting that even in a vision God requires a measure of faith from John, that the book was not simply given to him, that he had to go and get it from a being that would have been very intimidating.

**10:9 And I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, "take it, and eat it; and it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."**

John goes and does what he might have been afraid to do, telling the strong angel who stood on the land and sea to give him the book. The angel gives him the book with this extra-ordinary command—to eat it. He then projects what will happen to John. So John must again do something which requires a measure of faith and trust in this vision. He must take just one more step.



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

John is willing to obey, knowing that there would be some not so pleasant consequences. Now why would God give such a scenario in a vision? What was he trying to reveal by giving such a strange interactive vision to John? It would seem He did it so that we might conclude that information from God gives us a very mixed reaction. Eating it represented the experience of receiving it and reporting it. The receiving of it was very sweet, the knowledge of it being wonderful. But the implication of it is grievous and at times bitter.

This is a classic description of a bittersweet experience, and that would be the experience of John once entrusted with this great vision. It is the sweetest of things to know God and His ways. It also brings pain, for if ignorance is bliss, knowledge and wisdom is sorrow and grief. John's message is of great hope to God's people. It is a message of salvation from God's wrath. It is a message that even in the tumult and travail of history, God is firmly in control and working things together for the good of those who love Him. It is also a message of great doom, deep pain, and agonizing grief for all eternity to those who reject God's grace. It is a projection that many will do so.

And so, it is both sweet as honey and bitter to our stomachs. There is deep personal reward in the truth. But if God's love is at all being made complete in us, there is the deepest sorrow for those outside His care. We will be torn between our inner peace and joy regarding our own well-being, and our willingness to be accursed for the sake of our kinsman if all is right within us. This is of God, as the little book was of God, and this may be the tear that only God can somehow wipe away.

**10:11 And they said to me, "You must prophecy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."**

It is always interesting when Scripture follows a figurative literal presentation of truth with a plain literal presentation of it. This is the plain literal statement of the figure of eating the little book. It is at the same time both a sweet and a bitter experience to prophesy. John would continue to experience all the joy of obedience, along with the pain and frustration of a continued earthly ministry.

Here it is said that "they" tell John of his responsibility. The exact identity of the parties to whom this pronoun refers is uncertain. It is most likely speaking of one voice and some visual ascent by others that were present in the vision so that John understands this command not as coming from simply one angel, but from the entire heavenly company including God Himself.

John is told he must prophecy again. He had already prophesied and had the bitter experience of his exile to the isle of Patmos to show for it. Now he is told he is not done yet. He must now be prepared to resume that ministry and this time he would bear a message that related to specific people groups and powers. It would be a message concerning future world events. It would be a bitter-sweet experience, as he had already experienced.

Along the way of history since John many have said that the book John wrote about this coming revelation of Jesus Christ was nonsense, not fit to be included in the Scriptures. Even today it is widely regarded as unknowable. It has proven to be a bitter-sweet experience.

## Revelation 11

**11:1 And there was given me a measuring rod like a staff, and someone said, “Rise and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and those who worship in it.”**

This is what happens immediately after the charge is given to John that he must prophesy again concerning many tribes and nations and kingdoms. He is given an instrument of some sort through which He is to measure the temple of God and the altar and those who worship in it.

The measuring of the temple and the worshipers happens several times in Scripture. Sometimes the intent is to reveal something about the physical characteristics of the future temple in Jerusalem. At other times the intent seems to be to illustrate more of a spiritual evaluation of the worship and the worshipers in the earthly temple in Jerusalem.

There are two difficult things about this verse. First, is he to measure the temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers he is seeing in the vision, the temple in heaven? Or is he to measure the temple and worshipers in Jerusalem? At first glance it would seem best to take this as a charge to measure the one he sees in the vision rather than making a trip to Jerusalem to measure the one there. If he was to evaluate the worship in heaven, then that would certainly affirm the words he has been told to write to the seven churches, mainly that there was considerable lacking in their worship of Yahweh. But this idea of him measuring the temple in heaven creates difficulty in that he is told the outer court of the temple will be trodden underfoot by the gentiles for 42 months. That certainly refers to the temple in Jerusalem. So that seems to affirm a more literal idea, that the temple he is to measure is the one in Jerusalem.

The time of such a measuring is a second difficulty. Is it something John is to do in his present lifetime? Or is a measurement that will occur within the 70th week of Daniel? It seems best to believe the latter, since the entire unveiling of this book is about providing more precise details of that seven-year period. It seems that John's measurement was Him participating spiritually in the vision as he had done in the taking of the scroll from the angel in the previous passage. The detail of his measurement is not reported on. Exactly when during that seven-year period this measurement is happening is vague in this verse. It will be clarified by what we find in the next verse. It may also be describing the work of the two witnesses that will prophesy during this time or great wrath.

John's action relates to three things: the temple, the altar, and the worshipers. The reason might be that historically in the nation of Israel three questions reveal the spiritual state of their nation. First, is the temple built and maintained as Yahweh defined it should be, with a concern for doing things as God wants? Second, is what is going on with the altar according to what God has prescribed, or is it corrupted? Third, what is the condition of the worshipers themselves? Are their hearts right, or is it all just lip service? This is probably what is behind this action that John is asked to take. It is like the legitimate concern of any owner to make sure what is his is in fact his, that no boundaries have been moved and nothing of importance altered. The message of the two witnesses will likely be of this measuring, God's pronouncement on the spiritual condition of Israel.

**11:2 And leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread underfoot the holy city for forty two months.**

God does not consider the “courtyard” now as His to evaluate. He has by decree turned it over to the nations, those who had not been entrusted with the temple, the Gentiles. The temple itself was always considered the special privilege of the Jews.

The period is defined here as 42 months. Daniel had spoken of a series of decrees made by Yahweh regarding Israelites and Jerusalem, that would be fulfilled over a period he described as “seventy sevens” or “seventy weeks”. For various reasons (refer to Appendix 1), many Bible scholars believe that the term Daniel uses here refers to seventy, seven-year periods. Interestingly, 42 months is three and a half years, half of seven.

We should entertain the idea for a moment, that this reference in Revelation to 42 months may be referencing half of one of these sevens, a period of three and a half years. Interestingly, Daniel refers to a time when a future ruler would make a covenant with “many” in Israel and perhaps elsewhere, for one week, seven years. Then Daniel says that in the middle of the week this ruler would suddenly turn against that covenant and put an end to sacrifice and offering (Daniel 9:27). Since both men were seeing a vision regarding the future it seems highly likely that their two prophecies would share common ground. John and Daniel were seeing the same three and one-half year period.

John says of this period that the gentiles will tread Jerusalem underfoot for three and a half years. Jesus referenced this event as one still to come from His vantage point in history (Luke 21:24). He knew of this because He knew Daniel, and that this event would occur during the last half of the seventieth week of Daniel’s vision. John sees it occurring as angels are blowing two final trumpets that will complete the pouring out of God’s wrath to judge sin on the earth.

So we can surmise from what Daniel says, that the world ruler of the last days, establishes a seven year treaty that provides protection for the Jews and fosters the ceremonies of their religious system. It is part of the deception that the Jews view Him as their Messiah and their Savior. It is in the middle of the “week”, after three and a half years, that He turns against them and desecrates the temple. A period commences with that act during which all that is holy is trodden down.

The events of chapter 11 therefore, concern a period that begins before the voice of the 6th angel (9:13). The vision is reaching back in time to that point, to events that simply culminate or reach their consummation in the days just before the sounding of the seventh trumpet. They are the final part of the mystery of God that begins to unfold earlier but runs its course to completion when the seventh angel is “about to sound,” when the “mystery of God is finished as He preached to His servants the prophets” (Revelation 10:7).

**11:3 And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophecy for twelve hundred and sixty days clothed in sackcloth.”**

Two special men will come on the earthly scene with special authority and power that John will speak of here. They are special because of who they are in God’s economy. The identity of these two witnesses is a great mystery, very complex to shed precise light on.

They may be the same two who appeared with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah, though they are not named here. If that is true, then Moses and Elijah will re-appear on the earth for a period of three and a half years. Their mission will be as special witnesses of God. Now all God's children are His witnesses, but the fact that these are called such indicates that their mission and power is unique, beyond that of normal Christian witnesses. It is certainly true that Moses and Elijah would be able to speak of unique things that no man has ever seen. And with what we read of these two individuals in the next verse, they will have unique power.

The case for Elijah being one of the witnesses is very straight-forward and is based on Malachi 4:4-6. There God says He is going to send Elijah as a for-runner to the great day of the Lord. Whether it is Elijah or one who comes in the same spirit as Elijah can be legitimately questioned. Jesus indicated to His disciples that Elijah had come before His own first coming. In that statement He was viewing John the Baptist as Elijah (Matthew 17:11-13). So there is a likelihood that this will be the case here. A person will appear on earth in the Spirit and power of Elijah.

The case for Moses being one of these witnesses involves more conjecture. It has its main strength in the fact that he appeared with Elijah on the mount of transfiguration as a special minister of God. This is significant because we believe other Old Testament era saints were not resurrected at that time. Elijah's appearance can be explained by the fact that he never died. Moses' appearance seems to indicate that he is fulfilling some special role in the program and plan of God.

#### **11:4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.**

The two olive trees are mentioned in Zechariah 4:11-14. They are said to be "the two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth." John's language closely parallels Zechariah's. Anyone familiar with Zechariah's writings would immediately note the similarity and would be drawn to Zechariah's message. While not excluding the possibility of Moses and Elijah returning to earth for three and a half years, the text of Zechariah seems to take us in a different direction. The emphasis of the context of his prophecy seems to be that the two witnesses that stand before the Lord of the whole earth are likely the two other persons of the Godhead, the Spirit, and the Son. Emphasis is given by Zechariah's vision to the self-sustaining, unthwartable nature of Yahweh's work in Jerusalem, that it is such because it is being carried out through His Spirit and His Son, the humble King. The two witnesses of that day were Joshua, clearly a type of Christ, and either Zechariah or Zerubbabel, both clearly instruments of the Holy Spirit. (See Appendix 3 on the layering of Zechariah's prophecies)

We simply restate that these witnesses, regardless of their exact identity, are specially selected and appointed individuals, specially empowered through the Holy Spirit and the Son, for a very special work in this final hour of the great counterfeit christ on earth. So we conclude that these will be unique times, like no other in the history of the world and for that special hour God has specially prepared two witnesses to accomplish His special work on earth. These appear on earth to bear witness to Him, what He is doing and His heart for humankind.

**11:5 And if anyone desires to harm them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and if anyone desires to harm them, in this manner he must be killed.”**

This provides us with a glimpse of the unique power and authority of these two witnesses. The fire proceeding from their mouths is most likely a figure for the power they command by their words. It is what John saw, but it may not be that the actual fire comes from their mouths. The fire may come because of the command that goes out from their mouths. We should be cautious however in any view that leads us a way from a plain-literal view of this. The specific mention of the fact that this is the “manner in which their opponents must be killed” does seem to favor a plain literal view of these actions of theirs.

The primary point to be made is that their enemies will not be able to do away with them, as has happened to most other witnesses and messengers of God during evil times. In this case their presence will be assured for three and a half years. No one will be able to thwart their ministry through harming them personally without paying for it with their own life. This is another part of the uniqueness of these two individuals.

**11:6 These have the power to shut up the sky, in order that rain may not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.**

This is more on the unique power of these two specially called and anointed individuals. There is no recorded instance when men were able to do such things “as often as they desire.” There has always been greater limitation than that. These will be prophets greater than those of old. They will back up their message with very powerful signs during a time on earth when the evil one himself is deceiving men regarding his power and authority.

It is possible that some of the plagues of the various trumpets may be carried out in conjunction with the ministry of these two individuals, although the record does not demand this at any rate, the earth’s inhabitants will view much of the pestilence of the times as being connected with these two individuals and it is true that with these powers, they will be able to inflict misery on the earth’s citizens.

**11:7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.**

When by God’s timetable and plan, the three and one-half years of the ministry of these individuals is completed the time for their departure from earth will come. In this verse is the beginning of the description of how God will bring their ministry to a dramatic close.

The beginning of the end will come through the beast that comes out of the abyss, that is, the final world ruler whose power comes from the evil one. He will oppose them and enter conflict with them. The second stage of the contest he will win, defeating them by destroying their lives. That which none of their enemies have been able to do for three and a half years, he does. The earth has watched others who oppose these two die themselves. But this time the evil one prevails, or more properly, he appears to prevail.

The timing of this event is open to great debate, but their death occurs during the events of the sixth trumpet, that they are the ones who call the earth to repentance during the terrible outpouring of God's wrath. Despite their powerful testimony, mankind in general does not repent (9:20-21). With this God's patience is history and unbelieving humanity is given over to evil which for a moment triumph and has its moment of glory.

**11:8 And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.**

The killing of these two witnesses will be viewed as a great event on the earth, so that their dead bodies are displayed in Jerusalem for all to see and celebrate. Even as Jerusalem was the city that killed so many other prophets, including God incarnate, it will be the place where God's final efforts to bring humanity to Himself will end. Evil will once again flauntingly kick up its heels in mockery of God's grace, in Jerusalem.

Geographical Israel, the place chosen by Yahweh Creator where He would put His name, is at this time caught in the vise of the deception of the false messiah, snared in the religion of the nations who are without God. Rather than it being such a place Yahweh desired it to be, it now drifts to a new spiritual low water mark. That place hosts this great celebration of rebellion. It will be a display of great spiritual adultery for a city steeped in it. In a twisted way it is fitting in that it demonstrates the depravity of humanity that even a place of blessing and choosing becomes so unclean. At a time when the revelation given to the world through Israel and Jerusalem should have been instructing toward repentance, salvation, and holiness, we find humanity rejoicing instead at the demise of truth, the stamping out of God's word for the times.

**11:9 And those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.**

This is a projection of the gentiles blaspheming God through Jerusalem, demonstrating humanity's inability to arrive at a point of harmony with truth even when given the truth. The demise of the witnesses will be a world-class event. This is likely because they will be blamed for all the pestilence of the 70th week of Daniel that has come upon the earth. It is always present in our human nature to place blame anywhere we can other than ourselves. The beast, in making good evil and evil good, will provide humanity with the perfect scenario to do so, and they will have conditioned themselves to take the bait.

**11:10 And those who dwell on earth will rejoice over them and make merry: and they will send gifts to one another because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on earth.**

So great is the deception that the evil one foists on the world that there is a festive atmosphere on earth when these two witnesses are finally killed. It is a “holiday spirit” like that of Christmas today. It may even be that this is part of the rulers attempt to make “alterations in times and laws” (Daniel 7:25). The deception may be such that the blame for every plague that came over the earth during the previous five or six years is placed at their feet. And so, in their deaths the world believes it has solved its problems and rejoices. The end of the times of the sixth angel, just before the voice of the seventh angel, finds a festive celebration on earth, and the inhabitants re-affirming their godless lifestyle.

**11:11 And after 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 beholding them.**

The festive mood on earth is cut short by a miraculous act of God through which He tries once more to bring about faith in wicked men. Before the eyes of the world the two witnesses, who have been lying in state in Jerusalem as the world celebrates their death, are raised from the dead. The next verse speaks further to the circumstances surrounding this occurrence. The result is that fear grips those who witness the phenomenon even as fear gripped the revilers with Belshazzar (Daniel 5:6), and as it did the Roman guard at the tomb of Christ (Matthew 28:1-5). There is no explanation for resurrection. The fact that it occurs after three days is a special touch that should convince all that it is the work of God.

**11:12 And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies beheld them.**

There is no mistaking what happens to these individuals, no probable cause other than the voice which no natural law or human effort can prevail against. The command from God is shown to be unalterable one last time to humanity in this great display. In that moment there is amid the mirth and merry-making reason to pause and ponder the real state of things. One last time there is opportunity for faith, at the last possible moment.

**11:13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell, and seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to God.**

This is another event in this great and final sign to humanity that they need to consider their Maker. In the city of peace is this great tumult. Jerusalem hosts another resurrection, but also this great sign of an accompanying earthquake. John notes the percentage of the city’s buildings that fall, which means structural damage is even more widespread. He also notes specifically how many are killed, making this a major “natural” disaster. But against the backdrop of the previous plagues, it is not a colossal one. It is not as big an earthquake that will strike Jerusalem a short time later (Revelation 16:19; Zechariah 14). The events of the day have the effect of ending the grand holiday celebration. The day that had begun with high and proud spirits becomes one of terror.

In the terror is some renewed perspective and eternal good. We see in the terror glory given to God. We may be tempted to think that this is a feigned giving of glory to God, and some of it may be. But there is no doubt some genuine conversion happening through all this show of might from heaven.

It is important to remember that the verse is speaking of things as they are happening in Jerusalem. We know from other Scripture that many other events are happening simultaneously and that there is a great spiritual awakening and national conversion in Israel that happens at some point shortly after this event. God, through these and other judgments that will come later, is revealing Himself in dramatic form in and through Israel. And so, in a matter of hours there is this great metamorphosis in the hearts of some in Jerusalem and beyond in the world and glory is given to God.

#### **11:14 The second woe is past; behold the third woe is coming quickly.**

The events that unfold at the sounding of the trumpet of the sixth angel are simple in one sense, but quite complex in another sense. The placing of this statement in the text at this point shows that all the events spoken of in 9:13-11:14 relate to the time between the sounding of the sixth and seventh angel. There is also the reaching back in time of the verses in chapter 11 that enables us to see the full ministry of the two witnesses. But their death and resurrection occur as a part of the events announced by the sixth angel. To summarize the events:

1. Four evil angels who had been kept under restraint are set free and allowed to kill a third of mankind.
2. They do this through a huge army of 200 million beings, either actual horseman and horses or demonically powered beings of a sort we know nothing about.
3. There is no repentance because of this great battle or plague on the part of humanity in general.
4. Meanwhile in Jerusalem there is the ministry of two special messengers from God going on that has entered its third year.
5. These two witnesses are killed by the world leader after three and a half years of opposing him.
6. There is a time of world-wide celebration of their death that goes on for three and a half days as their bodies lie in state in Jerusalem.
7. By a verbal command from heaven, heard by their enemies, they are raised from the dead and go up to heaven.
8. This is quickly followed by a great earthquake that brings great destruction and death in Jerusalem.
9. This brings about in some survivors the worship of God.



**11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”**

John has just stated the end of the second woe and that the third woe is coming quickly. Yet in these verses no specifics are given that indicate that anything happens on earth on the level of trial and pestilence that comes with the advent of the first and second woes. That is because these verses do not give the particulars, but only describe the grand announcement, the critical event that the third woe brings. There are several events that begin to transpire on earth in rapid succession because of the sounding of the seventh angel, that strong angel that took up a dominant and triumphant position on earth with one foot on the land and one on the sea. These events come to light in ensuing chapters, the judgments of God in chapter 16 with the pouring out of seven bowls of the wrath of God on earth. These are seven distinct judgments that come on the earth because of the sounding of the seventh angel. They are fearsome events which are cast upon a world already reeling under the power of God and the evil power of Satan. The result of it all is that reported in this verse, that God assumes the throne of the false god foisted on the earth by Satan. Things will never be the same again.

**11:16 And the twenty four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,**

The twenty-four elders re-appear here doing just as they have done before. Although they have some role of leadership and authority in heaven, their loyalty and worship of God is unwavering. In their words of worship will be the thankful thoughts of billions of saints whose time of vindication, salvation and reward has finally arrived.

**11:17 saying, “We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou has taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign.”**

The twenty-four elders express the joy of heaven that has been anticipated for ages. It has finally come about. In every generation of humankind there have been people who anticipate God’s kingdom coming to earth. Billions have gone to the grave clinging to this great hope, somewhat disappointed that they did not live to see the day. But the day is not delayed because God does not have the power. It is only delayed because the other things He is seeking to accomplish do not allow the timing to be right just yet. The day will arrive when He takes matters in hand and He will rule over the earth.

**11:18 And the nations were enraged, and Thy wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to give their reward to Thy bond-servants the prophets and to the saints and to those who fear thy name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.**

Five great events of the end times are highlighted in this part of the Elder’s testimony. The time for the nations to be enraged is the first. This is the time for their rebellion to reach its apex, for them to shake their fist at the Almighty, accept Satan as their ruler, and engage their Creator in battle. Their sin would be allowed to reach its logical conclusion, transgressors would “run their course” (Daniel 8:23).

That which by God's mercy and grace had been delayed so long will then come. This is the second great event mentioned here that occurs in the last days the great day of the Lord. It is the day proclaimed by Isaiah (Isaiah 2:12-28), and then spoken of throughout the remainder of the writings of the prophets and the New Testament authors.

The third great event is the time for the dead to be judged. The day proclaimed, announced from heaven, and preached by so many on earth will arrive and humanity will be held accountable individually for their sin.

The fourth great event is the bestowal on the faithful of their reward. This is an important part of Yahweh's justice. First mentioned are the prophets who proclaimed faithfully these events and suffered much for their unwavering belief in them. But they are not alone. All who have been made holy by the blood of Christ, the holy ones, the saints, will be rewarded. And the list extends to all who fear the name of Yahweh, their Creator, who do not trifle with the message of God, or dismiss it as superstition or some other brand of untruth but believe and accept it. All of these will be rewarded for their faith regardless of their station in this life. The phrase "their reward" does not appear in the original, though there is a sense in which the reward of the wicked, what they attempted to get for themselves by their own efforts, will be given to the righteous. The phrase in the original is simply "the wages." The picture is of a payday, compensation for services rendered. It is a wonderful and glorious thought, that no effort or sacrifice or extra push for the sake of His glory, is lost on our master.

The fifth great event mentioned is the destruction of those "who destroy the earth." This should be understood as Satan and the fallen angels and all who have sided with him. He is the destroyer and all who willingly follow him or who is deceived by him to join him in standing against the truth by doing so brings about that which destroys. That is the eventual effect of lies, they bring destruction. Creation depends on truth. It will self-destruct apart from it. The process begins with the crown of creation—humanity. By turning against truth, humanity begins to destroy itself and as it does it destroys the planet. The day will come when the destroyer, Satan and all who have joined with him will themselves be destroyed.

**11:19 And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightening and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.**

John sees the ark. Whether this is the ark that Israel had or the real thing of which the earthly thing was just a copy (Hebrews 8:5), cannot be stated with absolute certainty, but it is likely the real thing (Jeremiah 3:16). The temple of God is opened. Mankind has access into the real temple, those who are citizens of heaven. Meanwhile on earth tumult continues, and the final outpouring of wrath, which will be delineated in detail in chapter 16 occurs.

## Romans 12

**12:1 And 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.**

With these words John leaves the subject of the seven angels, a subject he will come back to in chapter 15. He does this most likely because that is simply the course of the vision. And so leaving the specific description of the pouring out of God's wrath, John reports on a series of characters he sees. These characters represent key players in the drama of the end times that will play itself out on the earth. Together the characters are here said to be a great sign. It is great because it is profound. It reveals background, specific characteristics and some key events that will be fulfilled during the 70th week of Daniel. Some elements of the sign relate to what are to us past events. Most await fulfillment. Some are fulfilled multiple times, each time to a greater degree.

The sign appears in heaven, that is, as John is looking at a view that includes heaven and earth (11:19), something begins to transpire in heaven that will eventually also include the earthly scene. But it originates in heaven in the presence of God. This is sign language, figurative illustrations of literal events.

The first character we are introduced to is a woman clothed with the sun. This likely is an expression of a brilliant light radiating from her. As Jesus' garments glowed with a white light on the mountain, so the woman glows with brilliant light. She is clothed in glory and has a glorious position, the moon under her feet. As opposed to pagan goddesses of the moon, whose doctrines assigned all kinds of powers to the moon, this woman has such exalted position that the moon is at her feet. Added to this is her crown, a sign of privilege and authority, with twelve stars in it. Creation, even the glorious and unknown portions of it, are in some sense just props to this woman and what she represents, so significant is her role and so valuable to God is her mission.

This woman represents God's chosen people, chosen collectively for revelatory purposes and to be a ruling people and some chosen for salvation—national Israel. Theirs is an exalted, privileged position in God's plan through whom knowledge, redemption, and Godly rule will come to fallen humanity who have been held captive in the kingdom and domain of darkness. For this purpose, they were chosen, and when we refer to Israel as God's chosen people this is what we mean. It is not that all of them by virtue of that choosing are chosen for salvation. That is an individual calling that God elects and chooses for. Israel was chosen to be that people through whom God would reveal truth. Since Satan hates truth, they are naturally his enemy as will soon be illustrated by the action John sees.

**12:2 and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.**

Through God's chosen people, God Himself would enter the human stream, incarnate in human flesh. In John's vision the woman struggles to give birth, as Israel, against all odds and opposition bought the promised Messiah into the world.

**12:3 and another sign appeared in heaven; and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his head were seven diadems.**

As John is watching this great sign of the glorious woman with child another being appears, this great red dragon. John noticed he has seven heads. It is more than a classic, many-headed monster. The number of heads, the number of horns and crowns are specially noted by John and have significance in terms of who this represents and how they will manifest themselves on the earth. In Daniel's vision horns represented kings and kingdoms. He spoke of ten kings, three of whom would be subdued by a final world ruler, who would then rule over, or perhaps even through the other seven (Daniel 7:15-28). This dragon relates to that ruler and is the power behind that ruler. The dragon is Satan. The next statement by John confirms that.

**12:4 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.**

This confirms that the dragon is Satan who led a rebellion against God involving apparently a third of the angels in heaven. The rebellion is not over in the sense that Satan still has access into the presence of God and God has not carried out His final punishment of Satan. But the rebellion resulted in a third of the angels being expelled from heaven. They are confined to earth and its immediate atmosphere it appears. Here, we know them as demons and in some cases, they are imprisoned even further and confined in a deeper way by God until His purpose allows their release.

Satan wanted to hinder and stop the revelation of truth to his captives. He did not want God to become a man so that man might know who really God was and what the true nature of God was. He wanted to devour that revelation of truth. Did Satan know of God's plan to bring redemption through that child's eventual death?

It is interesting to speculate on that, though it is pure speculation. It is likely that he did not, that God allowed Satan to bring about the Son's death in the cruelest of ways through rebellious, depraved man, and in the greatest reversal of all times He worked that immediate victory of Satan into the greatest victory for Himself. Through it all He brought redemption to all who would believe. That is, of course speculation. The point here is that Satan attempted to kill Christ from the beginning and to thwart the revelation of truth about God.

**12:5 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.**

Israel gave birth to the Anointed One, Christ, the one appointed to rule over the world. His earthly life was marked with every type of temptation as the evil one sought to thwart the light of truth from shining through Him. Finally, He was condemned and executed by sinful humanity and faced the evil one's ultimate weapon—death. But because He knew no sin, death had no dominion over Him. God raised Him from the dead. John saw in his vision two great facts of the gospel symbolically portrayed the incarnation and the exaltation.

**12:6 And the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that she might be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.**

This vision follows the same course as those of Daniel because it must do primarily with Israel as a chosen race and God has seventy prophetic weeks planned for them. Israel has a place prepared by God, a place of special care so that in the end they will be seen to play a special role in His sovereign plan for heaven and earth. They occupied center stage in His dealings in the world for 690 prophetic weeks, or 483 years according to Daniel, until Christ was cut off by them. He was then "Caught up to God and to His throne," in John's words. This leaves one week, or seven years, to be fulfilled regarding Israel, the time when God is ending the world's kingdom and establishing His own. During that seven-year period Israel will become the object of the world ruler's affections for the first half of the seven years, 1260 days. Then during the second half of that week, 1260 more days, through the betrayal of that ruler Israel will endure great tribulation and suffering. But God will miraculously save a remnant of them, at least 144,000 (Revelation 7:1-8). These will first and foremost be saved from the deceit of the false religion of the day and have faith in Yahweh. Further, they will come to faith in Christ.

At the close of the first half of the 70th week important seeds will be sowed toward the national renewal of Israel projected by the Old Testament prophets and spoken of most directly by Paul in Romans 9-11. This sealing of the 144,000 and the preservation of the truth in Israel by them and the coming to faith of others through their testimony, is the most likely event that this symbolism, or sign language (12:1), is portraying to John and to us. Their place of refuge has always been Yahweh and He begins to open His arms to them wider as the last world leader turns against them and desecrates Jerusalem. Whether there is an actual physical place where they find refuge is open to speculation, but they are miraculously protected.

**12:7 And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war,"**

With this, attention shifts to Satan to describe a pivotal event in God's dealings with him. This vision backs up in time to provide additional detail to an event which Daniel had foretold (Daniel 12:1), and Jesus had foretold (Luke 10:18). It most likely happens just before the pronouncement of the first of the three great woes, beginning in 9:1. At that point God's tolerance of and patience toward evil has run its course, and one of the first actions He takes is to deny Satan access to heaven. Now Satan's angels have already been cast from heaven, but we know that Satan has apparently been allowed to come into God's presence (Job 1-3). That will end with this great spiritual battle. The time of this great battle is made more evident by verses 13-14 and will be discussed there.

**12:8 and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.**

Again, this event marks the beginning of the end of sin's long presence in the affairs of the universe because it marks the end of the longsuffering of God and the end of His granting of opportunity for repentance. Now sin will be judged, and that judgment begins in the house of God where Satan is denied any place in the heavens.

We don't know exactly where Satan makes his abode. He is called the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). With this action, whatever level of heaven he has lived in, he is now expelled from and that he is denied all access to the Creator. It would appear from subsequent verses that he and his angels are at this point confined to earth.

**12:9 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.**

This verse confirms several ideas. It confirms that the dragon represents Satan in this vision. We are not speculating on that matter. It confirms that Satan and his angels are given some restricted boundaries which deny them any access to God and heaven, whatever that access might currently be. It probably means that even their former abode in the "air" or in the immediate "heavens" with respect to the earth becomes a "no fly zone" for them. It supports the idea also that Satan is the originator and perpetrator of all evil, and that all attempts to deal with sin in mankind must eventually deal with him as the source of that evil.

**12:10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation, and 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, who accuses them before our God day and night."**

The importance and significance of this event is here confirmed. It marks a significant shift in heaven's policy and stance regarding Satan, the beginning of the decisive judgment against Him that will result eventually in His being cast into the lake of fire. It marks the beginning of the establishment of Christ's uncontested rule over all creation, the end of the era of waiting, the era of creation's groaning.

Satan's activity is revealed here as well, and it is surprising. No other verse in Scripture reveals the things that are here revealed, though other Scripture supports it. There is a continual presence on the part of Satan in God's presence, and it must be a nagging and bothersome one to Him because it is a constant rehearsal of the sins and shortcomings of believers. It is likely that their collective and individual sins are constantly being pointed out to God by Satan in a sort of ecclesiastical trash talking. This further highlights the longsuffering and patience of God as He has endured this through eons of time. It also raises the probability that our sins hurt God and the hosts of heaven in a special way as they become fodder for the enemy's diatribe.

In passing the verse also reveals that all this does not embitter heaven against believers. They view us as their brethren and count the days until Satan's false accusations are decisively eliminated. One can only imagine the change in heaven first that will occur when this great negative influence is finally removed.

**12:11 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 to death.**

The accusations of Satan against us fail to result in charges against us, and his opposition to our faith fails to destroy faith and the faith community. This happens for two reasons given in this text. First, due to the blood of the Lamb, the payment in full for our sins. The fact that we sin is not news to God. He has planned for it and the blood of Christ has been shed to cover our sin. Second, due to our own testimony, that is, our embracing of the truth of the good news of the Lamb, the value we collectively place on that life so that we are willing to sacrifice all to nurture it and advance it on the earth.

It is best to view this as being a collective statement regarding the community of God's people. It is not primarily a statement of everyone within the body of Christ, though it certainly has some application to us individually. There is a collective victory, even though there are some in the body of Christ who fail to overcome. The overall view of God's kingdom is that though Satan seeks to thwart God's presence and work in His people and through them, they overcome. They do so because there is no legal ground for God to withdraw from those of faith, and so He continues to work in them though they are imperfect vessels. At the same time, through the Holy Spirit they are faithful in declaring the gospel and in pushing it forward. The result is that despite Satan's best efforts, God has always had a people, a kingdom formed and raised up within Satan's stronghold. It persists regardless of individual tragedies and failings and shortcomings.

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

What is a blessing of eternal proportions in terms of the overall welfare of creation, in fact the greatest imaginable and blessed event that could be asked for, brings with it a brief period of terror with respect to the earth and its inhabitants. This is not an imagined terror or a false fear, but a very logical and appropriate response. The defeat of Satan by the forces of heaven will be decisive, and no student of historic battles could view it otherwise. Satan, no stranger to war or history, will himself realize the implications, that his final defeat and punishment is imminent.

Knowing this Satan will have great anger. That anger will be directed in a classically sinful way. He will not direct his anger at himself for his own foolish rebellion and waste of years, but at others. He will not in benevolence seek to endear himself to possible allies. He will seek to make sure that many experience his fate, that of eternal destruction, and in this way unsuccessfully salve his wounded pride. That means great terror for earth. But it should be known that this terror will only fall on the deserving, who have seen God's mighty dealings in earth's events in a very dramatic way for a period of several years, have witnessed the salvation of the righteous, and have refused to acknowledge their rebellion.

The earth, in such condition, becomes the stronghold that Satan falls back to after his colossal defeat by Michael. It will now have to endure the insane and demented actions of a powerful world ruler who knows he is losing his grip. Earth's history is full of examples of the unparalleled cruelty of such leaders. This will be many times worse, because it involves the person who is the very source of evil and sinfulness, the one who lent power to so many of the acts of cruelty witnessed on the planet. But the world will also have to endure the great wrath of God as it is poured out against such a wicked one. It will become a cosmic battlefield and war zone in a battle between two forces whose power is beyond imagination.

The defeat of Satan by Michael in the heavens signals the beginning of the end of a great rule of terror, glorious news for God's family and awful news for a rebellious force on earth.

**12:13 And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.**

Again, we see that Satan handles his defeat in a classically sinful and depraved way. He strikes out at that which is dear to his opponent. In this case particularly, Israel, and those who by faith have identified themselves with Israel, as will be seen later in the context (17).

This verse and the following help us identify the time of the great battle in heaven as being at the midpoint of Daniel's 70th week, or approximately 3 1/2 years into the seven-year period. Therefore, at the midpoint of that week the world ruler makes a dramatic shift in his stance towards Israel, why he sets up the "abomination of desolations" in the temple, and why at the breaking of the 5<sup>th</sup> seal (Revelation 6:9), we see the souls of martyrs pleading with God for revenge. This sign of the woman and the dragon explains what has happened behind the scenes to cause much of the turmoil on earth that John's vision has thus far revealed.

**12:14 And the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, in order that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time, times, and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.**

In verse six it has been said that the woman fled to her prepared place. Here it is said that she flies. Both are true and when the figure is understood there is no contradiction. The figure is well known to those acquainted with the imagery used in the Old Testament to describe God's salvation of Israel when they were slaves in Egypt. His word to them was that He had carried them out of Egypt on eagles' wings (Exodus 19:4). This speaks of His miraculous provision for them as they journeyed on foot into the wilderness. We are told that God strengthened and enabled them through a specific angel, the angel of Yahweh (Isaiah 63:9).

There is the well-known imagery which speaks of the strengthening of God being like eagles' wings that comes to those who wait on Him (Isaiah 40:31). The wings of "the great eagle" likely refer to the strengthening power of God that the Israel of old experienced that Israel will experience once again to endure this great assault by the evil one.



It is important to remember that during this time Israel will still be in unbelief as a nation. Any national conversion or renewal lies in the future when they “look on Him whom they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10-13:1). When Christ returns bodily to earth the will be converted in a single day (Ezekiel 37; Zechariah 3:9).

This likely refers to a remnant within Israel whom Yahweh in some way “seals” so that they are protected. In the language of this verse, this remnant is given the wings of eagles. Earlier in Revelation we saw 144,000 people, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes, called to a specific mission and “sealed” for it (Revelation 7:1-8). That account likely dovetails with this figure, and it is these that are likely nourished to faith in Christ. Their faith comes at some point during this great trial for Israel or right at the end as Christ returns.

This idea of a remnant harmonizes with much of the prophecy regarding Israel. Many of the prophecies indicate that it is a remnant with whom God is concerned and works with until the time is right for the revelation of Christ to His natural brothers (Isaiah 10:20-23; Romans 11:1-5).

There is a statement of time given within this verse for this nourishment process. The phrase “time, times, and half a time occurs twice in Daniel (Daniel 7:25; 12:7). There it refers to the last half of Daniel’s 70th week that commences with the great world leader’s breaking of the covenant with Israel and with the abomination of desolation standing in the Temple. It appears that the phrase should be understood as saying “a year, then 2 years, then half a year.” So it refers to a three and one-half year period and aligns perfectly with other prophecies made by other authors regarding this last of the last days.

**12:15 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 by the flood.**

This act is symbolic of several things Stan will initiate in the last half of the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel to wipe out God’s chosen people, chosen as an ethnic group collectively for a special revelatory role. It is a period which begins with the world leader’s sudden termination of the regular sacrifice of the Jews in their temple, and then a string of events that bring great desolation to them (Daniel 9:27).

**12:16 And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.**

In his vision John sees this symbolic action which speaks of God’s summoning of the various forces of nature at His disposal to thwart Satan’s efforts to destroy Yahweh’s chosen people. God will fend off the torrent of trial in behalf of His people so that the imagery of the Old Testament of them being saved through a flood of many waters will be fulfilled (Isaiah 17:12; 43:2).

**12:17 And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commands of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.**

If the woman represents the people of Israel, then “the other offspring” of the woman represent the gentile church, those of all ethnicities who have come to faith and into relationship with the God of Israel. Satan’s hatred extends not only to the Jews, but also to spiritual Israel. This will be a time of great spiritual hostility.

## Revelation 13

**13:1 And he stood on the sand of the seashore. And 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.**

As a part of Satan's war against God's people, he brings on the scene a certain character. Whether this beast represents the man, or the evil spirits that indwell that man is somewhat difficult to distinguish. Whatever the representation here we know that when Satan can indwell someone it is hard to say where their personality ends and his begins.

This beast represents a key character on the world scene during the final seven years of God's plan to bring Israel back into right terms with Him. Here we see that he comes up out of the sea. There is a close connection in Biblical thought between the sea and the abyss, the location of imprisoned evil spirits (Luke 8:31; Revelation 9:11). We have seen that Satan is given a key, and that these spirits are allowed to go free on the earth (9:1).

We surmise that what being pictured here is a spiritual event in the life of a world leader. The beast represents demonic beings that take control of that leader and bring about through him the many atrocities that occur during this time on earth. This spiritual event explains why the trouble and tribulation that ensues is the worst the world has ever seen.

Several things are said about this beast, the first being regarding his heads, horns and crown. Daniel 7 speaks of the final world empire with similar imagery, utilizing heads and horns to convey the political roots, associations, and powerbase of this individual. In Daniel's vision the same number of horns is used—ten. They are more specifically defined here in Revelation.

An angel, or heavenly figure of some sort, explains to Daniel that ten kings would arise in the final world empire, that an eleventh would arise who would subdue three of these kings, leaving the other seven as part of his coalition or base of power, but with him very clearly in charge (Daniel 7:23-28). So we take this vision of John to be in harmony with that of Daniel, talking about the same person. This beast represents a world ruler who will arise in connection with a kingdom that is really ten distinct kingdoms. The seven heads represent the previous six great world empires, whose tradition this seventh follows in. The ten horns represent the ten kingdom confederacy out of which the beast arises. Hence, the beast has seven heads and ten horns.

The other thing mentioned here is that on his heads are blasphemous names. Daniel has clearly revealed that this person would speak out against the Most High and exalt himself as God (Daniel 7:24-25; 11:26-39). This is represented here by these blasphemous names.

We conclude that the thing being portrayed here is not the arrival of the leader on the scene, but a spiritual event in the life of that leader. The beast represents the demons that take control of him in the middle of the 70th week of Daniel. This spiritual event causes him to abandon a more moderate stance and suddenly turn on Israel.

**13:2 And the beast that I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like that of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.**

The beast John sees combines the stealth and skill of a big cat, the power and viciousness of a bear, and the terror and dominance of a lion. It is a good picture of what Daniel has already projected (See Daniel 7). and what John will yet see regarding the nature of the great world leader of the last days once Satan has lent his power to him.

Satan is fully behind this ruler. Any power and authority that Satan has this individual has. It is doubtful that the world has ever seen such a person. So badly does Satan wish to inflict harm that he is willing to share power. Some would suggest from this that Satan himself enters this ruler and that just may be the case, though the language here does not demand it.

As Christ become a man perhaps Satan, who lacks the creative power to incarnate himself, seeks to do the next best thing by himself taking over the control of this ruler. So we come back to the fact that a spiritual event is being portrayed here of Satanically controlled world leader that comes on the scene in the last days.

**13:3 And I saw one of the heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast.**

One of the seven heads has a scar through which the Spirit is trying to communicate something to us. Since the heads represent kings or kingdoms, the scar probably represents the idea that one of those kings or kingdoms has suffered a terrible blow which it has survived. More will be revealed about this as John's vision proceeds, but this scar is a significant detail through which God wants to reveal something about the identity of this person. In that the wound is in one of the heads, which represent past empires, it is likely that in some sense the last empire is one of the seven revived or come back to life.

The second sentence in this verse could be understood as saying, "And the whole world was amazed after the beast." There is that about this person that inspires confidence. The healed wound, mentioned in conjunction with the earth's amazement, may have a great deal to do with that. What is represented by the wound, either an actual wound to the head of a ruler, or a resurrected empire that had long since died, becomes something that lends great credibility to him and helps him achieve his great influence.

This sentence indicates that the whole world follows him. It is not exactly certain what will be the extent of his personal kingdom, but he will clearly have his way with other kingdoms and authorities that exist at that time. In Daniel's vision this kingdom was so unlike all others that His interest immediately became the identity and nature of that kingdom that clearly crushed and dominated all others. It had no match in terms of cruelty, power, and dominion, it was "unlike all the others" (Daniel 7:19-27). When this verse speaks of the whole world it is likely that it is speaking of the whole global community. This will make this kingdom unlike any other that has ever existed.

**13:4 and they worshiped the dragon, because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?”**

So successful is Satan at this act of counterfeit incarnation, that he deceives the world into believing that when they see this world ruler, they are seeing God and when they hear from the one whose power is behind this ruler they are hearing from God. And so a world that has heard for centuries the message of the kingdom being established on earth, led by the Son of God empowered by the invisible Father from on high, falls for the scheme of one who has been cast out of heaven, who knows his final defeat is imminent, whose only hope is to be an imposter who arrives at the parade early and seizes the spotlight for his own sordid reasons.

That appears to be Satan's tactic and to the demise of all who did not believe the truth, the deceiver bursts on the earthly scene. Powerless to discern, the multitude accords him a thunderous welcome and the worship due their creator. He becomes in their minds the all-powerful one that no one can successfully resist.

**13:5 And there was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies; and authority to act for forty two months was given to him.**

Here we see the limit to the authority of Satan. It is God who grants the right to rule and his granting of the right to this individual ultimately serves His purpose. God allows evil only when He plans to act upon it to bring about what is noble and good. This was the story of the cross, and it is not uncommon in the dealings of God.

It is just and fair that unbelief and rebellion be allowed to run their natural course and be self-destructive. It would be the grossest injustice and the greatest of inequities if this were not the case. And so, God allows this ruler to come on the scene to lead transgressors to the logical end of their unbelief, to establish well the state of rebellion, the end of man's sin. So the end of man's sin punishes him and then sets him up for the day of the Lord, the time of his punishment at the hands of his Creator.

This verse depicts sin becoming as blatant and obvious as unbelievers have hoped for all along. Sin is finally legal and normative. They can sin with the law's arms wrapped around them; they have finally cast off the fetters of God. They are their own law of morality, but only for a limited time. Then they will face the truth to their great horror.

The period is 42 months, consistent with the preservation in chapter 12 of the woman, or Israel, for three and one-half years, with the dreading underfoot of Jerusalem by the Gentiles (11:2), with the testimony of the two witnesses (11:3). This is the final half of Daniel's 70th week, the last three and a half years of God's prescribed plan for Israel, when their rebellion against His covenant is ended and can be said to have reached full bloom, or in Daniel's words, to have “run its course.”

**13:6 And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.**

In exalting himself as God he blasphemes the one who is God, but this individual goes beyond that indirect sort of blasphemy. He opens his mouth, that is, he makes direct statements against God, probably claiming to be the Most High himself. It is possible that he will not deny Yahweh's existence, since there are so many visible signs and seeming knowledge of God on earth, such that men hide themselves from His presence. But he will exalt himself **over** Yahweh, and he will talk down and undermine truth about God, his kingdom and his people. This is what is meant by "blaspheming His tabernacle" as John states. So this earth ruler will be one who not only claims deity, as many world rulers have done and thereby blaspheme the only God, but he claims to be himself the sustainer of all that Isaiah

**13:7 And it was given 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.**

The authority to rule, and to overcome God's chosen ones can only be granted by God Himself. And so, we conclude that God, to advance His purposes of proving His might, power, and glory, allows this evil one not only to make war with His own people, but to overcome them in terms of this world and this life for a season. His rule will include the advance of evil and the repeated defeat of what is good. It will mean victory after victory for lies, deceitful schemes of the evil one, and setback after setback for the truth. It will mean the exaltation of godless people to positions of authority and influence. It will mean the destruction and death of the godly. It will mean that the secular is championed and all that has ever been sacred will be trodden down.

The authority of this leader will be worldwide. The "whole earth" when used in connection with this kingdom does not simply mean the middle east. These words clarify that every people group everywhere will come under the sway of this ruler. So though we know that at the time of his rule other kings will exist, they will in some way fall under his authority and be a part of his system.

**13:8 And all who dwell on 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.**

The worship of this person will be the depth to which the godless sink. That awful deceit will be the bitter end that comes because of their rejection of the truth. Their condemnation is a greater experience of the state of spiritual death and thus separation from the truth and the blessing inherent in it. Their own sin will be their misery.

This will be especially true of Israel, who rejected their true Messiah, accept Satan's counterfeit, and then must experience firsthand the horror of their mistake as he turns on them and begins to bring destruction on them. Protected from this horrible mistake are those who are chosen and elected by God before the world was created. In Eternity past God marked out worshippers of Him among both Jews and Gentiles. They can belong to no one else, so that in this great deceit and apostasy, not one of the ones marked out by God will be lost.

This will be a time for transgressors to run the full course, to experience the natural end of their evil, not for the righteous to fall into the trap of the evil one. And so the elect is preserved and these will be a people of God on earth during this time, though they will suffer greatly at the hands of evil men.

The book of life is said to be “of the Lamb” because it is only through Him that there is any spiritual life. That is the life that belongs to those whose names are found written in it, the life of Christ. Through His death those in the book have been purchased, redeemed, bought out of, the bondage of sin. His life was laid down as the payment for God’s righteous and just demand regarding sin.

This verse would seem to teach against the idea that all persons have their name written in that book, and that they are blotted out only when they die in unbelief. It would seem to indicate that the book is a written record of the election decision.

**13:9 if anyone has an ear, let him hear.**

As in the letters to the churches, this expression is an appeal to those seeking to know the workings of God, His moving, His purposes, His ways, and His heart. It is set in this context most likely because one does not really lay hold of an understanding of God’s workings without understanding His sovereignty, and without having room in their thinking for this idea that He does control the destinies of those He has created. Until we allow for that, we will never really come to an understanding of him and we will never enter the joy of full submission to Him. It is a critical part of any theology to have a strong statement on the sovereignty of God, otherwise we’re playing at theology. The next statement reinforces this idea.

**13:10 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.**

It is God’s plan that stands, and it is His just decree regarding people that is carried out. This verse mentions first captivity, a tool always used by God for discipline of His own. God’s discipline will always be carried out. The second idea mentioned is a statement on capital punishment. God’s justice will always be carried out. The third statement in the verse applies the first two to the faith and perseverance of the saints, saying that in this principle of the sovereignty of God lies the key to the faith and perseverance of the saints. Without going beyond the text, it seems to be saying that just as God’s justice and discipline prevail in individual lives, so His choice of the elect for salvation will prevail regardless of those who might exalt themselves above Him and those who will attempt to deceive people to draw them away after themselves. God’s own are safe. No one can pluck them from His hand.

There are two senses in which the sovereignty of God is the explanation for the faith and perseverance of the saints. The most obvious one is the work of God in their behalf that provides for their faith and perseverance. The second sense in which the sovereignty of God explains the faith and perseverance of His own is that the knowledge of that strengthens their faith which then inspires them to persevere. In any case, and both should be emphasized, even in the most dreadful attack on truth, among the chosen race and the entire community of the elect, none will be lost.

**13:11 And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon.**

John sees a second beast which represents a second personage who comes on the earthly scene. Whereas the first beast comes out of the sea, this one arises from the earth. The difference is noted, but the significance is not. Perhaps it is that the existence of the first person was a special work of Satan in terms of his even being alive. This person arises as any normal individual would.

This beast has two horns that are like a lamb. Again, we are uncertain what this symbolizes, but knowing that Satan's scheme is to counterfeit truth, it is likely that there will be that about this person that which counterfeits the ministry of the Lamb of God. There will be that about them that appears to reflect divine power. In that he speaks like a dragon, he speaks for the dragon, or Satan. He has great power and influence with his words. They are words that intimidate to insure response.

**13:12 And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it do worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.**

This individual, by his persuasive words and powerful speech, has a great impact on the earth. He is the world ruler's right-hand man, entrusted with his authority even when he is present. His power of persuasion enables him to convince the world to worship the world ruler. He is the public figure through whom much of the blasphemy connected with the first beast is carried out. The wound is again mentioned. It is a big factor in this great deception foisted upon the earth. It lends credence to the lie in a way that will soon be seen.

**13:13 And he performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to earth in the presence of men.**

Not only does this person speak persuasively, but he is able to back the words up with great power, just as true prophets of God had done in the past in their contests against false Gods. The whole scheme of Satan, meant to destroy Israel and God's chosen people, is elaborate and thorough and very convincing so that those who have balked at the truth accept it with open arms.

**13:14 And he deceives those who dwell on earth because of the signs which it is 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.**

Here we see clarified to a greater degree the wound of the beast and why it has such persuasive power. It apparently represents an actual wound which was fatal, so that the person died. But then he came back to life. So a resurrection happens, though the amount of time transpiring between the death of this person and their return to life is never revealed. It is also very likely that it is not an actual resurrection but the appearance of one pulled off by the master of deception himself. This is the reason why the wound is so powerfully influential among the people of the earth.

It is this wound that this second person, the great false prophet can exploit to the utmost because of his own demonic power to create at least the appearance of miracles. His influence leads people to be so enamored with the world ruler that they make a likeness of him. This is not simply a statue to commemorate him as a world leader but is meant to be an object of worship. They are fully convinced at this point that they have in this world ruler encountered their creator, and the fatal wound and the resurrection have given them the proof they need. But more proof will follow so that their deception will be guaranteed.

**13:15 And there was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast might even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.**

To this great spiritual leader is granted by Satan, but ultimately with God's permission, to create this great deceptive illusion of giving breath and life to this lifeless image. This could of course easily be done by demons, and they could very easily create the illusion that the image or statue is able to speak.

Why does God allow this? We don't know all the reasons. We do know that it is because they have not believed the truth that He has revealed so that ultimately, they are left only with lies. God allows them to be punished by their own sin.

The consequence of sin thus running unchecked and relatively unrestrained by God is the persecution of the righteous. And so, during this rampage by evil we see that those who refuse to bow down to the image lose their lives. Whether the execution comes at the hands of the image of the beast, the false spiritual leader, or their followers is not certain. The wording of the text seems to favor the idea that the image of the beast somehow has this capacity.

As difficult as this entire scene might have been at some times in history to imagine, it is no longer too hard given the capability of present technology combined with the "mark" that is given to the worshipers. Here the image is said to be that which causes them to be put to death not necessarily the actual executioner.

**13:16 And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead.**

Much has been said, written, and speculated about what this mark will be. John does not specifically say, and the various speculations have changed with the times. In today's world our minds think in terms of UPC codes, embedded chips and the like. It is difficult to say with any certainty because what is common today was unheard of fifty years ago and what will be fifty years from now is unheard of today. The only thing we need to know for sure is that there will be this order given for all inhabitants of the earth to be identified in this way. The implications of such a thing are of course huge, and it reveals the fact that this world will arrive at the point that the government is able to exert unheard of and unparalleled control over the citizens. The ensuing verses indicate more about this mark.



**13:17 and he provides that no one should be able to buy or sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.**

This reveals the purpose or at least a result of the action by “the beast” of marking the inhabitants of earth. It is an act of control, how he keeps track of and keeps tabs on the citizens. One can easily imagine several scenarios that could develop in such a political landscape. The greatest control this grants him is that no one who does not have this mark is able to transact business or be involved in commerce. They will either be a part of his system, or they will be starved out.

We have already seen that if they don’t worship him, they die. This mark probably demands oath of loyalty or the like. It is said to be either the numbers of his name or simply his name. The “number of his name” is a difficult phrase for us to interpret, though we can easily speculate. The next verse gives more information on what this number Isaiah

**13:18 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 understanding of this verse involves three things. It is wisdom to those who have these three. First, one must have understanding. It is only the one who has understanding who can gain the wisdom that the verse will impart. This likely refers to the one who is not deceived by the great apostasy that John has spoken of. It is for those who, like the men of Zebulon,” understand the times.

Second, it involves a calculation. The Greek word is from ψηφίζω meaning to figure out or count, as in “count the cost.” There is some sense in which this number must be “calculated.” It most likely refers to a process of discernment rather than a mathematical calculation, but this is not certain.

Thirdly, it involves this specific information—two facts. His number is said to be that of a man, and it is said to be six hundred sixty-six. When John says his number is that of a man, it gets somewhat mysterious, except Jewish numerologists viewed the number six as the number of man.

Anything beyond these words of the text is largely speculation now. It seems likely that to those living at the time of these events this verse will allow them to have wisdom and make the proper “calculation.” There will be present in them all three elements, the understanding, the ability to make the calculation, and the presence of some actual number within the mark itself. Those three things and the reminder provided by this verse will allow them to have wisdom.

We know that many world leaders have come and gone who demonstrate some of the things that are characteristic of the beast. This verse enables us not to be misled into thinking that the day of the Lord has come. The verse is wisdom to anyone at any time wishing to discern how the world events of their lifetime stack up against the predictions of Biblical Prophecy. We need not be fools, and we need not be misled by anyone. There is what we need in this verse for wisdom in the matter of discerning the great apostasy when it arrives on the scene.

## Revelation 14

**14:1 And 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.**

This verse stands in stark contrast to those verses immediately preceding it in chapter 13. There godless are presented as bearing the mark of the beast, the world ruler through whom Satan rules and exerts his power and influence in his attempt to trick humanity. They belong to him, and the result for them will be deception and destruction. Those in this verse belong to Christ. These bear His mark and come under His protective care.

The timing of this event will be established in later verses. It has to do with a very special work God wishes to do during the last half of the 70th week of His plan for Israel. It has to do with the 144,000 who were specially chosen of God as part of the events that occurred when the sixth seal was opened. Just before they are chosen in chapter 7, chapter 6 has closed with a scene that describes the kings, commanders and other great men of the earth seeking to be hidden from God and from the wrath of the Lamb, because they say, “the great day of their wrath has come.” It is immediately after this that an angel commands four other angels, who stand ready to execute God’s judgment on earth, not to do so until the 144,000 are sealed.

So these individuals are chosen of God to be on earth during the actual “day of the Lord.” At the same time, they are protected in some way from that wrath and will not be objects of it. Here in this verse, they stand with Christ on Mount Zion, that special place where God chose to place His name and make Himself known to man. Now He will begin to hold men accountable for that understanding.

**14:2 And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters, and like the sound of thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of many harpists playing on their harps.**

With the Lamb and the 144,000 standing on Mount Zion the earthly scene is set. With that John describes this great sound coming from heaven that he describes at first as a voice. It is a strong voice like the sound of the rushing of water. It is a loud, commanding voice, startling like thunder. As he hears it, he realizes it is music, sounding like a great ensemble of harps. Shifting his attention to this great noise he looks to heaven to find the source of the sound.

**14:3 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 forty four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.**

The challenge in this verse is to determine who “they” Isaiah Is it the 144,000? Or is it the voice from heaven. The grammar favors it being the 144,000 since the voice is referred to as singular. But the context favors it referring to the voice from heaven which though it is spoken of as a singular voice, it is described as many. It is reasonable to assume that in hearing the voice, John recognizes it as speaking intelligible words, and that from heaven such an ensemble would be able to achieve what eludes such an earthly ensemble, singing as one. The result is that it is accurate to describe the sound as “a voice,” and precise to show it to be many voices, a heavenly choir. It is coming from before the throne, which is in the temple of heaven (16:17).

This choir sings a special song which only the 144,000 can learn. It simply eludes everyone else. If it is true that all believers have been raptured from the earth by this time, then these are the only children of God alive on the planet. They are the beginning of a new multitude that will form because of their presence as John’s message will eventually show. Whether the song they learn is an actual song, or if it symbolizes something, such as fellowship and intimacy with God, or even the Gospel message, is open to conjecture. The point of the verse is that there is that which only they know, along with the heavenly company, because of who they are as God’s specially chosen ones.

**14:4 These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first-fruits to God and to the Lamb.**

Three things are said to be true of the 144,000 in this verse. First, they are morally pure. They are so amid the filth of the day because of a decision they have been enabled to follow through on of keeping themselves clean. Second, they are disciples, obedient to the wish and desire of Christ whatever it involves. Third, they are first-fruits, unique and special in quality, and the first of an era. They are the beginnings of a revived and renewed Israel. They are such because of the sovereign work of God whereby they were redeemed from among men for the purposes of the day and hour that God is bringing about on the earth. Two additional things are stated about these 144,000 in the next verse.

**14:5 And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.**

This is a very significant statement. Among the other things which accompany the day of the Lord as it bursts forth on the earth’s kingdoms, the prophet Zephaniah speaks of a remnant who will be raised up in Israel who will “do no wrong and tell no lies (Zephaniah 3:13). The 144,000 are the beginning of that renewal movement God brings among His ancient people.

Through John God describes to us how that great work prophesied in the Old Testament will be carried out as He writes on the heart of His ancient people His laws and statutes. That promise will have been fulfilled once already by this time in His Church. Now he will turn and do what even that Church thought impossible. He will change the heart of the ancient people from stone and turn it to Him. It will begin with the chosen of the chosen, 12,000 from each tribe. It should not be construed however, that His work at this time will be exclusive in Israel as the next verse will demonstrate.

**14:6 And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;**

Even on the day of the Lord, the time ordained in earth's events for God's wrath to be poured out and for humanity's sins to catch up with them, the mercy of God will still be operating, and God will still be calling people to Himself. The opportunity afforded by the gospel message will still be offered. The invitation will go out to every corner of the earth and all its people. It will be the work of people but miraculously driven along, as always, by heavenly forces. The work of the Gospel carries on. The elect of God is present and coming to faith even as the work of His judgment is being done.

**14:7 and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heavens and the earth and the sea and springs of water."**

The gospel message of that day will relate closely to the current happenings that the earth is witnessing. One can only imagine that as the book of Revelation is played out, as the characters come on the scene and as the events follow the script it will be a time of tremendous opportunity in terms of the hearts of the earth's people. We know that the world will generally know of God and even of Christ at this point. The battle will be in their minds to overcome the deluding influence of the day. Revelation will help persuade the elect and though we do not know the extent of the effectiveness of the gospel, we know that the opportunity will be ample for repentance. The angel brings to earth the message for men to look around them at the events of their day and recognize the authors of them for who they are.

**14:8 And another angel, a second one, following, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."**

The angel who brings the message to earth of repentance is followed by an announcement of the destruction of Babylon. Babylon's destruction is a landmark event in the program of God and the whole of chapter 17 speaks to this great event.

There is great mystery surrounding what Babylon represents. It is certain that it does not represent the actual city of Babylon, although this should not be concluded too hastily or regarded as an impossibility. Babylon's identity will be discussed more fully as more information is given in chapter 17. But we might be wise to conclude that it is called Babylon because its root is Babel (Genesis 10). The humanism of that most ancient kingdom remains the driving force of every great earthly kingdom since.

The statement that “she has made all nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality” is a demonstration of this. It is one that is repeated several times in John’s vision. Whatever else might be said regarding Babylon, this is its primary characteristic that it has taken the world in an immoral direction.

Within this statement about Babylon five significant things are indicated that are certain. First, this Babylon has led all nations in a moral direction. Its impact has been international in scope. In some sense it originated the moral climate that prevails in the end times. Second, Babylon’s influence has been subtle even as it has been sure. It has lured whole nations into its way of thinking and living so that its influence can be compared to the giving of wine to drink. So the picture is of sensual and alluring influence that the nations of the earth are attracted to, not that they are forced into. Third, Babylon’s influence appeals to the passions of humankind. It is a potion that arouses the natural passions of the human soul so that it has a certain irresistibility or addictive capacity with respect to humankind. It appeals to all the appetites of the flesh. Fourth, Babylon’s addicting and alluring influence is all in an immoral direction. It brings about in the kingdoms of the world the blind, impassioned pursuit of immorality of all sorts. Fifth, God will bring specific judgment on it and its influence will be brought to a complete and utter end as a part of the final offensive of God that will make Christ the king of the earth.

**14:9 And 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 upon his hand,**

The third angel gives a warning about the direction events are taking on earth. As the earth is receiving the great world ruler and blindly and giddily submitting itself to his whims and wishes, there is ample warning given of divine consequences. Even as they begin their love affair with this false messiah, they are warned about worshipping him and receiving his mark.

The choice to refuse to worship this “beast” is not from a practical standpoint, simple. To refuse to receive his mark is to commit financial suicide (13:16-17). The choice will be in this sense difficult and yet to those elect of God, the only possible option given the consequences of the next verse.

**14:10 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.”**

By the choice of worshipping the beast, God wants man to know they are falling for a subtle trick. They are drinking a kind of spiritual poison that results in them experiencing the full measure of God’s anger. If it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, it only makes sense that God will place a warning label on the bottle! There will be specific warning regarding the drink men are choosing, its effect and its consequences. They are terrifying. The choice will be to suffer the loss of the things of earth or to suffer the loss of the things of eternity. It will be appropriately a test of faith and trust, the ultimate one in a sense.

The punishment is severe, whether it is actual fire and brimstone or simply the varied plagues of the day with a carry-over into the actual fire and brimstone of Hell. It raises the possibility that it is possible to be holy and pure of heart, sinless, and yet inflict just punishment that is unmitigated and ongoing and not be bothered or condemned by the sight of it. That is a staggering thing to us who cannot comprehend the perfections of God. It is also a staggering thing to recognize how awful evil is to arouse from a truly just judge such a penalty. What must be the true moral nature of our acts?

This is the appointed end that awaits the wicked. Such an end is graphically demonstrated by the first occurrence of the word brimstone in the utter destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:24). It is stated that this brimstone is the end that awaits the wicked (Psalm 11:5-7). It is revealed that this is the end that will come on the anti-Christ (Ezekiel 38:22-23). Jesus warned of it (Luke 17:29). It is reported later in this prophecy of John as occurring in the case of all wicked beings (19:20; 20:10, 15; 21:8).

**14:11 And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.**

Those who worship the beast and his image and whoever receives his mark, and it seems that it is only received if worship is given, are sentenced to an eternal punishment. Their punishment is described as torment that yields smoke. It would seem to be referring to hell or the lake of fire, in that it is very severe, it is ongoing, and it is eternal.

**14:12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.**

If the previous statement like this in 13:10 emphasizes the sovereignty of God in the matter of perseverance, this statement represents the task of humanity in perseverance. That task is to keep the commands and to maintain one's trust in God. It is the manifestation of that work done by God's Spirit within His children.

In that the verse begins with the word "here" it is natural to ask "where?". The best way to understand this is to substitute the little phrase "in this". In this great event—the final punishment and end of those who accept the mark of the beast and worship him—are the persevering saints vindicated and rewarded. In this the glory of their lives is manifested. It is this event and the promise of deliverance that it holds for them, that has motivated their perseverance over the centuries.

**14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write, blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."**

In this verse John reports a statement made by an unidentified voice from heaven and then the agreement of the Holy Spirit, and the fuller revelation given by Him of the meaning of the statement. Aside from the statements themselves, it is interesting to note the interplay of the two forces. There is the heavenly statement of a profound truth, and then there is the Holy Spirit explaining that truth, giving understanding that relates to experience and application.

The key thing is to understand what is meant by the words, “from now on.” Does it mean from the time of John and the giving of this vision, or is it speaking from the point in time represented by the vision, the point in time when the followers of the beast are punished? Since the vision is dealing with a point in time at the very end of all earthly kingdoms and right before the initiation of Christ’s kingdom on earth, it would be difficult to see why death from that point on would be considered a blessing. But with the horrors being poured out on earth the perspective is certainly an understandable one.

It seems better to say that death for the righteous is a blessed thing from the time of John, since it would mean release from the awful turmoil of the earth as it moves toward its destined appointment with the satanic ruler and then the coming of the great day of the Lord. Those who die will experience none of the unrest and turmoil. They will not be called on to give their lives and blood for their faith but will have only the reward and blessing of the kingdom of God awaiting them. This is the witness of the Spirit and His great comfort given to the hearts of the saints in their moments of grief at the death of others and in the moment of their own death.

This voice from heaven can be taken to be that from one stepping outside of the time of the vision and into John’s time, making this statement to the Church that awaits this great day when their perseverance is vindicated. It could also be a reference to those who have come to faith through the testimony of the 144,000, but who are killed because of persecution or the plagues which God begins to pour out in conjunction with the great day of the Lord, a scenario developed in 15:2-4.

**14:14 And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand.**

This is one whom John refers to a “one like a son of man.” That is the title used by Daniel of the coming ruler (Daniel 7:13), used by Jesus of Himself, one John had personally heard Jesus use many times. So this is none other than Christ Himself.

The crown Jesus wears symbolizes special authority or dominion. His task is an important one and for this He has been anointed and appointed. It is to judge and rule the earth. There will come a time when God’s angels will be present on the earth led by Christ, with a very specific mission which is revealed in the next verse. It is a moment long prophesied and presented here to John in figurative language that ties it with the rest of the pictures of the day in Scripture. The sickle, a sharp one, is the instrument of harvest, prepared to do that work which it has not done to this point. It is the work of judgment that has been entrusted to Christ.

**14:15 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, because the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of earth is ripe.”**

If it is Christ who sits on the cloud, and it seems apparent that it is, then this is a great picture of His submission to God the Father, and even His agents. Christ is clearly the Anointed One, the one wearing the crown, yet He does not act until the order is given by the angels.

Now, what temple does the angel come out of? Quite likely the one on earth. The detail of a subsequent angel coming from the temple in heaven is meant to be a contrast (17). This angel coming out of the earthly temple has witnessed firsthand the abomination set up in the temple. This angel has likely visited the earth to witness its condition firsthand as in the case of Sodom. In harmony with the figure of harvest, the determination of the timing of the harvest would be made from the field.

Two details in the Angel's order are important. The first is the fact that the hour has finally arrived for judgment. It is the patience of God that has delayed it continually for thousands of years. Finally, the "hour" of His mercy gives way to the hour of His wrath and judgment.

The second detail of the statement that is significant is that the earth is ripe. All things that God has ordained and planned before judgment have come to completion and maturity. Not a detail is undone. None of the elect are lost. There are none of the lost who have not had fair opportunity. Earthly kingdoms have run their ordained courses. It is time to judge. There is still history to be carried out on earth, but this is a landmark order that comes from God. The earth is ripe. Yahweh' earthly temple completely desecrated, marks the fact that transgressions have run their course. They have finished.

**14:16 And he who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth; and the earth was reaped.**

If this one who looks like a son of man is Christ, it is He who initiates judgment of the planet. The earth is reaped, a symbolic picture of the change that He brings to earth. It is the end of an era and the beginning of a new one. It is the season of the harvest. It is the final reckoning with the true nature of things, the revelation of truth, and by that truth the condemnation of all that is evil.

**14:17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven and he also had a sharp sickle.**

Another figure comes on the scene now, probably to reveal greater detail of the judgment of the earth. The identity of this angel is unknown, but it is noted that this angel emerges from the temple in heaven, where God's throne is (16:17). Whether this means the other angel came out of the temple in heaven as well or whether this means the other angel came out of the temple on earth is open to speculation. Regardless, this angel comes prepared to join in the harvest of the earth that Christ has commenced.

It could be that what is being pictured in these verses is two specific acts that occur in conjunction with the day of the Lord. That Christ's work of harvesting pictured in the previous verse was that of gathering the good fruit, His own, and that the angel's work is the work of judgment that begins to be carried out, the hour of God's wrath as it is poured out on evil men and an evil world left behind for judgment.



**14:18 And another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called out with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.”**

It is quite a picture the meaning of which should not be speculated upon with great dogmatism. We know that there is fire in this heavenly altar and here this angel is said to have power over fire. This then may not be so much a reflection of an ancient world view that saw beings behind all natural law but could be simply the angel that tends the fire in the altar in heaven. For as the earthy altar, which is built after the pattern of the heavenly one, had a continuous fire that had to be maintained, so this heavenly one may be fueled by a ministering spirit. This angel also will have power over the fire, or more accurately the various fires, that will come upon the earth as a part of God's judgment on the great day of the Lord. This may be the explanation for the voice that came out of the altar in 9:13.

This angel, one of the executioners of God's judgment on the earth, calls to the angel who has come out of the temple of heaven with these words that again reflect the ordained nature of the time. The sickle is again said to be sharp, alluding to the fact that the judgments are prepared and ready. The grapes are said to be ripe. Things on earth have run their appointed course. From the altar under which John has seen the souls of the martyred saints, and through which the prayers of the saints are offered up to God, comes this testimony and command regarding the hour. It is from the angel who ministers at the focal point of redemption, the place where God and man are reconciled.

**14:19 And the angel swung his sickle to the earth, and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great winepress of the wrath of God.**

In figure this represents the intervention of God to bring about the appointed judgment of God in which unbelieving men will face God's wrath against their sin and rebellion. The angel is said to do a work of gathering. The judgment of God will be a world-wide phenomenon, but we also know that it will have an earthly focal point. This verse may allude to this in the figure it uses.

The figure speaks of the winepress of God's wrath. In other places we are told that men will drink the wine of God's wrath. Here the figure is slightly different because God wishes to illustrate the horror, pain, and distress of divine judgment. He chooses the winepress to do that. It pictures the thoroughly destructive nature of what it does to evil.

**14:20 And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the winepress up to the horses' bridle, for a distance of two hundred miles.**

God's winepress is given a physical location on earth, spoken of as “the city.” This likely refers to Jerusalem, the place God chose to put His name above all others. It is also the place where the abomination of desolation occurs, the ultimate act of defiance by man that leads to this destructive judgment of the day of the Lord. It is designated elsewhere in Scripture as the place to which God will gather all nations for a day of reckoning (Joel 3:2).

Outside of that city Jesus atoned for the sin of all who would believe. Then, outside the city, the blood will be shed of those who defiantly reject Him. So outside the city there is what can only be described as a great blood-letting, an enormous destruction of life. The event has been spoken of by earlier prophets and will be spoken of later in John's book. This is a startling description of unparalleled carnage. There is a tradition that says that the water of the Kidron flowed red from the great sacrifice of Passover lambs in Jerusalem in the spring of the year. Whether or not that is true, here will be something like that on a larger scale.

It is described in such a way that it depicts an event that will far surpass the horror of Gettysburg and the beaches of Normandy for the loss of human life. John sees stream of blood that is five feet deep and 200 miles long. Whether or not this vision will be fulfilled in the plain literal sense, or if the vision simply portrayed a great and horrible battle cannot be stated with absolute certainty. It would be characteristic of Biblical prophecy to speak in plain literal language with a plain literal fulfillment, a detail revealed by God beforehand that is marveled at when it comes to pass.

## Revelation 15

**15:1 And 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.**

This is like the beginning of chapter 12. John describes what he sees in heaven and calls it great and marvelous. It is such because it is not just a random sight but reveals truth about the future. It is a sign, something that gives information and direction about destinations and sights along the way. John sees seven angels each of whom had power over a plague that would be inflicted on the inhabitants of earth. With the outpouring of these plagues, God's judgment in the great day of the Lord is ended.

So though similar in beginning to chapter 12, chapter 15 marks a return to the flow of chapter 11, interrupted by chapters 12-14. Chapters 12-14 deal with characters and events of the entire seventieth week. It is a pause of sorts, to go back and pick up some of the detail. Chapter 15 is a return to how chapter 11 ended, the backside of the parenthesis. The seven plagues come upon the earth as part of the events heralded by the seventh trumpet. They are the third woe that is to come upon the inhabitants of earth.

**15:2 And I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name standing on the sea, holding harps of God.**

John sees in heaven those who have come off victorious from the beast, that is, those who have not been taken in by the strong, deluding influence that Satan foists on the world through this great world leader. They have also come off victorious from his image which had been granted power to kill those who do not worship that image (13:17). They are not deluded by this show of miraculous power, nor by the threat and danger with respect to their physical lives. Neither have they accepted his mark but instead have accepted the truth.

All these are in heaven. We do not know if they got there by death, or by rapture, but death is the likely explanation since that is clearly the consequence of not worshipping the beast. Here this special group stands before God with harps, making music in the heavenly kingdom. There are some similarities between this and the opening scene of chapter 14, but that does not mean they entirely correlate. This sight does relate to the statement in 14:13 that speaks of the rest of those who die in the Lord. At the hour of earth's great travail and sinful man's great horror, there is peace, joy, deep reverence, and thanksgiving being expressed in heaven.

**15:3 And they sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou king of the nations."**

We are not exactly sure in what sense this is the song of Moses. It appears to be a shorter, summary version of the song sung by Israel in celebration of the destruction of the Egyptian army in the sea by Yahweh (Exodus 15), or of the one written by Moses at God's direction to be used as a witness against them in their unfaithfulness (Deuteronomy 32).

This is also said to be the song of the Lamb, or Christ. Several things must be said about this. First, Christ in his pre-incarnate state may have had a role in its inspiration, being present in some way in the affairs of Israel during Moses' time (1 Corinthians 10:4). Second, though it does not follow the text of Moses' song, it certainly enhances the ideas of it. Third, it is perhaps in our way of thinking a new song that embraces the theme of Moses' song and from a heavenly perspective simply a re-creation of the same song. Fourth, it is a powerful thought to realize that the song of Moses would be sung in heaven by this company that most likely includes both Jew and Gentile.

Whatever the origin of this song, its lines are testimony "from the other side" of the greatness of God's works, their righteousness, and of His sovereignty. It is inspiring that this is the testimony of sight not faith. It comes after all the evidence is in. It is not simply the thought of hope. It is a testimony against the rebellion of man for all eternity.

**15:4 Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name: For thou alone art holy. For all nations will come and worship before thee, for thy righteous acts have been revealed.**

As fear grips the people of earth, the song of heaven poses this great question. Reverence and respect and awe of the Creator are the end results toward which God's plan is moving. "Thou alone art holy" is the great lesson of history. If there is one statement about God that rises from a look at the history of humanity it is this one. It is another important goal that God has in His plan, to bring creation to a knowledge of this great fact that He is wholly other in terms of all that exists.

The worship and submission of all nations will naturally follow the universal knowledge of the holiness of God. This will all flow from the consummation of revelation when God makes Himself known in all His power and glory on the day of the Lord. Revelation, God revealing Himself to man, will be the key element in the final salvation of creation as it has been in the salvation of souls throughout time.

**15:5 After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened.**

Back in 11:19 we are also told that the temple in heaven is opened. In that place it is said that the ark of God appears. Here once again, the temple is opened and John calls it "the temple of the tabernacle of testimony." The tabernacle was constructed by Moses as a model of the real thing in heaven (Hebrews 8:8). Its purpose was to provide a place for the ark of the testimony. The ark was itself a shelter for the tablets of the law, the terms of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. So John's statement shows this understanding, that the temple in heaven was the one after which the tabernacle of the testimony built by Moses was modeled.

This is a great sight to a Jewish man of any era, to see the temple of heaven and perhaps the ark of the testimony. Those were the actual objects which served as the pattern for the earthly things. In both cases in Revelation, the opportunity to see the temple of heaven opened is mentioned in passing. It is a very significant detail that means that John was privileged to see what Moses saw on the mountain.

**15:6 and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their breasts with golden girdles.**

This is a picture of the absolute righteousness of God's indignation that is about to be carried out regarding sinful man. These special agents of God emerge from the temple to do their work. Theirs is not a hypocritical violence to be carried out in the name of religion. It is truly divinely ordered according to God's standards of holiness, righteousness and justice.

The mission begins in the soberest and gravest of ways, in the temple of heaven. The angels are clothed in the fabric of priests, for in this work they are about to begin they are carrying out a service to both God and His family of saints. There have been devilish crusades carried out on earth by a corrupt church in God's name. They were the work of sinful man imagining God's justice and righteousness to be their companion. It was not. This is the real thing, beginning from the heart of God, carried out with the purest of motives by hand-picked ministers of God.

**15:7 And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.**

Men will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, and angel had announced previously (14:10). Here, that wrath is pictured as it is served up in bowlfuls. They come from one of the four living creatures, those special ministering spirits that seem to be the personal servants who continually occupy themselves with carrying out the special wishes of God.

In an earthly scenario, these would bring wine to the king. In this heavenly one, they bring from Him the "wine of His wrath" to be served to rebels on earth. It is a grave thought that is tacked on to the end of this verse. It is a finality that is awful to ponder for the unbeliever, that the one they oppose lives forever and ever, and the sentence He passes is an eternal one. They have rolled the stone which will return to crush them and there will be no reprieve.

**15:7 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.**

There is a tremendous and fearsome divine intensity that is behind these final plagues. We see descriptions of this kind of display of God's glory only a couple of times in Scripture (Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11). There is that about these events that is so significant that heaven is absolutely focused on carrying them out, and normal activity will not resume until they are completed. The work is a sure one with all of God's power and glory behind it. This is a sober and solemn moment, profound, awe-inspiring, fearsome and terrible at once. Heaven waits.

## Revelation 16

**16:1 And I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth.”**

We do not know the source of this voice. It could well be that of God the Father Himself who alone knows the day and the hour of such things. But John does not name the source. Regardless of who the speaker is it is a divine order to “start the ball.” And so, the hour has arrived for the end of God’s judgment, the fiercest part, to commence. We understand that much has already happened to humanity and the planet. But there will be a horror to these judgments that is unparalleled. Sadly, it will be a time that will confirm the degree to which evil is entrenched in humanity.

**16:2 And the first angel went and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image.**

The judgment of God inflicts men with personal pain here. It appears selective here, affecting only those who have taken to themselves the mark of the beast. It is not that God’s judgment is selective. The fact is that His judgment would extend to all, were not the requirement of His justice met through the sacrifice of Christ in the lives of believers. This idea is evident in the judgment of the firstborn in Egypt, where only the presence of the blood of the Passover lamb allowed God’s judgment to pass over a household. So the judgment is realized only in those who have chosen to worship the beast and taken His mark.

This gives rise to interesting speculation. Are there those on earth, besides the 144,000 who were sealed by God, who have not taken the mark of the beast. This verse can be taken as implicitly teaching that and it is likely, given the activity of the 144,000 and two other witnesses that were spoken of in chapter eleven.

**16:3 And the second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood, like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.**

If a powerful being wished to do something which dramatically impacted life on this planet, its oceans are the places of its vulnerability. While we do not know exactly what this judgment is, its effect would certainly be catastrophic.

The phrase “like a dead man” seems noteworthy. It may be added to show that the judgment effects more than the color of the ocean. The blood of a dead man is not liquid. It becomes a jell-like substance, and eventually powder. The statement “like blood” would have been sufficient to describe color change. It seems likely that John was nothing more than the fact that the ocean was red. Aside from any constitutional change in the water, this language is certainly conveying the idea that there was no longer in the ocean that which supported life. It all adds to the overall pall of death and destruction that is settling over the earth.

**16:4 And the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and springs of water; and they became blood.**

With this judgment the fresh water supplies on earth are contaminated. The statement says they became blood, a classic metaphor in which one thing is said to be something that it is clearly not (i.e., “All flesh is grass” Isaiah 40:6). The key message being conveyed is that the rivers have been injured and become injurious with respect to their normal function on the planet. There is certainly the plain message that the water is undrinkable and unusable.

**16:5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous art Thou, who art and who wast, O Holy One, because Thou didst judge these things.**

As in 14:18 when we saw an angel with power over fire, so here we see the angel who has power over the waters. Again, this may not be a simple reflection of a primitive world view. That is certainly possible and within the normal principle of revelation for God to have communicated in terms and expressions understood and used by those He was communicating to. But it could be that the angel being referred to here is simply the one who had initiated the judgment over the waters and so exercised power over them. It could also be that among the myriad of angels who help maintain God’s order, there are specific areas of responsibility delineated. It could be that this angel is the “angel of the waters” in that sense.

The real significant thing is what is being said by the angel. It is the testimony of one who has watched humanity, the world, and God as interactions have occurred over millennia. This being bears witness to the justice of what he now sees. The next verse will explain the logic of this declaration.

**16:6 for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink. They deserve it.**

This is a statement that vindicates God in pouring out this horrible judgment on the earth. The judgments are directed at those with the mark of the beast, those who have embraced his lie about being God and did so because they rejected the claims of the true God. They are spiritual offspring of Satan, like the many who have resisted the truth through the centuries and persecuted those who were its bearers. They deserve what they get. There will be no “innocent parties” who get caught up in these judgments.

**16:7 And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.”**

The voice of that ministering spirit who tends the altar, under which were the souls of all who had given their lives for the faith (6:9), who had cried out to God, “How long before our blood is avenged!” now bears witness to the just nature of these judgments. First, they are true. They are in line with all that truth teaches. They authenticate what is true and what is false. They are in line with the principles of truth even though very severe. Second, the judgments are righteous. They are right even though they inflict great personal pain and suffering.

This testimony is a great reminder of moral reality—both the existence of God and that of hard and fast boundaries of right and wrong, and the existence of unalterable consequences when those are violated. It is so easy to be contaminated by the world and to believe that anything violent or severe is inherently wrong. This is untrue. Judgment by God is both true and righteous.

**16:8 And the fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given to it to scorch man with fire.**

So far God has infected rebellious humanity with malignant sores, has poisoned the planets oceans and made its rivers undrinkable. He now causes a great global warming to occur. It is not a matter of a few degrees. It is a scorching heat, and this on a planet where the water has already been wiped out. How God does this is of great interest. Will it be changing earth's orbit or causing sufficient flare-ups on the sun itself to bring this about? With what we are learning about the solar system we can imagine a few ways in which this judgment could be brought about. What we see is that one by one the things that stabilize and sustain the planet are being destabilized. Those which nurtures life becomes that which destroys it.

**16:9 And men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.”**

There is on earth now, despite the rapture of the Church, sufficient witness to and knowledge of the truth so that John and the Holy Spirit here marvel at the stubbornness of unbelief. We know from the description of the breaking of the sixth seal in chapter that there is in the earth now the specific knowledge that the things that are happening are coming because of the wrath of God and the Lamb. There was at that point a dread of His presence and what was to come. There was a hiding out to escape His wrath (6:15-17). Here however the name of God is blasphemed.

We believe that a period of around three years has passed since the events recorded at the end of chapter six. There has been a noticeable change in the spiritual climate on earth and the growth of a very arrogant collective spirit in humanity. There is apparently full knowledge of who is responsible and the meaning of the events. But there is apparently also the belief that the wrath of God can be thwarted, so great is the deception. Not only does humanity refuse to repent, but they get caught up in the blasphemous spirit of the world leader and offend God even worse.

It is possible that by the name of God being blasphemed, John is speaking of the character of Yahweh being assaulted by humanity. But the blasphemy of the name of God may specifically indicate that the name Yahweh is blasphemed as well. As that name is being recovered more and more in the literature of the Church after being lost for centuries, many in the secular world have gained knowledge of it. It is not hard to imagine that name specifically being derided in the last of the last days. Satan might specially delight in bringing about this level of rebellion among those who bear Yahweh's image.



**16:10 And the fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain.**

Whether this refers to physical darkness or spiritual darkness, or both is uncertain. Verses 13-14 indicate that greater spiritual darkness is coming soon. This verse expresses the pain that comes because of the phenomenon this represents. The picture of the gnawing of tongues is vivid. It projects the picture of great torment and torture of soul.

It is easy to see how even physical darkness would do such a thing to those suffering from malignant sores, severe climate change, a lack of fresh water, an unparalleled heat wave along with any lingering effects of earlier judgments. The effects of prolonged darkness on human emotions have long been noted.

The fact that the bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast seems to be a picture of something happening with respect to his power and authority. We can speculate that it may represent some greater turning over by God of this kingdom to the powers of darkness, in which case we know there would be great physical suffering. This is the direction this last earthly kingdom is traveling spiritually as John's words in verses 13-14 will show.

**16:11 And they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.**

Once again John marvels at the degree of the deception on earth that leads to humanity's unbelief. Again, there seems to be an understanding on the part of humanity regarding who is responsible for these plagues. But there is an unwillingness to acknowledge the truth clearly implied in them. In fact, there is an opposite reaction. There is a continued belief by rebellious man that he will "cast off his fetters," and be his own master (Psalm 2:3). This belief sets man up for the final two judgments of God.

**16:12 And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the east.**

This great river which had already been "turned to blood," now is completely dried up. This judgment is a trap, that allows the armies of the kings of the east to be mobilized in a greater way, and to move freely in a westerly direction. These kings are apparently still enjoying some measure of rule and authority, though under the authority of the one great world leader. This judgment comes as a part of a specific military strategy of God to lure what appears to be a world alliance to a very specific battlefield. They will meet their end there. This is humanity's rebellion and insubordination to God being allowed to reach its logical end. The saber rattling is done. The battle is about to be joined.

**16:13 And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;**

Having allowed humans to engage the willful pursuit of rebellion, God now allows the forces of evil even greater control. The withdrawal of God and His gradual release of individuals to the consequences of their own choices is always the result of persistent sin. In this case this allows for the advent onto the earthly scene of three unclean spirits who begin to work their great hatred for all that bears God's image out in the affairs of the world. The results will be utterly catastrophic but will also serve as revelation of the true nature of things.

**16:14 for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.**

These three unclean spirits are such that they control demons. The demons can bring about "supernatural" phenomena. Whether or not they perform the signs or just create the illusion that it has been performed is open to speculation. The demons, whether just three or whether the three control legions, do a great work of deception. It appears though not actually stated, that the kings and their subjects become convinced that they have at their disposal sufficient firepower to match up with God, or at least with Israel.

From the testimony of other prophetic accounts, it seems that this battle is one in which the armies of the world gather against Jerusalem and a Jewish army defending it. The kings and great men's original fear of the wrath of God and of the lamb (Revelation 6:15-17), has now been overcome by the deception of these three demons. They are emboldened in their rebellion to come against what they know to be the will of Yahweh. This is the contest that will be no contest, the dramatic revelation of who is indeed God and who is really the Almighty.

**16:15 (Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame.)**

The presence of this verse here demands some pondering. Some suggest that whatever coming has been promised by Christ doesn't occur until whatever time this is referring to. There is obvious support for this position embraced by many so that they believe in what is termed a post-tribulation rapture.

However, the text does not demand this. The imagery of Christ's coming like a thief is clearly directed at the individual who does not live with the truth of revelation in view and is deceived into thinking "everything is under control." It refers to those who are saying, "peace and safety."

There is not time in history when ungodly people are more brimming with confidence than when these three unclean spirits have added their final work of deception to that already done by the antichrist and the false prophet. They are certain that they have established a world order that will fight the battle that ends all wars. Being masters of their own fate will be the order of the day and the value of the day will be peace and safety. Christ's coming against them will not be a surprise. His utter destruction and devastation of them will be, so little will be their estimation of Him and so inflated their view of their own power because of the work of the three unclean spirits.

This will be a time in which all on earth will be deceived. It will be a time when those who have not pondered and come to grips with the truth are shown to be spiritually naked, devoid of truth, devoid of any spirit but evil one's. They will be caught with their pants not simply down, but off, totally unprepared for what the day will demand from them. To their shame the folly of their choice of a lie over the truth will be fully revealed and they will be left with absolutely nothing to show for all their confidence in the wicked schemes foisted on them. The garment of truth guards against that shame. When it is cast aside, this is the only possible outcome.

**16:16 And they gathered them together to the place which in the Hebrew is called Har Magedon.**

This is the specific place marked out by God for this great event. It is in the valley of Megiddo, an ancient battlefield where many decisive battles were fought beginning in the 15th century BC. It is about 25 miles north of Jerusalem. The term in Hebrew means "hill of Megiddo." This is the name given to an area which would probably include the entire valley of Jezreel. The choice by earth's forces of this battlefield is the work of demons, but ultimately the will of God, that they should meet their end here.

**16:17 And 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."**

There have been bowls poured out on the earth, on the sea on the rivers and springs, on the sun, on the throne of the beast, and on the Euphrates River. Now this bowl is simply poured into the air. The first consequence is that a voice comes from the throne in the temple that announces, "It is done." It is unknown if this voice is heard only in heaven or throughout the universe. It would be an eerie announcement if the latter were true.

This utterance, "It is done." refers to so much. A similar sounding statement in our English versions was made by Christ as He finished His work on the cross. However, He used a different expression than the one uttered by the voice John hears. Christ used an expression that indicated an end to a process. The expression used here expresses both an end and a beginning. It could simply be translated "It has become."

The plan of God for the pouring out of His wrath and punishment for sin, His design for allowing sin to reach its utmost end, for transgressors to run their course, has become a reality. There is much that is about to become reality because evil has been ended.

**16:18 And there were flashes of lightening and sounds and peals of thunder, and there was a great earthquake such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.**

After the voice making the announcement from the throne, there is the coming of these phenomena to the earth. There is a great display of God's power that begins with flashes of lightening and peals of thunder. Humanity has always seen God in these two things and so it is fitting that these be the climax of His overthrow of the kingdoms of earth. These are followed by a great earthquake, one of such catastrophic proportions that John says, under the inspiration of the holy Spirit, that it is unparalleled in the history of humanity. It was an earthquake that was both great and mighty.

**16:19 And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.**

The earthquake is a worldwide shaking. Whether there is a local epicenter, from which the damage spreads or multiple ones, the damage is catastrophic and worldwide. Multiple ones combining for one great quake is probably the way we would describe it in the present day. Jerusalem is the great city referred to here, that is split into three parts. We know that when Christ physically returns to earth and his feet touch the Mount of Olives the mountain will be split, and a valley formed (Zechariah 14:3-5). Whether this is the same event is uncertain, but it seems likely.

Babylon's destruction is treated in greater detail in chapter 17. The question of what Babylon represents is an interesting one. It seems to mean more than just a city, but it may include a specific city or kingdom. More will be said on its identity in the next chapter, for now it is sufficient to say that it represents the judgment of God on the antichrist spirit that first manifested itself at Babel (on the site of Babylon). It will run its course through human history until the time of the incarnation of that spirit in the antichrist, Satan's world ruler during the 70th week of Daniel. That system finally receives its just dues, the fierce wrath of God.

**16:20 And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.**

This phrase speaks of the massive upheaval in the physical earth as God's wrath is poured out. There will be great change in the earth's topography because of this great shaking of the earth by God. This is a picture we can only imagine. Just as many speculate on the past of the earth and what a different place it may have been, so we can speculate on what may lie ahead given all the changes that Bible prophecy projects. The aftermath of these events will present surviving humanity with a very different world.

**16:21 And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.**

A remarkable plague that would be devastating to civilization is seen by John here. One can imagine the damage to structures, to communication systems, such as they are after all the events that have gone before. It will be a horrible punishment exacted on humanity, and they will prove the justice of it by their response. Even this will not bring about repentance. It will result not in the humiliation and brokenness of humanity, but in a display of their arrogance and defiance.

## Revelation 17

**17:1 And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters.”**

In the Bible the sin of harlotry is spoken against often. That sin, however, becomes a metaphor that represents a spiritual condition. In this sense a harlot represents one who joined themselves in some sense to God, at least in name, but are not faithful. They give themselves to the highest bidder, who and what they believe will deliver to them the things that they really want.

In this figure we may be encountering the epitome of what taking of Yahweh’s name in vain in the most pronounced sense. It is a movement that embraces Yahweh and at the same time pursues any and every other god and engages in the pleasures of those things contrary to the revealed will of God.

The harlot spoken of here is said to be “great.” By that it is probably meant that she represents a form of spiritual perversion that surpasses all others. It seems appropriate imagery for that spirit that is responsible for the deep evil that gradually has taken root among humanity that enables the final apostasy, the acceptance of a human, the antichrist as God. So great will be the resulting evil, that it will run roughshod over whatever the form of religion is that this harlot represents (verses 16-18).

The woman is perhaps connected to three cities. In verse 5 she is connected to Babylon. In verse 9-18 she is seemingly connected to Rome or perhaps to Jerusalem. More can be speculated through the information revealed later in this chapter about the specific identity of this woman.

The truth that will be spoken of in these terms is revealed by one of the seven angels who have in the previous two chapters presided over the final plagues which “finish the wrath of God.” So it seems that the judgment portrayed here will occur during this final outpouring of God’s wrath. It is likely that this chapter provides a more detailed look at the impact of the judgments poured out by the seventh angel (16:19).

The “many waters” represent the diversity of those this spirit influences. The literal idea is many people, multitudes, nations, tongues, as verse 15 will clearly state.

**17:2 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.**

Three things are implicated in this statement about this harlot, whatever she represents. First, the kings of the earth indulged all she represents. So we should be able to discern it as having influence on all the great empires of the earth at the very least, and we should see it at work in the lives of the influential. Second, it represents something that sows the seed that multiplies immorality and leads to all manner of acts that do not align with God’s will for humanity. Third, it has great influence and holds sway over all inhabitants of the earth. Humanity is not the same because of this force. This much is said as an introduction to John before he sees the harlot and the judgment against her.

**17:3 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.**

After being given a verbal description of the effect of this harlot, John is given this visual image by the Holy Spirit. The woman is found to be in a wilderness. The name of the wilderness is not mentioned, it is simply a desolate area. Biblically there is much associated with “the wilderness,” but this detail may not be significant here other than of her now being in a state of desolation and banishment, wasting away in her sins.

What seems to be of significance is the beast the woman is seated on. This beast is said to be scarlet, perhaps used as a symbol of intense evil. The beast is full of blasphemous names, none of which are mentioned. Whatever they are, they all reflect a disdain for Yahweh and sacred things. The beast has seven heads and ten horns. We see this kind of combination earlier in John’s writing (chapter 13), and in the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 7:7-8). This seems to indicate that this beast epitomized by the final world empire.

The imagery of this vision at this point seems to indicate that the woman represents the fallen nature of humanity, the very germ of evil in us that the spirit of antichrist enables and carries along over the vast centuries of human history. More detail will be given in the verses that follow against which this interpretation can be tested.

**17:4 And 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.**

The woman is clothed as one might expect a wealthy harlot to be clothed. The purple and scarlet may speak of the royal treatment afforded her and of her immoral and sinful nature. She has gained and so wears things that are precious to the earth.

This may speak of earthly things like influence, affluence, and legitimacy this perverted spiritual force has gained for people in exchange for adulterating the truth of God. She is pictured as continually partaking of the things that are abominable to God. What is offensive to God this whore feeds on and celebrates, all the while being destroyed by it.

**17:5 and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, “Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth.”**

Something inscribed on the forehead in Revelation indicates ownership, not a surname. The woman belongs to someone, and the Spirit is trying to show that she acts in behalf of someone or something else. There is mystery to the name of the one she belongs to and acts for. By mystery it is meant that there is something of significance that is hidden in its meaning. This almost assures us that the harlot does not refer to the city of Babylon.

The harlot however does represent that which has some parallel to Babylon. It could be that it represents the real power behind Babylon, or that it represents what is the antithesis of God's rule, yet used by God to bring about His purposes, even as Babylon did in Israel and as the early kingdom called Babel had done previously. It is likely that she portrays fallen humanity's desire to be "like God," masters of their own morality, and so their vulnerability to Satan's false, humanistic religions. All religions outside of the worship of Yahweh are perversions of the truth and lies that have served Satan's purposes to lure humanity away from the truth. He is such that he always marginalizes what is true. Humans are carried along due to their perversion of truth by Satan's power.

This deception is epitomized by the first recorded attempt among humans to exalt themselves as God's equal at the tower of Babel and to establish their own kingdom. It is this lustful quest to be one's own master that has been the real religion of the world since Adam and Eve's first sin. It is epitomized in several ways in the history of Babylon and exemplified even in the perversion that came about in the Christian Church as it became institutionalized in Rome. It lusted for world power and lost its real power in that pursuit.

This Babylon is said to be the progenitor of all harlotry; both spiritual and otherwise, and of all the abominable practices of the earth. This religion of self-love and exaltation would certainly be rightly seen in this way, formalized first in Babylon probably by Cain, Lamech and Nimrod of Genesis 4. From these it spread throughout the world in various forms. It often reared its head within Christianity and Judaism.

**17:6 And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. And when I saw her, I wondered greatly.**

This is another important piece about who or what this figure of the harlot represents. The woman represents that which is responsible for the violence done to the people of truth, and to those who were witnesses of Jesus, those of the true Church of Christ. Yet her portrayal as a harlot indicates a certain affinity for the truth and then a compromise of it in the interest of fleshly gain.

John, in looking at this image of this woman who very obviously represents such power and influence, is said to wonder greatly. It is a very significant figure yet very mysterious. To understand it is to gain insight into the common thread that links together every evil deed done in every culture and among every people of Earth's sordid history. Yet the name Babylon was strange because it was a kingdom that had passed. Or had it?

The spirit of antichrist, first visible in Cain and His offspring, is the common thread that has infected the earth's great empires. It even found its way into the Christian Church headquartered in Rome. It astounds John perhaps because it represents the truth perverted and gone bad, prostituted for gain. And it is that, the truth of humans being made in the image of God taken to the extreme so that it becomes a lie. It evolves into the enemy of truth, a movement that would murder the carriers of the truth of Christ. John wonders greatly because it is a complex mystery and its identification is complex.

**17:7 And the angel said to me, why do you wonder? I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.**

The angel's words indicate that the mystery is not meant to be unintelligible. In fact, it would be explained. As in any other mystery, this does not mean that no thought will be required. It means that an important key will be provided so that the detail makes sense as all of it becomes known.

The angel says that he would make known two mysteries, that of the woman and that of the beast—specifically its seven heads and ten horns. He will spend most of his words explaining the beast (verses 8-17), and relatively few explaining the woman (v. 18).

This would lead us to believe three things. First, the identity of the beast may be the more significant thing to establish. Second, being able to identify the beast once the reality it represents comes about is more important. Third, that the relative difficulty of establishing the identity of the beast is greater and requires more information. What we will find however, is that a great deal of other data from Scripture can be brought to bear on the identity of the beast whereby its identity can be spoken of with greater certainty.

**17:8 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 earth will wonder, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.**

This beast represents an empire, a power, or an emperor, who in some sense existed. Then it ceased to exist. It then comes into existence once again. This likely indicates an affinity with an evil power or personage that has already done a work on the earth. The evidence for this is strengthened by what is specifically said here about his reappearance on the earth.

It happens when he “comes out of the abyss.” We have seen in John thus far Satan opening the bottomless pit and frightful creatures emerging from it to raise havoc on the earth (Revelation 9:1-6). We see a beast that rises from the bottomless pit makes war against Yahweh's two witnesses (Revelation 11:7). We see a beast arising out of the sea, seemingly at the behest of Satan. He has ten horns and seven heads with blasphemous names on its heads (Revelation 12:17-13:4). The bottomless pit is to be equated to the abyss and many observe that it was thought to be in the sea. It is the place where evil spirits are confined, spoken of in numerous places in Scripture (i.e. Jude).

As is often the case in Bible prophecy, we likely have in this beast the spiritual personage behind the actual ruler. In this case, this spiritual entity is of such evil that he has been assigned to the dungeon with those considered too dangerous for the welfare of the world. At some point this personage is allowed freedom again and becomes the energy behind this king and kingdom. However, the result and purpose of the release is succinctly stated here—he is destined for destruction.



John prophesies that the unregenerate on earth will be amazed and will marvel at the re-appearance of the king or kingdom (Revelation 13:3-4). There is something in his basic identity that leaves people mesmerized. We have nothing besides these words to go on in figuring this out. It has led many to believe that the imagery is not simply speaking of a revived kingdom, i.e., a resurrected Babylonian, Roman empire or the like, but a resurrected person. This agrees with other descriptions of this beast as having been fatally wounded (13:3). It appears possible that by deceit and intrigue, Satan will market this person, inhabited by one of his own evil spirits, as someone beyond human. The world, amazed by life where death was certified, is deceived, and blindly follows. This is the beast that carries the great prostitute. It is Satan incarnated, playing on the desire of humans to be their own masters, executing his deceptions to rule over earth. He enables the perverted truth, that humans can rule themselves against God's wishes, to gain a wide following on the earth. He is the doctrine of Babel impersonated.

**17:9 Here is the mind that has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,**

The reference here to the "mind of wisdom," indicates that this clue regarding the woman is meant to provide some degree of clarity as to the identity of the figure. The phrase could be freely translated as meaning, "This is information for the mind that wishes to be wise in this matter."

We can develop some theoretical idea of what this entire figure represents, though our wisdom is limited by world history to date. The clue given here will be most useful for those who are alive at the time these events unfold.

The seven heads of the beast have a dual symbolism. This will be affirmed in verse 10. The seven heads represent first, seven mountains on which the woman sits. This can very easily be construed as a reference to Rome, which has been known since the writers of antiquity as the city built on seven hills. In that case this beast that bears the woman along will be identifiable in some way with Rome.

But it can also be seen as seven earthly kingdoms that have arisen or will arise that provide Satan incarnation of himself to gain a base of power through which he can have world-wide authority.

Thus far from the imagery we can deduce these things. The great world ruler, foisted on the earth by Satan, will be empowered by the same old perverted form of truth that has operated in Adam and Eve since they fell. That desire to be "like God" that inspired Adam and Eve to rebel, and then inspired the rebellion of the tower of Babel creates Satan's foothold.

This that resides in the heart of every human is represented by the harlot. It is an apt comparison. This in us leads us to prostitute ourselves to various worldly influences in the interest of gaining things of worldly importance. It is that pragmatic kind of truth system that arises in us, a system of beliefs that harmonize with what we want. The whole movement already firmly established in human hearts will be connected to Rome in some way, perhaps because it is epitomized by the "west" as that term is used today, meaning western civilization.

We must not jump too quickly and decisively to identifying the seven mountains with Rome. Mountains in the Scripture are often representative of kingdoms and empires. The next verse will reveal that this is true in the case of this figure as well.

**17:10 And they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he does he must remain a little while.**

John is told that the seven heads represent seven kings. Five of these have come and gone by John's time. This probably is speaking of five "world-class" kings or kingdoms which could be the world emperors of their day, up until the time of John when a sixth was in power. Beginning with Rome, one can look backwards and identify five empires that specifically related to Biblical history, since the time of the creation of nations in response to the rebellion of Babel. These were Greece, Persia, Babylon, Assyria, and Egypt. Each of these occupied territories that was part of the Roman empire. The sixth under this imagery would be understood as the Roman empire. The seventh is quite possibly the so-called "Holy Roman Empire" that remained for a season undefined here by the angel to John.

This scheme has the attractive feature of an internal consistency in that the seven heads can be seen to speak of seven kings whose empires related to Roman territory, while also symbolizing in terms familiar to the ancients the city that by John's time stood as supreme over that entire territory.

Based on history thus far, this makes western civilization and its colonizing powers the fourth beast of Daniel that was like any other, that devoured the earth. Its foundation was Rome in many ways. But as it has developed it is becoming more apparent that its philosophical and moral foundation is based on the passion of fallen humanity to be their own master, answerable to no one. This sounds all so logical. But we must remember that history is still in the process of being written and the picture could change very quickly.

Although these ideas are meant to give clarity, they prove to be elusive. They will provide great wisdom and certainty and they will inspire faith for those alive and present on earth when the events they represent occur. Until then, we are speculating.

**17:11 And the beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.**

The beast is said to be "of the seven." The word "one" is added by the NASB. The idea is that there is a connection between the eighth king and the seven previous kings of some sort. Two ideas are possible in terms of understanding this phrase. First, though the person has not arrived on the world scene, there has been present a certain spirit throughout the rise and fall of the World's great kingdoms that will be powerfully present. Second, it could be what was suggested earlier—the result of Satan's counterfeit and intrigue that gives appearance of a re-incarnation or resurrection of an earlier world emperor or empire. Though the thought is incredulous, this second possibility is likely what the angel is communicating to John.

As miraculous as is this king's or kingdom's ascent to power and as great as his power is, the fact remains that his destiny is not to rule, but to be destroyed. Of all that is unclear in the text to us, this is not.

It appears that Satan is somehow able to convince the world that this leader has been raised from the dead and has returned to this life as humanity's hope and savior. The world receives him with open arms. We must remind ourselves of the harlot's presence in all this and that a prostituted form of truth will aid in bringing this about. It appears that this truth system will be the focus of the attention that allows the beast to slip in almost incidentally. That is the great danger that occurs when truth becomes perverted.

**17:12 And 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.**

Once again, we find imagery in John's vision that is in harmony with that of the vision of Daniel. But there are some differences that must be harmonized. Daniel saw 10 horns and then an eleventh came up among them, displacing 3, leaving a total of eight. From Daniel's account it seems that the three are done away with, but the picture in Revelation seems to be that they still exist.

There is the more popular view as well that the anti-Christ emerges from one of the 10 nations represented by Daniel's 10 horns. But the language does not demand this and may not even support it. Daniel speaks of this 11<sup>th</sup> horn coming "after" 10 kings have arisen in the 4<sup>th</sup> great world empire. So the fourth great world empire is Rome in Daniel's vision. Rome is the sixth Kingdom in John's vision. We could deduce from Daniel's language that he is speaking of a timeline and 10 kings who rule sequentially along that timeline. These would be followed by a great world ruler.

But our vantage point with 2,000 years of history since John's vision and 2500 since Daniel's vision, allow us to bring clarity to what Daniel saw. The 10 kings Daniel saw arising in this 4<sup>th</sup> great world empire were 10 kingdoms. Each one was a distinct domain within what was the Roman empire. In time Rome gave birth to 10 powers. Daniel may have been seeing what we refer to simply as "the west," with a dominant nation arising that "subdues" three of the 10 distinct kingdoms that are born out of old Rome.

John's vision addresses that period when the beast, the great ruler has emerged from that one dominant kingdom. The focus of Daniel's vision was first on empires and kingdoms and secondarily on the individuals who were kings. Hence, he, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, gives the broad viewpoint, describing the political roots of what comes to be an alliance of 10 or 11 nations dominated by one superpower and its leader. The Holy Spirit through John shows us the alliance at the specific time of the emergence of that one leader of the dominant superpower.

Revelation 17 is speaking of the political climate that develops during the 70th week of Daniel as the great day of Yahweh approaches. Within these 10 nations will come to power 10 leaders who, from God's point of view, are sovereign for a short period of time at a point of history simultaneous with the emergence of a particular great superpower of the day. The next verse describes the divine purpose in giving these ten kings power and authority.

**17:13 These have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the beast.**

These 10 kingdoms are united in purpose. Whether they know it or not is open to question. In time they hand over their individual sovereignty to a dominant, evil King and kingdom. This is the purpose which they themselves serve, that for which God has raised them up. He has granted them sovereignty. In His plan their role is that they increase in power then unite their kingdom with that of the beast. There have been many rulers in this world that have been beasts. There will be one that will be a beast beyond all others.

The beast represents a spirit that has resided in the heart of humanity that Satan has utilized repeatedly to his advantage. But it is more than that. The beast's emergence depicts a time when Satan foists a ruler on the earth that will appeal dramatically to this spirit in us. This one will rule as none ever has, with the power of Satan allowed as it never has been. Though this ruler is widely accepted and acclaimed and celebrated, he will be a monster that works incredible evil. He will be a wild beast among humans who have willingly made themselves vulnerable. Humanity's evil and rebellion against God, their fallenness, will reach its golden age at the rise of this kingdom. Or another, more truthful way of looking at it, humanity will reach their lowest point at the rise of this kingdom.

**17:14 These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is the Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."**

This alliance of this Satanic ruler with the 10 kingdoms is anti-Christ. Satan purposes to destroy Christ and snatch from His control the rule of the earth. Or more likely, Satan seeks to destroy humanity and thus take as many of these his rivals to his eternal destiny. Whatever his devious designs, this war he incites includes persecution in multiple forms, great deception to replace the truth, and ultimately the great battle of Armageddon that will be won decisively by the Lamb. With the Lamb, lined up with Him during this time and hence objects of the wrath of the evil alliance are individuals who by God's grace have been called of God. These have been chosen out from among men and are thus faithful in their worship of Him as opposed to worship of the beast.

**17:15 And He said to me, "The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues."**

Religion has long been a masquerade for humanity's evil intentions, the all-out pursuit of self-centered and self-gratifying objectives. These are pursued in religious trappings. This danger was warned against by the apostles (1 Peter 2:16).

Self-centeredness is a universal religion practiced in every culture under a host of labels including Christianity. It is the bending of truth, or the prostitution of truth, for the purpose of achieving selfish ends. It has always been the favorite religion of humanity, their preference universally pursued under various labels. Israel exemplified this prostituting of truth according to all the language of Scripture. No kingdom is referred to as much as Israel as having prostituted itself.

**17:16 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.**

Satan's desire is to rule the earth and steal the glory reserved only for God. To that end there comes a time when even Satan's own schemes serve him no longer and must give way to what serves his purpose better. The intermediate step of perverted, twisted truth serves the purpose of disarming humans for the ultimate lie that Satan is God. When the time comes, Satan will turn on false religion and seek to wipe it out and replace it with the worship of him. That is what is pictured by the desolation of this great harlot. Satan hates humanity. They are God's appointed ruler of creation. Satan is not. All the evil passion evoked for centuries among humans will come to nothing. That is the judgment that awaits all who have been ensnared by their own desire and will. They are those Satan has manipulated for his own purposes. They have been hated by him the whole time.

This world alliance will be decidedly against authentic Christianity. But in the end, it will be against humanity, Christian and non-Christian alike. The alliance will make world humanistic religion and humanity itself desolate in the end.

It is said that this beast will eat her flesh, that is, devour her. So in the end those of all religions and the anti-religious, all who have earned their way to power and influence by prostituting themselves to the world and making their belief system more palatable to the world, will be destroyed and abused by the very one that had empowered their insurrection and rebellion.

**17:17 For God has put in their hearts to exercise His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled.**

God's purpose is carried out in the things that kings purpose, even those who do not acknowledge Him. And so, these 10 kings/kingdoms, perfectly united together as no others are, in that unity execute perfectly God's plan to bring about the kingdom of the beast. Through it God will allow sin and transgressors to run their course, to fully pursue their rebellion and then be ended.

All of this will happen only because God has put it into their hearts, meaning he has allowed it to happen inside them and grow to this point. But it all has an end. The grand idea, the unparalleled oneness, the great triumph of spirit and brotherhood, will last only until the words of God are fulfilled. It has no power to rescue fallen people. It will come crashing down like every other movement of humanity due to our inherent corruption.

**17:18 And the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.**

The great harlot can be associated with Rome by this statement and the statement in verse nine. This was the city that would legitimately have been understood by John's readers to be ruling over the kings of the earth at that time. As we have already seen, the imagery of the ninth verse in which the woman is said to sit on seven hills may have alluded to this and is a strong argument for the prostitute representing Rome. Even the Christian faith would be prostituted in that city after John's era. The power or influence represented by this woman, which led the world's kings and peoples into immorality was epitomized by the Holy Roman empire for centuries.

On the other hand, the city of Jerusalem is God's royal city, continually presented by Scripture as the city destined to rise to prominence and host the kingdom of the One whose right it is to rule (Matthew 5:35). This great city (see 11:8) epitomizes what God desires to bring about in humanity even as they historically prostituted themselves to false gods and rejected Messiah. In Yahweh's mind it is Jerusalem which He Himself has chosen above all other cities and places in the world to place His name (to make His address).

It is not sacrilege if we associate Jerusalem with this great harlot. God Himself did so (Ezekiel 16). His accusation was that Jerusalem was a more brazen prostitute than the ancient city of Sodom (Ezekiel 16:47-48), that He destroyed in judgment. Nor should we arrogantly and smugly hold this against Jerusalem. The reality is that Israel's history is the story of all the families of the earth. They proved typical of humanity despite all the revelation of truth they historically have experienced. And the reality of the Christian Church is that our history has tracked just as did Israel's. What happened in Jerusalem happened in Rome and this simply illustrates that what happened in Babel has shown itself in every city of humanity and in every human heart.

We have identified the great harlot. It is humanity, apart from Jesus!

## Revelation 18

**18:1 After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.**

After seeing in his vision, the harlot on the beast, and after the angel's explanation is complete, the next scene begins to unfold. John notes that another angel now comes on the scene from heaven. By his appearance and entrance and by the overall impression of the scene, John notes that this angel has "great authority." In the vision, so great is the glory of this angel that the light exuded from him illumines the whole earth. This is an important detail to John.

**18:2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great: And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird."**

From the imagery of a harlot whose identity is tied to a city, and who is also said to have the name "Babylon the Great" on her forehead, we move along in this continuing account of the fall of Babylon.

The angel makes this announcement in a powerful voice regarding Babylon. The question is, what is represented here by Babylon? Is it the actual ancient city, rebuilt in these last times, or is Babylon symbolic here? If it is symbolic, is it a symbol of another city, of a kingdom, of some other entity?

It is most likely that the two figures represent something similar. The harlot represents fallen humanity and the arrogant, false religion and truth systems that enable and allow the various godless empires to flourish on earth. It is the error and tragedy of Babylon, a foreshadow of the last great empire of fallen humanity. It will be led by the seven-headed monster described in Revelation as "the beast." He will no doubt have a capital city. He and his regime will be key players in worldly vices, in international government and in international trade both as a buyer and seller. Babylon here represents the spirit of anti-Christ in full bloom. From today's perspective, and the future may change this, it certainly can be applied to Yahweh's perspective on the prosperity and vice of the western world.

As significant as the city's fall, is what it then becomes, a dwelling place of demons. It goes from the crown jewel of the world kingdom to a sort of spiritual waste disposal site. It is a very profound event to ponder, this account of how quickly earthly fortune can change.

Speculation of course, abounds among those who see Babylon here as representing an actual city and the actual city in view here. Rome has been a popular option. Some have proposed that Babylon will be rebuilt. Some have argued strongly for New York City! It is simply impossible to know from our present perspective, what city, if any is represented by it. But those within the time frame of the kingdom of the beast will be able to identify Babylon.

From a time perspective, the record here in chapter 18 is probably an expansion of the statement in 16:19 regarding the judgment of the 7th bowl, the final event of God's wrathful judgment.

**18:3 For all the nations of the earth 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.**

This city is represented as a leader for the godless world from which has emanated a way of life that has caught on around the world. It is such that the kings of the world have first been caught up in it and from them its cancer has spread into their kingdoms. Whatever Babylon represents, it is the center of the world's culture.

It currently seems best to view that culture as the error of Nimrod's original Babel, carried to its logical conclusion. So Babylon we should understand as the embodiment of the idea that has driven much of fallen humanity's agenda, the determination to be our own master and pursue our own greatness.

For now, one is struck once again, by the similarity of this statement with the one made in chapter seventeen about the great harlot (17:2-5). For this reason, we should understand Babylon as we did the great harlot, as speaking of the belief system that puts self above God. This movement may prove to be identified with a particular city on the earth at some point in the future.

**18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive her plagues."**

Somehow before the judgment occurs there is this final warning and call by God. It is a warning sounded to His people. This call shows that somehow there is a people of God present on earth, even right under the nose of the beast in earth's final hour. Despite all the persecution and all the economic sanctions, the faith and the faith community persist.

We do not know how far back in time this account in chapter 18 is reaching. The first announcement of Babylon's fall is in chapter 14, when it is announced by an angel just after another angel announces an "eternal gospel" to every tribe and nation. So establishing the exact chronology is challenging since the destruction of Babylon seems to occur under the judgments of the seventh Bowl in 16:19.

Some understand this event of the call of God's people as happening in conjunction with a post-tribulation rapture. However, the language makes it sound like God is asking His own to depart as He did with Lot in Sodom, rather than snatching them away. When the Old Testament prophets spoke of the eventual judgment of Babylon it was to be like the judgment of Sodom.

The key thing here is that there is a community of faith in Babylon, whether that is a city, or a kingdom. These are told to come out and they are told to do so in order that they might not participate in her sins and her punishment. This is good advice for the people of God in many situations. Creating distance between ourselves and sin is the best protection against its subtle effects. To not create that distance is to be affected by the divine consequences associated with it.



**18:5 “For her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”**

The sins associated with Babylon are portrayed graphically here piled up to heaven. This is a graphic picture of the result that comes about when we place ourselves in God's place. To make our own plans for our own greatness apart from God is self-worship. To make self-worship anything other than what it is, is to leave ourselves vulnerable to a horrible judgment.

**18:6 “Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.”**

God often orchestrates repayment beyond what is owed (Isaiah 40:2; Luke 19:8). That is good news when righteousness is in view and terrible news when it comes to judgment. Babylon gave out to others immorality, intentionally and methodically. For this her judgment will be a double portion of God's wrath. To be an instrument of evil and to do so willingly, laughingly, is to invite the worst of God's judgment.

**18:7 “To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I sit as a queen and I am not a widow and will never see mourning.’”**

The great sin that offends God in the deepest way is self-sufficiency, not realizing and admitting that God is our life-breath. That was the essence of the values of humanity's first world government, Babel. At its least this is a failure to reflect and give thanks. At its worse it is an actual belief that one is self-made and controls their own fate, is their own master, and is not vulnerable or accountable to anyone. To glorify oneself and to take the next step, living only for one's self-gratification and not with a view to divine accountability is to ask to be taught the lesson of Babylon, whose greatest king believed he had attained the original Babel vision. He testified to any who would listen of the real, true and sovereign God (Daniel 4).

**18:8 “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 who judges is strong.”**

The judgment against Babylon will be swift. That is always the nature of divine judgment on the arrogant. It is so only because warning is unheeded and scoffed at. Her state will change dramatically in one day.

There are world events like that, where the foundations of our security are shaken, and dreams and illusions come tumbling down. There will be such a day for this Babylon, where she will simply be overwhelmed by the strong God she has offended. God will demonstrate through the swiftness and degree of calamity, through the dramatic and quick change in her status, both the folly of her arrogance and the greatness of His power. The ease, the reveling, and the abundance will give way to pestilence, mourning and famine. Her magnificence will be fuel for the fire, and the strength of Yahweh will be the new object of humanity's amazement.

**18:9 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,”**

The destruction of Babylon will be an event that the world can watch, one that brings grief and sorrow to the leaders of the world. The “plagues” that are a part of her judgment will result in her burning, something projected by the Old Testament prophets. Her destruction comes in conjunction with the great earthquake and the fall of other great cities and the huge hailstones.

**18:10 “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.’”**

There is great sympathy for Babylon but there is no rushing to her side in her time of need because of the nature of the judgment and in particular the fear it strikes in hearts. So there is this sad lament taken up by onlookers who remain at a distance. The limits of the picture created by this verse are unknown. Is it strictly a figure meant to portray the fear and helplessness of Babylon’s sympathizers, or is it speaking of an actual city so situated that there is several leaders able to stand and watch, but only from a distance? Is the event such that leaders come, but must upon arriving, remain at a distance?

These are unanswered question, but we are left with the picture of world leaders pondering an event which to them is very profound. How quickly the world can change, and in this case of this imagery, its ruling city is wiped out. The world’s great leaders ponder the swiftness of Babylon’s judgments, the quickness of her fall, her past greatness and strength suddenly brought to nothing.

**18:11 “And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes anymore.”**

The event represents economic catastrophe, so great has been Babylon’s buying power. Whatever Babylon represents, she is the pillar of the world economy and her loss spells doom for the economy of the entire world.

This verse has implications regarding the timing of events in Revelation. In reading the account one assumes that the events are unfolding in rapid succession. But there are continual indications that they happen over a broad enough time for the earth’s inhabitants to ponder them and respond to them. This event is the last of God’s great judgments on earth before stepping in to rule it. One might think that His kingdom commences immediately upon the conclusion of the plagues of Babylon. But it appears that there is an appropriate “aftermath,” where the world’s people feel the impact of the event as in this verse and the ensuing ones that describe actual items involved in the world trade that presently grinds to a halt.

**18:12 “Cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citrus wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble.”**

John sees in terms consistent with his day, particular products that were the staples of world trade. These show the purchasing power of Babylon and the great world trade her appetites stimulated. Her destruction renders these things valueless. There is no one to buy what had seemed so valuable. It is now reduced to no value. The items mentioned speak of a very opulent lifestyle, of a massive trade involving luxuries not necessities. A world-wide depression unlike any other down-turn ensues.

**18:13 “and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flower and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives.**

John continues to paint a picture in terms familiar to him of a bustling world economy completely busted. The consumerism that so exaggerates trade has the bite taken out of it and is followed by economic collapse. The supplies of goods so exceed demand that the sellers can only weep and mourn. It will be a great financial earthquake that rocks the world when this entity depicted as Babylon goes down.

**18:14 “And 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.”**

More is added to the picture of Babylon's anguish. It is a city with a ravenous appetite for the delicacies that come with luxury. One hour the craving for these set her agenda. The next hour she is reduced to nothing. Thus, one of the last great events of the world under Satan's rule epitomizes what has been characteristic of life in his domain, the suddenness with which fortunes can change and times altered. Life outside the design of the Creator has a marked cruelty to it.

**18:15 “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.”**

The exact nature of the events God brings on this city/kingdom is not known to us. The effect of those events is such that the normal reflex of rescue/recover is mitigated by the fear of getting too close. That is pictured for the second time here in verse 15 (see verse 10). Whomever or whatever Babylon represents she is the prime customer of the world's merchants. Their way of life effectively ends with her destruction.

**18:16 “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;’”**

Babylon had achieved a very high standard of living so that she is characterized as one finely clothed in this lament of the world's merchants. This imagery is probably indicative of how her individual inhabitants were able to live as well as the beauty of the city itself.

Babylon is called by the world's merchants "the great city," her splendor simply being unparalleled. It is not hard to imagine that the last great world leader will, as other emperors have done, build a city that reflects the glory, splendor and vision of the domain. Again, Babylon could become a city that epitomizes the sin of Babel, the crown jewel of Satan's last effort to supplant Christ. This lament of the merchants reflects the carefully crafted image of that kingdom and perhaps its capital city.

**18:17 "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,"**

In the conclusion of the merchants lament the thing that so astounds them about the ruin before them is the speed with which it came about. The great reversal of fortunes takes their confidence away. There is not talk of self-sufficiency or of rising again, just awe and fear at the dramatic destruction that lies before them.

John then notes another group who will take up a lament for Babylon, those who made their living on the sea transporting the world's goods from seller to buyer. They too are pictured standing at a distance in fear and shock at the sight before them. This grieving audience includes everything from ship owners to their hired crews, to their passengers, all of whom, like the kings and merchants, are pictured standing at a distance watching. We can imagine them either being on site, or collectively, around the world, viewing the sight through whatever media technology of the time brings about.

This further confirms what we know about this that is called Babylon. Whatever it represents, whether a city or a kingdom, it is a major hub of ocean-going trade vessels, a port of call for goods and passengers.

**18:18 "And were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?'"**

The lament of people of the sea is like that of a person bereaved of a friend who wonders how such a person can ever be replaced. There is in these words also a sense of wonder, how could this happen to Babylon? It is a state of shock and disbelief. This would seem to be indicative of the great deception as well.

Things on earth have arrived at the point where they really believe they are impervious, that disaster could never overtake them. Despite all they have witnessed for seven years of the acts of both fallen humans and God, they are here in a shocked state of disbelief that their leading city could be reduced to nothing as they stare at the columns of smoke rising in the sky signaling her end. Whatever means God uses to destroy her, smoke is all that remains.

**18:19 "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.'"**

The act of throwing dust in the air is an expression of grief much more characteristic of the cultures of the middle east in our day. It may be given to us with this imagery because that was common to the culture of the original readers, or it may be that something is being said about the dominant culture of the end times, or at least of the sea-going people of the end times.

The lament of woe is stated once again for a third time. Woe is an emotional word, a word that expresses pain. In the original language it is an onomatopoeia, a word that makes a sound appropriate to its meaning. The word in Greek is οὐαι, pronounced oo-ay! It is the kind of sound one in agonizing pain might make.

These laments can be felt by anyone who has witnessed a disaster even from afar. Babylon was such that many became rich just keeping the goods that she consumed flowing into her by sea. This does not demand that we understand that the city is a seaport, but it makes it more likely. Again, one is impressed by her key role in world commerce and trade, and the economic impact of her demise. It will effectively ruin the economy of the world. Her end is again stated to be so very quick in just one hour.

**18:20 “Rejoice over her, O heaven; and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.”**

There is a call to rejoice given here to the citizens of heaven, including the redeemed, and especially those who have been persecuted by the world and its system. We might think that this would be a sad day in heaven. There is a time when God does not take delight in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11). But there is a time for the victory of good over evil, a right time, and that makes it a time of rejoicing. Despite the lives forever lost, something so great is gained that the holy and righteous thing is to rejoice. That is a staggering thing for fallen humanity to contemplate. When the earth’s evil empire is finally judged there will be no sadness in heaven and that will be both fitting, proper, and right. We must conclude from this that the immense depravity of humanity and its cruelty, injustice, and offensiveness is well-disguised and so hidden from our eyes.

**18:21 And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.”**

The empire of evil will be cast from God’s presence, never to be seen again. This is what is shown figuratively in this vision to John. So complete will be the destruction of this city/kingdom that it will be like casting a great stone in the sea, where it sinks to the bottom and is never retrieved again. It is not unlikely that in the judgment the sea will become a factor in some way, though this imagery does not demand it. The thing the text is clear on is that Babylon will be overthrown with great violence, and there will be no recovery. It will be over for Babylon.

It is interesting that this end is quite like that assigned to the ancient city of Tyre, to be cast into the sea (Ezekiel 28:1-10). Tyre was the crown jewel of the Phoenician kingdom, the sea-going people who were the heart and soul of trade and commerce in the ancient world. The similarities between the destruction of both cities are intriguing. Furthermore, a great irony is that in the destruction of Tyre a key player was Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. His initial destruction of the mainland city of Tyre was followed years later by Alexander the Great’s destruction of the island fortress. Both were remarkable fulfillments of the words of Yahweh given through the prophet Ezekiel (See Ezekiel 26-29). As it proved certain in Tyre, it will certainly be so for Babylon.

**18:22 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 the mill will not be heard in you any longer;**

These are poetic and dramatic statements to add emotion, drama and color to the statement that “Babylon will not be found any longer.” They help capture the profound and sobering nature of God’s judgment. The revelry, the hustle and bustle, the business will be forever brought to a halt. It is not just a judgment that impedes or even cripples, it is a judgment that brings death. The next verse adds further to this drama.

**18:23 “And the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all nations were deceived by your sorcery.”**

Two more statements reflect the death of the city and its whole way of life. There is no surer confirmation of a city’s destruction than what darkness reveals. There is no light, and life always produces light in a city. There is no activity that so represents earthly culture as the basic institution of marriage. It is gone in Babylon.

The remainder of the verse tells why this has befallen Babylon, it is not because God for some reason resents greatness or might. It is because of how Babylon achieved that might, through the deception that is the primary tactic of the earthly system’s leading men and women. It is called what it really is, sorcery. Deception, when allowed to run its course will always produce nothing, despite intermediate gain.

Again, whatever Babylon is meant to depict, we know that this is depicting the end of the entire world system that has characterized all human history.

**18:24 “And in her was found the blood of the prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.”**

Whether Babylon is an actual city or not can be debated. What is obvious from this statement is that it epitomizes evil, those forces that have resisted God and hated Him to do violence against His spokespersons, and against all humans in general as bearers of His image. It represents evil from the time of Cain, the first to resist the presence of truth to the point of committing murder. His way has been followed by millions because it is the way of their ruler, the evil one.

By way of summarizing the whole matter of the identity of Babylon, it seems likely that this figure of Babylon represents the earthly kingdom that came into its own after the fall of humanity. Its earliest form came through Lamech, who apparently established civil law and commerce (Genesis 4:18-24). It seems that after the destruction brought about by the flood, Nimrod the hunter of men, preserved Cain’s tradition which was the way propounded by Satan himself (Genesis 10:8-12). It is in the record of Nimrod that the name Babel first appears. Babylon represents this earthly kingdom having run its full course according to God’s purposes. It is made to face the full wrath of the Creator on the Day of the Lord when the proper order of creature and creator will be re-established. The true nature of things will be publicly revealed, and the demands of justice finally met. On that day, or more accurately during the events of that time, the source of all the evil and cruelty on the planet will be fully and finally revealed. It is the day of the revelation of the truth, of justice, of the earth’s true anointed ruler, Jesus Christ.

## Revelation 19

**19:1 After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;”**

This is the response of the heavenly multitude to the command in 18:20, for righteous rejoicing in the face of great calamity. Rejoicing needs to be on this occasion because it is a just, righteous, and fitting calamity that has come about. Hallelujah is the beginning of this song, meaning “Praise be to Yahweh!” The event shows that God is who He has claimed Himself to be. He is not an oppressor of men as Satan has contended from the beginning, but the rescuer of men. He is glorious. There is that about him for which He should be ascribed greatness. He is the source of power. The lesson of Babylon’s instant demise is that all power exists only by His permission. When that permission is withdrawn, no supposed might can deter that kingdom’s collapse.

This is the response of the redeemed, the declaration of the great lesson of history not the rhetoric of a pep rally or even the conviction of faith. It is now revealed for the eyes of all to behold bringing mourning to the damned, but sweet comfort to those who by evil had been made to mourn.

**19:2 “Because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He is avenging the blood of His bond-servants on her.”**

From the 21st century mindset, it is hard to imagine judgment that imposes suffering to be true and righteous. But that is part of the deception of the times. God, who is the embodiment of truth, cannot bring about any other kind of judgment but that which is true and righteous. A city, Babylon, is destroyed with lightning speed. Presumably millions of lives are lost though the account was noticeable in its silence on the loss of human life. Its punishment is righteous and just because the way of that city has been a cruel hoax foisted upon the world that has robbed billions of people of that which is truly life. The generation of the end is held accountable because they hung onto the system and perpetuated the deception in the face of unparalleled revelation. Never in history will the existence and opinion of God be more obvious than in the day of Yahweh.

That city is called the great harlot. It is a great description of a way of life that is seductive and yet destructive. It also shows us that chapters 17 and 18 are dealing with the same judgment, with a little different slant and emphasis. Babylon is the most appropriate name to choose from ancient world empires to represent the germ that is present in them all. That germ is Satan’s desire to usurp God as the sovereign of the earth, with man buying into that lie and becoming his chief instrument, jumping at the opportunity to justify being their own master.

The judgment of God against this system is true and righteous because it is deserved due to the injustice, the persecution, the murder committed through it. The indiscriminate punishment and murder of the righteous will come home to haunt the realm of evil and all who have cast their lot with it on the great and terrible day of the Lord.

These words recorded in this verse include phrases from Deuteronomy 32:43, the song written for Israel by Moses at the direction of God to be a witness against them of their evil. These words are from the conclusion to that song which speaks of God's faithfulness to the covenant and His restoration of their fortunes. On the other side of "the evil that would befall them in the latter days" (Deuteronomy 31:19), the song becomes a song of worship that speaks of God's great goodness to His people. If we imagine the full scenario of the times, this would quite possibly be happening now when Israel's final rescue and national repentance and salvation is being brought about on earth by their true Messiah, Christ. If that is true it will be an amazing orchestration of events, what we would expect as the grand plan comes together.

**19:3 And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! Its smoke rises up forever and ever."**

This statement coincides with the word given by Isaiah (34:10), regarding the nations, and in particular Edom, that have been Zion's enemies. It is probably an exclamation of the thoroughness of the destruction and not a statement that demands that smoke be forever present, though that would certainly be no problem for Yahweh. The judgment against Babylon will be forever remembered and it could be that God's means of accomplishing this could result in an eternal presence of column of smoke. This would be a great reminder of the temporary heyday of evil. The destruction of Babylon as related in the Old Testament involves the same fire and brimstone that destroyed Sodom, so we know that some sort of natural phenomenon known to God will bring this scenario about.

**19:4 And the twenty four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who sits on the throne, saying "Amen. Hallelujah!"**

There would be something very holy and sobering in witnessing such an act of God's judgment firsthand. It would be a chilling reminder of one's place as a creature in relationship to the Creator. With the revelation brought about through God's judgment there would also be a realization that it was just and righteous. If earthly tragedies stir us to moments of silence, what reverence will be evoked in us when we view the terror of falling into the hands of the living God?

The response of the elders and the living creatures, who have not been spoken of for several chapters, reflects their recognition of the justness and righteousness of it all. "Amen!" they exclaim, meaning, so be it! They understand it as right and fitting. They shout, "Hallelujah!" They do so not as we might use the word, as an expression of gladness. It is an acknowledgment of His hand being that which brought about what could never have been done through human agency. And so, the word "Hallelujah!" meaning praise be to Yahweh!

**19:5 And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all of you His bondservants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."**

The command comes from the throne that this is a time for worship, a time to praise God. When God judges there is no need for us to rationalize it or to defend it or to comment on it. It is a time to worship. It is time to give praise to Yahweh who would be true to His character and to His word by such a great and just act. The command is to praise God, not to pity the damned.



**19:6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.”**

The destruction of Babylon marks the beginning of the end in terms of evil's power in God's creation. The suffering it has brought on all creation, and on the people of God has been immense. So there will be great joy in the realization that it is OUR God that now reigns. That which we know has been true but has been for thousands of years disputed and contented, will be forever experienced. The truth we have lived by in faith will now bring its great reward.

This multitude, most likely the assembly of the redeemed, erupts in thunderous salute to their Savior and Redeemer. John reaches for several expressions to describe the sound of the collective voice of the multitude, and we are left to imagine the power, majesty, and deep emotion of this moment in heaven. It is the ultimate moment, when the faith of the elect becomes sight, when that to which they have staked all their hope becomes reality.

**19:7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.**

The overthrow of Babylon by Yahweh establishes Him as creation's Sovereign. It marks a day of great celebration for God's people. It is a time to be glad and a time to ascribe credit to God for the work He has done across eons of time in orchestrating His plan. This marks the consummation of that plan, the time His work of drawing a people to Himself, of establishing a kingdom of priests who will reign over creation, is completed.

The completion of that work results in a new era described as the marriage of the Lamb, God's Son. This is a good picture of the day because it will result in the Groom, Christ, and His bride, His chosen people from all time past, united together in a new and everlasting way. From this point on they will be together forever and will be in one another's physical company as a matter of daily routine.

**19:8 And it was given her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.**

To this great community of believers is granted a privilege. That privilege is to clothe herself, that is, to take on as a matter of one's day to day life, the righteous acts that are characteristic of God's children. This linen represents our new bodies and the accompanying freedom they will give us from the presence of sin, the eradication of sin from our beings so that the image of God is fully restored in us. From a visual standpoint this will be noticeable, even as was the magnificence of Christ on the mount of transfiguration. It is the complete and final work of sanctification, the rejoining of our complete beings to union with God. These works of saints are not past deeds done in the earthly life by any persons, which will certainly pale when compared to the glory of Christ. These are pure acts defined by Scripture that were our elusive goal, that will become for us a matter of daily routine once our redemption is complete. These deeds are those ordained of God in eternity past and we will finally be enabled to rise to them.

Some suggest that the white linen is a manifestation of the good deeds done on earth by all God's chosen ones that they are here recognized for. Some add that only those with such garments, that is, those who have done such deeds, will participate in the marriage feast. Other believers they say, will be left out of that event, though remaining in heaven. Some believe the white linen is a reward for good deeds done. Some believe it represents the righteousness of Christ bestowed on us. All these positions have that which commends them.

The position that the white linen signifies the new bodies that will be given to all of God's children allows the text to speak for itself. It is a way of demonstrating that we will be granted unbroken participation in God's kingdom when God rescues our bodies from the physical presence of sin. We will, at that point, have experienced the final part of salvation's work and will begin to do that for which we have been called and chosen and rescued.

**19:9 And he said to me, "Write, Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."**

These are words that God especially wanted in the written record and wanted to call attention to. All that is written is His will, but this is a way of calling attention to these, and they are of great importance. Could there be a greater blessing than to be invited to the marriage supper of the lamb? If one has this, is there anything else that is really lacking or needful? Conversely, if one does not have this, is anything else really a blessing?

As the procession of the bridegroom would make its way through the city, past the houses of friends who would be invited and join in the celebration, it would grow in number and increase in joy. It was a great thing to be a part of. As Christ's people, led by Him make their way through this life, it is a great thing when they come into your life, and you are invited, and you respond and join in the joy of the occasion. The beauty of it is that you'll never have to go home again, because you're not only a celebrant, but you're also the bride and you're journeying to your new home.

John is then told by this angel, "These are true words of God." It is not that the others are not. It is that these are so significant that God wants us to ponder them well. They have the capacity to shape our values and the power to alter our moods, the potential to change how we think. To be invited to believe in Christ, is to be invited to be joined forever to Him. It is an unfathomable blessing, the pearl of great price.

**19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold to the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."**

At being told these are the true words of God, John, perhaps thinking he might be speaking with a manifestation of God or perhaps just as a natural human instinct, bows at the angel's feet in a posture of worship. The angel properly corrects him in this and states that he, like John and all believers, is a servant of Christ. That is revealing in terms of the angel's view of believers and themselves. They are ministering spirits even as we are ministers. They do not view themselves as above us even though we view them as such. They see us as their peers, who have come to believe the truth proclaimed by Christ, His testimony about Himself and God.

The testimony of Jesus, we are told, is the spirit of prophecy. As the spirit gives life to the body, it is the words of Christ, the truth from Him and the truth about Him, that was the primary object of the writings of the Old Testament. It is the testimony of Jesus, transmitted by the Holy Spirit through believers, that gives life to the prophetic ministry of the Church in the New Testament era. To speak of God is one thing. To speak of Him at Christ's impetus, as provided by the Holy Spirit, in harmony with what Christ has already spoken, is life-giving and life changing. To speak of the future is something many have undertaken to do. To do so truthfully is to have the testimony of Jesus and the life He imparts behind your words. The power John felt at the words of the angel, the inner witness that convicted him of their great truth, came not because the person who delivered them was God, but because he was relaying to John the testimony of Jesus. John's written words were Jesus' testimony. This dynamic gave power to his words through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit in John and confirmed to John that what the angel had spoken was the "true words of God."

**19:11 And I saw heaven opened; and behold, a white horse, and He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He judges and wages war.**

This is the vision of Christ in heaven, changed from his previous manifestation as a lamb that had been slain. He is seen here in those final moments before His departure from heaven to take charge of the kingdom on earth. He is appropriately seen on a white horse, for at this point He is not the Savior, but the Commander. He is called faithful and true because these are known to be His primary attributes.

There are few world conquerors who would be called faithful and true. None in the absolute sense. They would be driven to conquer for selfish reasons and motivated to rule by all manner of false motives. The rightful king of the earth comes with power and great glory but has been found by God to be faithful and true. For this reason, He is the world's great hope particularly after the great imposter who has proven himself to be devious and false.

Because He is faithful and true, Jesus can judge and make war righteously. This is hard to imagine in our minds. Nearly every war fought has had some unrighteousness attached to it by both warring parties. But it is the mark of God that He does wage war, and He does so righteously. Judgment will be rendered without corruption. There will be no more bias, no lobbying for selfish interests, no purchasing of decisions. Judgment will be rendered in righteousness.

**19:12 And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems, and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.**

In these words we see the great breadth of Christ's being and character, what we might expect of the perfect man, the God-man. There is a fitting and appropriate vengeance and anger in His eye. It is the look that comes from being given the authority to act and to rule.

There is also the mystery in His person. It is demonstrated in the deeply personal and tender side to Him that brings God to bestow on Him a name so special that only He Himself understands its significance. Such names will be bestowed on all of us who are faithful to the mission God has commissioned us to do (Revelation 2:7). It is in that faithfulness that we overcome the world. I suspect that we will receive a name fitting to our make-up and proven by our journey, a name that fits those deepest thoughts, dreams, and struggles we have shared only with God.

Christ, the first born, is here said to have such a name. It will obviously be known by others, since it is written on Him, but it will not be fully comprehended in terms of its significance by others. We can imagine from this that our intimacy with God will be very deep and there will be things shared between us that only the two of us understand the depth of.

**19:13 And He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood; and His name is called The Word of God.**

The robe dipped in blood could symbolize a few things. It could be symbolic of His own atoning death; the blood He had shed at the hand of the world He was now set to rule. It could be symbolic of the blood He is now about to shed in His judgment of the world and the armies of the anti-Christ. Blood symbolizing the atonement in Scripture is more often sprinkled on something. The fact that the robe is dipped in blood more likely means that the present mission Christ is embarking upon demands that He be clothed in judgment. He is in the mode of vengeance and setting things right. He comes now for war with a sword. He is the very fulfillment of the Word of God, as John had written in his gospel. He is the word made flesh. In this case God's word concerning the responsibility of men and their accountability for their deeds is about to be incarnated in Christ's actions. This is the name by which John makes the rider of the white horse positively identified to us.

**19:14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.**

The armies of heaven follow Christ, though it is Christ who is their strength and their weapon. Their clothing does not speak of going to war, but of the purity and righteousness of their leader. It does not indicate their effort or role, but it magnifies his. They are on white horses as well, symbolic of authority, of victory, of splendor. Christ in His goodness shares His glory. Whether these armies are composed of angels, or the resurrected saints is uncertain, but the latter is likely. The saints are returning to earth in their new bodies to rule with Christ, their rightful privilege being finally restored.

**19:15 And from His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations; and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and he treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God the Almighty.**

The only weapon mentioned regarding the armies of heaven is the sword in the mouth of Christ. His word is enough, there is no need for more. By His word the world was created and by His word it can be conquered, subdued, ruled, and destroyed. His rule will be strong and unyielding. The day of man exerting his will within the bounds of God's permission will end with the Day of the Lord, in which His way of doing things will become the order of the world.

The figure of treading the winepress of God's wrath is a fearsome one that speaks of the ferocity of God's vengeance against sin. It is done methodically and thoroughly. There is no ability to resist, no escape, as the wrath of God is brought to bear on a sinful world. It is grim imagery.

**19:16 And on His robe and on His thigh he has a name written, “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.”**

This is now the fourth name mentioned in the context in association with Christ. There was the name “faithful and true” (verse 11). There was “the name no one knows (verse 12). There was the name “word of God” (verse 13). Here is the title bestowed upon Him by God at His ascension into heaven after the incarnation. He is the second Adam, the perfect man who is allowed to exercise absolute dominion over the earth based on a perfect life.

While in today’s world the name of a sponsor is commonly emblazoned on the thigh of the uniform of a great athlete, here the name that is above all names is seen. There could be no greater statement than the one made by this name. This reminds us more of present-day customs rather than ancient ones in terms of the way the name is displayed. But it also is the ancient word about Christ finally becoming a reality in a very different world.

**19:17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in mid-heaven, “Come assemble for the great supper of God;”**

Once this invitation to the birds is completed in the next verse it will compose another chilling, gory perspective on the tremendous loss of life that will occur when men decide they can take God on with their armies. This must be understood according to the culture of the ancients in that they accounted of their victories in this way. What we see as a gruesome description was a way of emphasizing the completeness and finality of the victory. The birds are summoned for a practical purpose also, and that is to help dispose of the huge number of decaying bodies and the threat of disease they will bring. It is God’s provision for an important task that will face His kingdom at the outset. This passage parallels the prediction of Ezekiel likely, though Ezekiel could have the battle in mind that comes after 1,000 years of Christ’s reign (Ezekiel 39:17-20).

**19:18 in order 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 those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.**

The judgment of God will fall on all men regardless of position. All who have rebelled against God will be equally damned to perish before the One whose rule they can’t simply cast off. There is nothing that will save and there will be no mercy. This account, worded so matter of fact, shows that God does not always defer judgment in favor of mercy. Nor is God so merciful that He is incapable of doing what is just, or what needs to be done for the overall good of creation. So His judgment against sin, which corrupted creation for so long, and was slowly destroying it, finally stops evil in its tracks. God in mercy toward the devout and faithful, steps in to take creation back from those who hold it hostage.

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

One of the most staggering, unbelievable, and tragic verses of Scripture is this verse. Humanity's rejection of the truth about God is very deep. The world, when stripped of all presence of believers, really does not believe in God. That is, they do not believe in His power and authority. And so, they are more than willing to throw in with one who they perceive to have the powers of a god, since they have no truth regarding the one true God. So they are ready to go to battle with the Almighty. It is a wild idea to a believer, perfectly logical to an unbeliever.

How does the antichrist get them to the battlefield? How do they come see their enemy as ready to meet them on this spot on the globe? We don't know, but we can only imagine how the deception might paint God as a lesser being, perhaps as an alien, who must be defeated for the good of the planet. It was after all, only a few years back that Ronald Reagan, when asked what might unite the world, stated that the world would unite if threatened by a common alien enemy. This may be how it will all play out as this great coalition comes together to finally deal with the "enemy."

**19:20 And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone.**

Little of the battle is described in the various allusions to this event. With our understanding we know it would be over in an instant. The word would simply have to proceed from the mouth of God, and it would be done. It would be stunning in its suddenness.

The thing we are reminded of in this verse is that by rejecting the truth one is vulnerable to deception and particularly this great deception of the antichrist and false prophet. Those who receive the mark of the beast and worship him do so because they are deceived, and we know that no one is deceived unless they first reject the truth. You are not deceived because you are neutral regarding the truth, or because you take a wrong turn in an honest and sincere search for truth. You are deceived because that is the penalty for rejecting the truth. Here God judges both the deceivers and in the next verse the deceived.

The deceivers are cast into the lake of fire, most likely a figure of speech for Hell, and they will never be heard from again. For the second time in Revelation, we see that this is the appointed end that awaits the wicked--brimstone. This end is demonstrated in the first use of the word brimstone in the Scripture, in the utter destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:24). It is then clearly stated that this brimstone is the end that awaits the wicked (Psalm 11:5-7). It is revealed that this is the end that will come on the anti-Christ (Ezekiel 38:22-23). Jesus warned of it (Luke 17:29). John has already spoken of it (Revelation 14:10; 19:20). It is reported later in this prophecy of John as occurring in the case of all wicked beings (20:15; 21:8).

**19:21 And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.**

The deceived ones are not allowed to escape, they must pay the price for not caring enough about the truth to accept it and by that be insured against such a spiritual catastrophe. There is no need for weaponry. It is that which proceeds from the mouth of the word incarnate that comes to pass. Truth is as He states. He speaks and it is done, even as in creation.

So great is the carnage that there is no burial immediately of the corpses. God miraculously cleans up the mess by the birds of the heaven that assemble to feast on the bodies. Many birds can make such carnage disappear incredibly fast. The birds being summoned by God are part of the humiliation of the wicked, but they are also God's practical provision to deal with the matter of the outbreak of disease that could come when so many bodies are decaying in the open field. We know that the cleanup of such a battlefield would take considerable time. It will be a herculean effort in which the birds will play an important role.

## Revelation 20

**20:1 And I saw an angel coming down from heaven having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.**

In 9:1 the key to the abyss was given to Satan who loosed from its confines a horde of imprisoned spirits who went out and afflicted the earth. Assuming this is the same place, and the terms are slightly different, the key is now placed in the charge of this good angel. It is also noted that the angel carries a great chain. The angel is not named but he will do a very important work.

**20:2 And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.**

This angel goes with his chain and binds Satan. We don't know what the chain represents but we take the words to mean what they clearly are meant to communicate, that is, that Satan will lose his freedom to operate and do what he has done through the years of history.

It should be noted that Satan is not only bound with a chain, but he is imprisoned, and the exit is sealed. How God will accomplish this and what the chain is, will someday be known to us. Whatever it all is, it is represented by a chain, a pit, a cover over the pit and a seal on the cover. That is a picture of complete isolation and confinement. Ultimately, God's decree is the reason Satan is confined at the allotted time.

The text states that Satan is bound for 1000 years. Most have taken this to be a purely symbolic number. But the mere fact that the number is stated six times in the first seven verses of this chapter speaks for its literal interpretation. It may be granted that the context is full of symbols, and just as the chain may not be a literal chain, so also the thousand years do not have to be taken literally. On the other hand, we might, in the interest of intellectual honesty beg for an open mindedness toward a literal interpretation, without imposing any system on the text. After all, if there is any sort of restricting of Satan taught in the passage, then there is also a period involved. Since both are true why not simply let the words speak for themselves and allow other Scriptures to illuminate them. As the passage unfolds, it fits perfectly well with the covenant promises made to Abraham and Old Testament prophecies made regarding a coming earthly kingdom of God.

**20:3 And threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.**

So Satan is bound with a chain, thrown into the abyss, it is shut and then it is sealed over him. We assume this is the seal of God, so that it bears legal authority of the highest sort. Now, we are unsure of what the abyss speaks of, except that it is a place known both to the good and evil forces as a place where spirits are confined in a way that takes away their freedom to operate on earth (Luke 8:31). Wherever such a place is, and however it is constructed, it exists and is possible through the authoritative decree of God. It is this that ultimately makes it possible.



Satan's confinement here is very comprehensive. He is not simply bound on a long chain so that he can still do damage to those who leave the path of the faithful as various ones within Christianity would argue and as is seen in such fictional writings as *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan. Such an interpretation does not account for the strength of the language used here. The picture here of Satan's confinement is more thorough and complete than the confinement of Christ in His tomb, and it is done by God. The language clearly states that Satan does not deceive the nations during these thousand years. His activity clearly stops, a condition that has never been true.

This verse also teaches that after the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released for a short time. This creates obvious problems for any who would believe that the thousand years represents eternity. It also creates problems for any who think that the thousand years refers to the time between Christ's first and second coming. It is difficult to sense that Satan has been bound at any time since Christ's first coming, even if, as they say, he is bound on a long chain.

The entire scenario developed by the language of this verse presents a host of problems for interpreters. It seems however, that some variation of the literal, visible reign of Jesus Christ on earth would harmonize best with it. In fact, it is the presence of the truth of Revelation 20 that gave impetus to the chiliast view of the first century, the revival of that view by the historic pre-millennialists and the pre-millennial view of the dispensationalist.

**20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark upon their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.**

This verse reveals significant facts that if allowed to do so, characterize the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. It reveals that His rule will be shared with His children. It reveals that there will be a resurrection of His saints so that they reign with Him during the thousand years.

The phrase at the beginning of the verse, "they sat upon them," is understood by what follows (see vs. 6-12). It is best to see "they" as referring to resurrected saints who receive leadership in the kingdom as their reward for faithful service on earth. This is just as Jesus had promised during His earthly ministry (Luke 19:11-27; Matthew 18:14-30; 19:27-30). It is reasonable to assume from the entire testimony of Scripture, that John sees the whole company of God's children of all eras resurrected and united forever with Christ here.

So in seeing the martyrs it is not necessary to assume that John saw only them, plus the tribulation saints. He did see these, but likely others as well. Perhaps he notes these to call special attention to them and to the fact that though they paid dearly for their faith while on earth, they receive great earthly reward. The meek do eventually inherit the earth as John had heard from Jesus early in His ministry.

**20:5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.**

The language used by John leaves us with some questions on the matter of who is raised from the dead and when. Taking the material from the previous verse, some might say that only those who have been beheaded, and those who had died in the tribulation are raised from the dead and rule with Christ for one thousand years. That scenario disappears however when the entire passage down through verse 12 is considered along with the rest of Scripture.

The phrase “the rest of the dead” should be understood as the unbelieving dead. By the “first resurrection” John is suggesting that the dead are raised at two distinct times. The righteous dead are raised, and they reign with Christ on earth for a thousand years. They constitute the first resurrection. The unrighteous dead do not come to life until after the thousand years are completed. John speaks more distinctly of this resurrection in verse 12. What John has seen is a result of the first resurrection, and so he sees those martyred because of their faith, some from his own era, beheaded, and he sees those who perished in the great tribulation. Both groups he notes as part of the entire group who have been raised from the dead to rule with Christ.

**20:6 Blessed and holy is the one who has 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.**

John says two things about those who are a part of the first resurrection. They are blessed and they are holy. Two things are always said of God’s children throughout Scripture, and they are these, that they are blessed and holy. The term for saints in the New Testament comes from the Greek word for holy. They are “holy ones” by the very term employed. They are blessed with every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3). No better scriptural terms could be chosen to describe the entire company of believers from the Old Testament and New Testament eras than to say they are blessed and holy.

Overall, of these “the second death” has no power. “The second death” is later defined precisely by John as the lake of fire (verse 14). Eternal condemnation for sin is not a prospect that believers must be concerned about. They are set apart ones, holy, chosen and redeemed by God for blessing.

Part of that blessing of redemption is that those redeemed serve as priests of God and they reign with Christ for the thousand-year kingdom on earth. To this end humanity was created, to carry out God’s rule on earth. Sin robbed them of that privilege. Christ will redeem them and the present creation in this way, and so will display his sovereignty over evil. This display will not be the final display of Yahweh’s mastery of evil, but it is an important one. He will demonstrate by this act of ruling the present fallen creation that His power and goodness are such that He can rule over evil by sheer power, not just by destroying it. He will eventually confine evil beings forever. But that is the next stage. In His thousand-year reign on earth His salvation reclaims for humanity the position and blessing of being God’s special priests and carrying out His will in His kingdom.

**20:7 And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,**

This is a time in the plan of God that is not spoken of a great deal. We don't know why this is necessary in God's mind, nor what He wishes to accomplish that can be best achieved in this way. But this is the plan.

Those of the school of Covenant Theology and many in what is commonly referred to as "reformed theology," reject the idea that Jesus, the Christ, will occupy the throne of David in a literal earthly kingdom for a thousand years. While few might buy into the all the tenants of Dispensationalism, which re-introduced this idea into Christian theology, the idea of such an era in earth history has strong support in Scripture and in early church history. Even the term dispensations, is biblical (Eph. 3:9), though the term "era" might be preferable as a means of avoiding the perceived excesses of Dispensationalism. The idea of events associated with such eras, whereby the goodness, grace, sovereignty and overall glory of God are demonstrated alongside the depravity of man, would serve the tenants of all schools of theological persuasion well. It also seems that such an idea would give understanding to the acts of God spoken of in chapters 19-20 of Revelation.

It would seem reasonable that to complete the story of fallen humanity that God loses Satan after a thousand years without his influence, God to prove in a final way that evil is present in human hearts apart from the evil one's activity. Of course, it is tricky business to speculate on what God is being motivated by and any conjecture along the lines of things not written must be clearly called what it is, at best an educated guess informed by Scripture. The fact is that this age that comes to an end in this event, will be a compelling demonstration of the fallen nature of humanity and so will also demonstrate dramatically God's goodness.

**20:8 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.**

After the purging from the earth of all the "bad apples," and after a thousand years of a perfect government on earth and God's presence with humankind, evil is still found in their hearts. It does appear from previous chapters that no unbelievers will be present at the start of the millennial reign of Christ. It appears that Israel is converted to belief in mass at the coming of Christ (Zechariah 12:7-13:1). It is likely that scores of others join them in belief from among the gentile nations. These will be the inhabitants of the earth. Unbelievers will be destroyed who have joined in the rebellion led by the anti-Christ. So the inhabitants of the earth will all be believers in Christ. Those raptured and resurrected will rule with Christ so that the cultures of the earth and to a certain degree perhaps its political lines will still be visible under Christ's rule.

Life for the inhabitants of the earth will be significantly different, but it appears that there is still birth and death. Evil has not been purged from humanity and this root remains alive so that Satan finds willing hearts even after the lessons of Daniel's 70th week, and even after 1,000 years of peace, tranquility, and prosperity.

Gog and Magog are mentioned. We believe that these kingdoms relate to the territory in the far north relative to Israel. This would be territory in the northern part of the old Persian empire and up into modern-day Russia. Gog and Magog are spoken of extensively in Ezekiel 38-39. That prophecy may be directed at an earlier time. It may be the battle led by the anti-Christ against Israel, or it may be distinct from that battle. If it is distinct, it may be that it is speaking of this battle, though that appears unlikely from the details given by Ezekiel. Most likely this battle seen by John and the one seen by Ezekiel are separate incidents. Gog is present in both. It becomes a chief player in Satan's hands in this the last great battle of Earth-history.

This is most likely a the most compelling example of the history of fallen humanity repeating itself. Satan once again can incite the nations to take on God in actual physical battle. And so, the evil of humanity is once again dramatically proved as something like the fall of Adam occurs all over again. The numberless army is a testimony to the great power of evil in the hearts of humanity.

**20:9 And they come upon 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.**

The hordes come against Jerusalem, the earthly capital of Jesus the Christ. Their intent is to capture and destroy it. But their end is simple and quick at the hands of God as He enters judgment with them. Despite all the preparation, all the grandiose schemes, and all the bravado that will likely relate to this rebellion, it will be over rather quickly.

Satan's hatred for Jerusalem is intense because this is the place where Yahweh has chosen to put His name. Because it is special to God (Deuteronomy 11:12), Jerusalem is of great interest to Satan. And so, for centuries, Satan has stirred up all manner of evil and fleshliness regarding Jerusalem. All of this will have been set aside for 1,000 years among humanity. But it will be fanned into flame once again by Satan when he is allowed to return to do his work among fallen men.

**20:10 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.**

Sin torments. Satan has brought great torment on angels and humans as he incites them to follow the evil urgings of their hearts. It is just and right that he endures this great punishment along with those who gave visible form to Satan's kingdom on earth. In the end Satan is joined to their fate even as he was joined to them in their earthly partnership. Torment is Satan's end. His punishment marks the beginning of God dealing finally and decisively with evil.

For the third time in Revelation, we see that this is the appointed end that awaits the wicked brimstone. This end is graphically demonstrated in the first use of the word brimstone in the Scripture, in the utter destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:24). It is then clearly stated that this brimstone is the end that awaits the wicked (Psalm 11:5-7). It is revealed that this is the end that will come on the anti-Christ (Ezekiel 38:22-23). Jesus warned of it (Luke 17:29). John has already spoken of it (Revelation 14:10; 19:20). It is reported later in this prophecy of John as occurring in the case of all wicked beings (20:15; 21:8).

The language here represents hell as a real place, and the punishment that goes with it as torment. It represents the sentence as lasting forever. We should not feel free to make hell or its punishment anything less.

**20:11 And 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.**

John sees God seated on a different throne than he had seen earlier. This is a great white throne, and it is the throne of judgment. It is God in some visible form, ready to judge. When God decides to judge apart from grace, no person or thing can stand in His presence, and so we are told that earth and heaven flee away. This is a reference to the destruction of the earth and heavens reported in 21:1 as having already happened. It was a teaching of the apostles, in harmony with the Old Testament, that destruction of the present earth and the heavens, meaning the atmosphere associated with them was God's plan (Isaiah 66:22-23; 2 Peter 3:10).

This testimony of John is a dramatic statement of creation's prospects apart from God's grace. No place is found for them. They cease to exist as we have known them. Perhaps this is a literal statement that the equilibrium of our solar system is lost and so earth begins simply to drift aimlessly through the universe as an eternal memorial to the end of evil.

That is conjecture based on the words of the text. We know that the present order is upheld "by the word of His power" (Hebrews 1:3). God has only to withdraw His word and the present order will no longer be sustained.

**20:12 And I saw the dead, the great and 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 written in the books, according to their deeds.**

The first resurrection is spoken of in verse five. It is the resurrection of the righteous, the first resurrection. This is the second resurrection. For those who have not believed in Christ, the judgment of God will be based on their deeds. Position in life will not matter. Even death does not release us from this appointment.

The books may be the principles God has revealed. We know we are responsible for truth God has made known. And we know that His revealed will is the standard by which we are judged. It may be that these books are a record of our deeds, evidence assembled by God to refute our own testimony of our goodness. We are not told what is in these books, only that they have everything to do with this judgment.

Then there is the book of life, presented here as man's only real hope in judgment. It is a book mentioned in the Old Testament (Psalm 69:28). Its existence is affirmed in the New Testament (Philippians 4:3). But it is mentioned relatively few times outside of the book of Revelation. We are not positive beyond this testimony what this book is. Some suggest it originally contained all the names of those granted physical life. Their names remain in it until their final rejection of Christ, at which point they are blotted out. Their lot then is to inherit the "second death" as the consequence of not believing in Him. Whatever this book is, it must be the book that bears witness to our faith in the truth God has revealed, embodied in Jesus Christ. The testimony of this book leads to the final sentence of every human being.

Here we are specifically told that in this second resurrection, the dead are judged by the things written in the books (plural), whatever is in them. We surmise from the ensuing verses that because they are not found in the book of life, they are left with only their deeds. So they are judged according to those deeds. The rest of Scripture testifies that for such persons there is no hope. These deeds are either recorded in “the books,” or are simply recalled by God and then judged by what “the books” say.

We conclude from this and other Scriptures that all those written in the book of life have been raised from the dead and glorified before the 1,000-year reign of Christ. They have reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Their eternal lives are secured by their faith. The only righteous people left from the eons of earth’s history would be from among those who have lived as earth’s inhabitants during the millennial reign of Christ. Hence, there could be some righteous people found in this judgment, with their names recorded in the book of life due to their faith. But they will be few compared to the hordes of wicked dead from all of Earth’s sordid history who are judged by their deeds and found wanting.

**20:13 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, everyone of them according to their deeds.**

As stated earlier, there is no escape from this appointment with our Creator. No matter where our death occurred, no matter what depth our soul and body have been taken to, there is no escape from this moment of accountability. And it is reiterated that the judgment will be according to deeds. God will not care one iota about some image we carefully cultivated. It will be an issue of what we did, how we acted, including our thoughts and our attitudes. This is what will be examined.

**20:14 And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.**

This marks the end of evil. When evil is completely judged including the planet earth of our era, the universe will be purified from it. This will be the end of spiritual death, physical death, and the temporary abode of the wicked who have physically died—Hades. With this act and the judgment against the earth and heavens, God has decisively dealt with evil, and all its remnants are now confined to the lake of fire. This is called here the second death. It is the final confirmation in the state of spiritual death for unbelieving beings, final expulsion from the presence of God. It is the misguided goal of evil persons realized, to their great horror.

**20:15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**

Salvation does not come to anyone through the deeds they have performed. It comes only through having one’s name written in the book of life. If one’s name is not in the book of life, nothing else is enough. We see here that this place of eternal torment and punishment is not just for Satan and his special agents. People will be cast into it, those who have not placed their faith in Jesus Christ. It is a simple tragic statement of the end that awaits those who refuse to be reconciled to God.

For the fourth time in Revelation, we see that this is the appointed end that awaits the wicked brimstone. It is the testimony of all of Scripture, graphically demonstrated when the word brimstone first occurs in the report of the utter destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:24). It is then clearly stated that this brimstone is the end that awaits the wicked (Psalm 11:5-7). It is revealed that this is the end that will come on the anti-Christ (Ezekiel 38:22-23). Jesus warned of it (Luke 17:29). John has already spoken of it (Revelation 14:10; 19:20; 20:10). It is reported one more time in this prophecy of John as occurring in the case of all wicked beings (21:8).

The book of life is mentioned six times in the book of Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12; 20:15; 21:27). It is only mentioned two other times in all of Scripture (Psalm 69:28; Philippians 4:3). Twice in the book of Revelation it is stated that names are written in it "from the foundation of the world." The use of the phrase "before the foundation of the world" would lead us to believe that the names of the elect are recorded in the book of life.

But this raises another question, because twice in the Scripture (Psalm 69:28; Revelation 3:5) the possibility is raised of having one's name erased from the book of life. This means that one of three ideas is possible. First, it is possible that the names in the book of life are of all people who will be given physical life. Second it is possible that the names in the book of life are only of the elect, but that some of the elects are lost along the way. Third, it is possible that the names of only the elect are in the book of life, and that the blotting out of one's name cannot really happen, but is a rhetorical device used to make a special point.

Of these three alternatives each has its problems. The second seems to go against the testimony of Scripture. The first requires that either all men are recorded in the book of life and are blotted out if they die without faith or that we employ a scheme that says that the names in the book of life are those of all who will profess faith, and that those who do not actually possess it (i.e., the Judas Iscariots of the world), are blotted out from it. The third alternative has its problems particularly in Revelation 3:5 where the testimony "I will not erase his name from the book of life" comes from Jesus Himself. It is hard to read that statement in its context and think that it is a mere rhetorical device. It might be construed to be that, if Jesus' words were, "I will blot your name out of the book of life." But a statement NOT to do so hardly has hyperbolic value.

Understanding the book of life is bit of a thorny problem which interpreters have tended to deal with by using the first explanation above. That explanation, that the names of all who will be granted physical life are recorded in the book of life seems to be the best way of dealing with the matter without sacrificing something of important value in the truth expressed in Scripture.

## Revelation 21

**21:1 And 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.**

God's judgment against evil extends to the physical earth. This destruction is a restatement of what had been spoken of in 20:11 and followed by a creation of a new heaven and earth by God. It will be a very different earth with no ocean, which would mean whole different ecosystems. The heaven mentioned here is not the abode of God, but the heavens of which the present earth is a part, the heavens as viewed from earth. The word as used in Scripture can refer to something as small as the zone in which the birds fly, and to something as large as the universe.

We do not know the extent of this destruction, but the fact that we are told later that there is no sun would seem to indicate that either the destruction is very extensive, or the new heaven and earth are in an entirely different solar system. The primary point of this verse is that the old has passed away and the new has come.

**21:2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.**

The community of believers is now complete. The Old Testament saints and New Testament saints have been joined to Christ earlier (Revelation 19:8ff). Now they have been joined by the saints of the Millennial era, and together they will occupy their eternal home. It is the new place of God's presence, called the new Jerusalem, prepared in advance by God for Himself and His own, and now brought down by Him from heaven to the new earth. It is said to be adorned like a bride for her husband.

There is no need to view this imagery as contradictory with the earlier imagery of the bride being the community of the elect. Presumably, the elect has been somewhere sheltered from the judgment of God against the earth. It could well be that they have been in the new Jerusalem in heaven and that the imagery here includes not just the city, but those in it—the buildings and the people coming down as one. In that case the statement would be fitting, "as a bride adorned for her husband," since the city has the bride within it.

**21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them,"**

There will no longer be a heaven and an earth in the sense that we presently understand them, as the dwelling of God and the separate dwelling of humanity. God's work of restoring humankind will be complete, and they will no longer be separated from Him by evil. All people in this new creation will be Yahweh's people. Yahweh and His people will live together in perfect fellowship. This statement is a very significant one in terms of the terms it uses. The promise that escaped those under the Old Covenant, and which was only partially experienced by those under the New Covenant, will now be actualized.



Twice in the verse it is said that God is “among” men. This represents a huge change that is the end of a very long undertaking by God we have known as redemption. He has lived within His people with a spiritual presence. Now He will have an earthly address, a physical presence with or among them. His great spiritual presence will of course, still be felt.

What we see about the eternal state in these verses is important. Besides confirming the fact that humanity and God will forever transact life in each other’s company, these verses give us information about the place of our abode. What we commonly speak of as the experience of “heaven,” the Scripture here clarifies as occurring on the new earth. Now this new earth could indeed be out in the heavens somewhere, in a corner of the universe unknown to us, that God will transport us to. We are not told when it is created, if it is new meaning recently created, or new meaning different from the old and unused. But the important thing is to understand that there will not be a heaven where God lives and earth where we live. We will live together on the new earth.

The new Jerusalem is brought to that new earth from “heaven,” that is, it is from the former place of God’s abode. The new Jerusalem is probably the place Christ has gone to prepare for us (John 14:1-2).

All of this adds up to this: heaven will be on earth, but not this earth. But the remarkable truth stated emphatically in this verse is not about the place, but the fact that God will live “among” men.

**21:4 And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning or crying or pain; the first things have passed away.**

Sorrow has been a part of life since sin got a grip on humanity. With sin and evil dealt with that will change. All past grief over lost loved ones, lost opportunities, squandered potential, evil choices, will be healed and miraculously done away with. Death, spiritual and physical, will be gone, no longer a part of the human experience. All that went with sin and spiritual death, the mourning, the crying, the pain, will all be gone.

There is this important statement; “The first things have passed away.” Life as we presently know it, will be a thing of the past. So different will the new life be that it will bear only passing resemblance to what we presently view as routine. That does not require radical alterations on God’s part. Only one alteration is necessary the removal of evil.

That one thing changes everything for all of eternity. Even experiences that are “normal,” would be radically different without evil. Everything from planting a garden to holding a worship service, to the work of leading and governing, would be changed. Nothing will be the same because of just one change. And so, the first things, corrupted by evil, will be gone forever.

**21:5 And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.”**

This word comes from God Himself, not that the others have not, but that there is an emphatic importance to these, something of great significance in them. They are so wonderful that they are difficult to trust. But God wants us to know that these words that are spoken by Him are faithful and true. They can and should be counted on and hope should be built on them.

The message is that there is nothing that will not be new. There are not simply some things that are different. ALL things will be different. The changes brought about by God will be universal. All things will be unused and unspoiled. Their nature will be different than the things we have experienced as a part of this life. They show no marks of wear, and no signs of abuse. The things we see will be different things and the things we hear, smell, touch and feel will be different. It will be true in the physical realm, the emotional realm and the spiritual realm. It is possible to reflect for a lifetime on how different life will be and not exhaust the subject. This statement is for that, to build within us a theology of hope, contentment, happiness, and the like.

**21:6 And He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost!”**

There are echoes in this statement of Isaiah 55, and there are echoes of the words of Christ on the cross. Christ’s great statement, “It is finished!” emphasized the completion of the redeeming work of man. This statement of Yahweh begins with the word *γεγοναν*, meaning “It has become!” It is a proclamation that the end toward which God’s plan had aimed has been brought about by Him.

The phrases all around this verse describe what has “become.” God’s great work of the reclamation of creation has fully come about. The old evil fallen world is gone. The purpose of allowing evil’s presence and corruption has been achieved. A representative remnant of humanity has been saved and re-created. These are those chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. They have been brought to faith, redeemed, and finally glorified—sanctified completely and forever for Yahweh’s kingdom.

The plan set in motion in the aftermath of the fall in Eden is done. Beyond what it was in the beginning it now is because that is the nature of God. He is the beginning, and He is the end. He has proved His nature by His work. Through the eons of human history, he has faithfully given to those who thirst for life with Him that life. He has done so without cost to them, at great cost to Him. His work toward humankind has proven His character, and now that work is complete.

**21:7 He who overcomes shall inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.**

The one who overcomes inherits the new things, life in the new heaven and earth and most importantly, life in the physical company of God. The new “things” are not to be minimized, as we rightfully do about earthly things, for things apart from evil are useful and bring joy. Ultimately, what gives the new things meaning is the fact that they are all enjoyed in perfect harmony with God and the new life is not only lived with His approval, but in company with Him. The relationship is still that in which He is the responsible one, the one looking out for our welfare, seeking our advancement. It is a relationship of love, protection, and nurture on His part and of love, respect and imitation on our part. This life is the inheritance of all who overcome, who rather than a life of rebellion against God, choose to place faith and trust in Him and His goodness.

The victory that overcomes the world is not one of works—of us managing to do good deeds that gain God’s approval. That much is clear from the testimony of Scripture. It is the victory of faith (1 John 5:4). To believe in Jesus Christ, then to go on and believe in the faithfulness of God and to trust in His good plan is done by us only through the power of the Holy Spirit. This faith of ours is the victory that against all odds overcomes the world.

**21:8 But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death.**

Faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). The antithesis of faith is distrust. Those who distrust God live by their own devices and serve themselves. They are marked by the things listed in these verses. They have walked in the way of humanity’s rebellion against God, with all its trappings.

Theses too have an inheritance. In seeking to save their lives, they will in the end lose all that makes physical life dear, without losing their physical lives. They will be banished from the presence of God, confirmed in the choice they made and the desire they pursued to be free of His fetters. They will be forever in the company of those who orchestrated their fall. They will reap the ongoing fruit of their sin, punished without mercy by the agony of their regret. And death will escape them.

For the fifth time in Revelation, we see the warning that this is the appointed end that awaits the wicked--brimstone. This has been the testimony of all of Scripture. It was graphically demonstrated when the word brimstone first occurred in the utter destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19:24). It is later plainly stated that this brimstone is the end that awaits the wicked (Psalm 11:5-7). It is revealed that this is the end that will come on the anti-Christ (Ezekiel 38:22-23). Jesus warned of this end for the wicked (Luke 17:29). John has warned of it four previous times (14:10; 19:20; 20:10, 15). Hell has been almost universally spoken of even by those that don’t believe in Christ. The warning has sounded loudly and clearly, scoffed at by countless, feared by many, heeded by few.

The list of offenses here is instructive. The cowardly are listed right along with the murderers. The liars are listed with the abominable, and the unbelieving with the sorcerers. It is because the one who suppresses truth hinders others from receiving it and thus robs them of eternal life. This is the ultimate in all that is abominable. Suppressing truth identifies a person with those who serve the power behind all the false religion that has come to exist in our world. All sin is offensive because it is ultimately against truth and so advances the great lie. The unbeliever by unbelief is guilty of all these sins by the very stance they have taken against the truth.

**21:9 And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues, came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the lamb.”**

A specific angel, whom John recognized from the past angelic activity he had watched, now will show John that which to angels, we are told, is a marvelous sight (1 Peter 1:12). There are those things that angels do that we would long to see and understand. But the same is said of angels as they view what God is accomplishing in the lives of His children on the earth through the truth He has revealed and made known. And so the angel is pointing out to John the finished product of heaven’s workings, as they have been carried out both in heaven and on earth. It is one of the great wonders of time. John describes detail of this wonder to us next.

**21:10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.**

This Jerusalem is the reality that the earthly city was to speak of. It is probably in this case not just a city, but the inhabitants of it, for elsewhere these are referred to as the bride of Christ (Luke 5:34). As we might describe the magnificence of a bride by describing her dress, John will begin to describe the detail of the city Christ’s bride occupies, the home Christ went to prepare for His bride when He left the earth. It is a part of His home which now is brought to the new earth where humanity and God will live together. It is the final act of the dissolution of the old relationship and the consummation of the new.

**21:11 having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.**

Jasper was part of the breastplate of the high priest. A mixture of quartz and iron-oxide, it is formed in colors of white, red, yellow, brown, and black. Sometimes these colors are arranged in layers in the rock. Jasper is harder than steel and scratches glass. The ancient Greeks and Romans believed it had healing powers and that it could draw the poison from snakebites. Here John uses the beauty of a fine “crystal clear” jasper as a comparison to the appearance of the City’s glory that he sees. Later he will say that the city walls were made of jasper (18).

The city reflects its Creator and glows with the glory of God. Now we know that there will be no need for the sun, that the light of the glory of God will be such that it illuminates the city (23), so that there is no night there (25). So we can surmise that the appearance of this city is a giant version of what we see when we display beautiful gems in perfect lighting conditions. From this glimpse God has beautifully crafted our home from those things that are of great value to us. He has done so meticulously. As the young bridegroom in the Jewish culture would prepare a place in which to live with his new bride, a place that would express His love and capture her heart, so God has done his best work on our new home, the glory of which John begins to describe here.

**21:12 It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are those of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.**

John states that the wall is great and high. Both words express something. The wall of a city was its protection from enemies in the former world. As such it was also an expression of a city's strength, its capable administration, its order, its wealth, and even its majesty and beauty. John observes two details about the gates of the city. First, John observes that an angel is present at each of the twelve gates in the wall. There may be an order and administration to even the perfect city where nothing evil exists that must be maintained which angels see too. Or their mission might simply be that of displaying the glory of that order. Either way, John observes an angel at each of the gates.

We also see that the gates have names. The names are not as in the old earthly city to describe a function, but to memorialize the family through whom the glory of God became known to those of earth and through whom redemption was brought to the former world. It will be an abiding memorial to God's grace, twelve names of twelve brothers whose works were self-serving and immoral, etched through God's mercy in the gates of the capital of the eternal kingdom. It will be a memorial to a covenant kept and the grace that brought it to fruition and proved it to be unconditional in nature.

**21:13 There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west.**

There is a symmetry to the appearance of the city that John notes, further testimony to the meticulous nature of its builder and architect. It is of interest that there is a directional orientation to the city even on the new planet.

**21:14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the apostles of the Lamb.**

Twelve huge stones John sees as the foundation for the wall. How exactly they lay he does not note here, only that they serve as the foundation for this great and high wall. Each of them has the name of an Apostle of Christ on it. He does not list the twelve names he sees here. Was Matthias listed or was Paul listed. No answer is given but it must have been interesting for John to see his own name there.

There is great symbolism in this we are certain, though somewhat uncertain as to what it is. There are some things that are likely revealed as mysteries to ponder in the coming age. But we can think of numerous reasons why those whose lives were given for the founding of the Church, those who were its foundation, should be memorialized in the foundation of the wall of the new Jerusalem.

**21:15 And the one who spoke to me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city and its gates and its wall.**

God wished to reveal to us something about the size of this city. And so, the angel, one of the seven who had poured out the seven plagues, has a means of measuring made of gold, of course! John will be enabled to record something about the size of this city which travels through the universe to its site on the new earth.

**21:16 And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as its width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.**

New Jerusalem is a 1500-mile cube, an area roughly has the size of the U.S., and extending upward the same distance. It is a small planet brought to earth a city of monstrous proportions. This means the gates are hundreds of miles apart, depending on how exactly they are configured in the walls.

Now the question throughout the book of Revelation is this; was John seeing actual realities, things as they would be, or was he seeing things which revealed how things would be. Both things are argued for by various interpreters. But it seems here that John was given a view of the actual city. By giving the actual dimensions in units understandable to us, it seems that God is revealing to us the actual city, not just a general concept.

The footprint then of the city would occupy 2.25 million square miles. If that area was broken down into quarter-acre lots, 5.76 billion home-sites would be available just on the ground level! Such a city could support a huge number of people. If it were made up of gigantic high-rises and 50% of the available area was used, and each person was allowed 1,000 square feet of living space, it is easy to see it being home to sixteen trillion people (@ 1,000 sq. ft. each, ½ occupancy, 13,939 per mile could live, 528 stories available per mile of height, 2.25 million square miles per story, or 31,362,750,000 per story, 16,559, 532,000,000 total people).

**21:17 And he measured its wall, seventy two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.**

We are not told if this is the height of the wall or the thickness of it. Both were important to the ancient mind. But the height is most likely in view. It is impressive and formidable to say the least.

In the original language the measurement is given in cubits, and it is said that these are also angelic. It is interesting to ponder who used them first, angels or humans. It is likely that angels did, that they were learned by humanity and that they are a testimony to the order of heaven and the interaction of heaven with earth early on.

**21:18 And the material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.**

The city looked like a brilliant jasper (11), because that is what its wall is made of. It is surrounded by a wall over 200 feet high made of jasper. Whether it is a single stone for each of the four walls, or multiple stones bonded together we are not told. It is a beautiful and enduring wall. The city itself within the walls, is said to be of pure gold, refined to where it is clear like glass. It would be gold of the purest sort to be described in this way. It is a great work of art, and the expense in earthly terms would be staggering!

We must remember that the language in Revelation is often symbolic, but nothing in the context allows us to dismiss this as that. Exotic materials are available to God in the universe and have likely been created by Him in quantities unknown to us and in quality unseen by us. We cast concrete. He casts precious stones! We would expect nothing less than spectacular in a city crafted by One with such creative power as He has demonstrated.

**21:19 And the foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald;**

Humans build with bricks and sticks. God's building materials reflect His wealth, and He doesn't build our house with cheap stuff! He doesn't even embrace practicality! He builds with precious stones—He is extravagant for us.

This is the second time John mentions the foundation stones of the city wall. He has noted that he saw twelve of them. That would make them huge, since this wall is about 6,000 miles in total length. We can only imagine solid sapphires, emeralds, jaspers, and so on, over 500 miles in length. Each of these huge stones then, is a precious stone, and each has one of the 12 apostles' names on it. There may be a symbolism in each of the stones, but it is unknown to us. Many have suggested the significance of each stone scripturally. What is significant is that this will be a fulfillment of a promise God made to Israel in Isaiah 54:11-17. It will be fulfilled literally and extravagantly.

**21:20 the fifth sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eight, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysopase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.**

With this verse all twelve of the foundation stones have been recognized by John. Each is a thing of beauty to imagine in terms of appearance and together the sight must have been spectacular. We are left to wonder about the city's finer appointments and inner extravagances if the foundation of the wall is marked by such grandeur. Eternity will provide extravagance beyond our imagination, and it is a wise trade to live shrewdly in our times.

**21:21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.**

It completely escapes us to describe how such a “planet” as this would be possible. There are however things God knows and has access to in other parts of His universe that completely defy our earthly experience. We cannot for example, imagine the oyster it would take to produce such a pearl! But God has resources and understanding we know nothing about, and He certainly can speak into existence what He wishes. When we ponder His greatness, and the ability of the heavenly host who attend Him, and then try to conceive of what might be available in the far-flung regions of the universe He has created, it opens huge possibilities. Gates of pearls and streets of gold are not difficult to imagine.

**21:22 And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple.**

There is no temple in the new Jerusalem in the sense of a temple building. We will live with God as Adam did in Eden. There will be continued, unbroken intimacy with God there and so no need for a place to go to worship Him. He will be worshiped in spirit and in truth. His presence will be the place of worship and it will fill the earth.

The old Jerusalem was the place He chose to put His name on the present earth. It was the place where the knowledge of God could be found. In the eternal state the earth will be full of the knowledge of God, so that there is no need of the special places and routines that fallen humanity needed to find Him.

The fact that there is no temple in the eternal state and that this fact is here clearly stated has great significance on our eschatology. It means that the temple described in such detail in Ezekiel 40-48, along with the procedures and ceremonies of worship in the land, are not for the eternal state. Since they have found no fulfillment to date, there must be some age between now and eternity that all those things fit into. Only a theology that allows for a block of time during which Christ reigns the earth and where worship occurs in a temple in earthly Jerusalem could all the prophecies connected with the temple and Jerusalem be fulfilled in a literal sense. And if we leave the literal sense of such prophecies, we have unintelligible data.

The eternal state we know to be the end of temples. Previously in Revelation John has seen a temple in heaven. It must be that in the making of the new heavens and earth these changes. This verse is clear, there is no temple in the eternal state.

**21:23 And the city has no need of the sun or the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illuminated it, and its lamp is the lamb.**

It appears that the new heavens and earth will be very different. We have already seen that there is no sea on the new earth (21:2). Now it appears that there is no sun or moon, though the words simply say they are not needed. We are told in verse 25 that there is no night there. It is reasonable to assume that light has become a permanent presence in this city because of the presence of Yahweh Himself. There is abundant scriptural evidence that this would be true, given all the associations of God's presence with light.



**21:24 And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it.**

The light that new Jerusalem provides will light the entire new planet. This should be taken in the physical sense. It is possible that by the phrase “walk by its light” John has more in mind than physical light. From that city great truth will emanate as well. But physical light is the primary subject John has been speaking to in the previous verse and will continue speaking of in the following one.

Of great interest is the fact that nations and kings are mentioned here. As in the millennial kingdom there will apparently be certain clear distinctions in people and there will be lines of authority and leadership that persist as God carries out His rule in the new earth.

This is the third and permanent phase of the kingdom of God. There was the mystery form of it, or as some have called it “the invisible form.” This is the form we experience today, being carried out by Christ in the hearts of humankind amid the wicked world. Then there will be its first visible form during the 1,000-year reign of Christ in the Old Jerusalem on the present earth. Then there is this future state that John is foreseeing in this verse. This is the kingdom in full bloom, perfect, complete, and mature in every sense, permanent, lasting forever and ever. It is established at the end of time itself. It will be the kingdom that forever ends all others, ruled by the only Sovereign, and under Him those who in carrying out His rule on the new earth, worship Him in spirit and in truth.

**21:25 And in the daytime (for there shall be no night there), its gates shall never be closed;**

This is what we refer to as “heaven,” our home in the eternal state. It will be a place of constant activity, always “open for business” whatever the nature of that is in eternity. This is some of the only insight we have into life as it will be lived in the eternal state, and it is not real explicit. The open gates were on the old earth, the signal of safety primarily, but also of business and commerce. They were not open on the old earth at night for fear of danger from enemies. In the new world there will be no night and no enemies. So the activity and business of that life is continuous.

The message John is wanting to get across however, is not that of 24-hour business. He is drawing attention to the city’s unthreatened security, peace and well-being. All threat from enemies has been eliminated. The security of the inhabitants is absolute.

In this verse it is stated that there is no night there. This builds on the idea that there is no need for the sun. This is a commentary on the different nature of everything on the planet, from its plant life to that of the human body.

**21:26 And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it.**

Tribute and gifts of worship will come into the city to its people and its ruler. All that is good from the peoples and lands of the new world will be brought in through its gates. That this implies some form of economy and enterprise in the heavenly kingdom seems obvious. There is certainly room for that in this verse, or it could be simply a reference to the spirit of those times when there will be honor and glory among the nations for God and his people on the new earth, a stark contrast to the spirit of the nations on the present earth.

**21:27 and 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.**

This is a clear statement of the moral lines that will remain forever drawn by God in the eternal state. It is not necessary to infer from this that the unclean will exist on the new earth. It is a statement of fact about the city that draws sharp lines.

We know that the world of evil will still exist, because all the unclean and those who practice abominations and all liars were already cast into the lake of fire, experiencing the second death (8). That place is not a part of this new earth. We know from other Scripture that death escapes those who are there, so that they remain alive for eternity. So they will exist, but they will have no part in living in the presence of God, in His city or in its light. That is the privilege reserved for those written in the book of life. This verse then clearly excludes the wicked from any relief from their condemnation. They are excluded from all the blessing of the redeemed.

## Revelation 22

**22:1 And He showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street.**

The new Jerusalem is said to have a street, singular (2). It is a divided street that John sees with a river in the middle of it. He refers to the river as having the water of life. There is that in God, and therefore in His city, that supports eternal life. This passage, like many in Revelation, is taken by some to be purely metaphorical. But there is no sense to abandon a literal understanding of it. We know that in the case of Naaman, God healed him and used the water of a river to do it. We know that ultimately the power of eternal life lies in Yahweh, but He can use whatever means He chooses to impart it.

**22:2 And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.**

The tree is singular, but on either side of the river. It is most likely then, that the term tree speaks of trees that line the river. The trees are said to bear twelve kinds of fruit. The word “kinds” is added by the NASB. It infers different varieties of fruit, whereas it is more likely that the verse is expressing the idea of twelve crops of fruit per year.

Despite the mention of the fruit of the trees, it is apparently the leaves of these trees that will be the instrument God uses to sustain the eternal spiritual life of redeemed humanity. That which God kept from humanity in the garden of Eden, which He drove them away from in their fallen state, will be freely accessible to them. There is that in this tree that ministers and sustains eternal physical and spiritual life. What it is remains mysterious. But it will be provided for us.

**22:3 And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the lamb shall be in it, and his bond-servants shall serve Him;**

The curse that came upon the first creation due to sin will be no more. Whether this happens in conjunction with the leaves of the tree of life is uncertain, but it appears likely. The new Jerusalem is the place where God chooses to make His residence. It will be the headquarters of the power and authority of the universe, the office of its Creator. As the book began it ends. It began by speaking of truth that God entrusted Christ with to show His bondservants. As it began, it now begins to wind down. We have the same three characters here—God, Christ, the bondservants.

This is God’s vision and plan for our lives, that which He is moving all things towards. It is the removal of the curse of sin. It is the secret end, unveiled and made plain to us. Our end is the privilege and joy of serving Him by carrying out His will in a perfect world.

**22:4 and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.**

Intimacy and submission, the two elements that elude us in this life in our pursuit of God, the two things lost in the fall, will both be ours when our redemption is complete. To look on the face of Christ, to know Him by sight, will be our great privilege. To be marked as belonging to Him will mean our security forever, as well as our satisfaction, joy and fulfillment. It is for this that we have been made. This verse then, is a profound statement of the great human search and creation's great groaning satisfied. It is our adoption as sons completed.

**22:5 And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.**

This verse marks for a second time a great change in the human experience. Evenings and mornings were inherent in the old creation. They are gone in the new creation. The glory of God that illumined the way of the Israelites in the Sinai desert will illumine the new earth so that the light of the sun as we have come to depend on it will be unnecessary (see 4:23). All things have been made new (21:5), and this is possibly the greatest proof of it.

The "serving" of His bondservants mentioned in verse three is further defined here. It is the activity of "reigning with Him." We will serve Him by carrying out the administration of His will throughout eternity in His great kingdom whatever He chooses to do in conjunction with it. Our serving is not in menial earthly tasks, but in carrying out the great business of the King of the universe.

**22:6 And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true," and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must shortly take place.**

The angel who was one of the seven who poured out the bowls of God's wrath is the one speaking here. The first statement, that these words are faithful and true, is the only one regarded by the NASB as being spoken by the angel. The NIV regards the whole verse as a quote, and there is no good reason not to agree. The term "these words" refers to the entire contents of the book. It is all faithful and true. It is faithful, that is, trustworthy, because it is true. It is true because it is from God and is therefore a reflection of His character. The next statement confirms that its ultimate source is not simply angels, but God Himself.

Yahweh is the God of the spirits of the prophets. That is an important statement about the prophetic writings including Revelation, and about God Himself. He is the same faithful and true source that made the prophet's words faithful and true. The same level of inspiration is claimed for the book of Revelation. This statement is also an interesting one regarding the Godhead. We know that John and the other disciples referred to Jesus as "the Lord" (John 21:7). His statement here can be construed to be an affirmation of the deity of Christ, and an implicit affirmation of the trinity. The text is saying that Jesus is the God of the spirits of the prophets, which spirit's Peter testified were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:21). Putting it all together, we have testimony of the Holy Spirit concerning Christ that clearly identifies Christ as God.

The purpose of the message of the book of Revelation is to reveal or unveil, as its name indicates. It is to make those in God's service aware of what lies ahead. It concerns things that "must shortly take place." The word for shortly means quickly, at once, soon, without delay. It also conveys speed, swiftness, quickness, so that it could refer here not to the proximity in time of the events, but to their swiftness once they unfold. If it does not refer to the character of the events of the book, but to their proximity, then we must simply say that in God's eyes they were close at hand and that by His way of judging time they were soon to come about even though they were at least 2,000 years away!

**22:7 "And behold I am coming quickly. Blessed is the one who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."**

The NASB renders these words as coming from Christ. They could be the words of Christ, conveyed by the angel to us. It seems more likely from what will follow in verse eight that the latter is true, that they are words of Christ, coming from the angel.

Christ's coming will be swift. The idea will be mentioned again in verse 12. The word used is the same as in verse 6, probably describing the swiftness of the event rather than the proximity of it. It fits with the imagery of the thief in the night in that there is a suddenness to the event, due to our sleep, that makes for dramatic impact. The thief may come quite slowly, but it is a sudden and shocking impact that he has. So will be the coming of Christ. There is therefore blessing in paying attention to the words of the book in that it keeps one from sleep and so the coming of Christ to such a one still comes swiftly, but not unexpectedly.

**22:8 And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things.**

John identifies himself here as he did in the beginning of the book, as the witness of the events he has reported. He also tells of his response to the heavenly message. It is no small thing that He, a Jew, and a Christian fell down to worship this angel. It gives us an idea of the magnitude of the words, the power of the spiritual atmosphere, but also of the power of human nature amid it all to respond in the wrong way. We can be participating in the most powerful of spiritual events, and yet be led to do the wrong thing. It is very instructive that even in our great moments, our worship can get misdirected.

**22:9 And he said to me "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God."**

At this John stands corrected, again an important lesson on the ease with which our beings can be led astray in the sensory power of a moment, even when in the Spirit. The angel's words are simple; "Don't do that!" We must follow them and heed them.

The angel places himself on the level of John, John on the level with the prophets, and all of them on the level of the obedient ones. It is an insightful look at rank and hierarchy in the kingdom of God. There is difference in role and function, but equality in terms of value and intrinsic worth, all of which falls in line and takes its place under the surpassing greatness and glory that are God's. He alone is to be worshiped. The worship of the Creator and His appointed King is THE activity that is common to all this new creation, and that gives order to all that new creation.

**22:10 And He said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.”**

At one point John had been instructed to “seal up” particular words he had heard (10:4). That meant specifically not to record them in writing to make them known. Those words were not for others to hear or know. They lie beyond revelation. I take these words to mean that all that John has written is for all who will read to know and heed. It is God’s desire to hold nothing of what He has revealed in this book back from anyone. In this sense it is not to be sealed up or closed to make it inaccessible.

It is intriguing that a book that has sparked such division and in some cases such heresy would be the will of God. Amazing that though it is difficult to understand, so that even a man such as Luther said, “It may be blessed to understand it, but who does?” yet God deemed it profitable and good that we have it. And so, one of the last books to be accepted into the New Testament cannon by the Church, we are assured by these words, is one that God wants us to open.

It is because the time is near. In this statement we must remember that chapters 2 and 3 have to do with messages to the church of the present age, and that those chapters contain messages for the wisdom of all who will seek them out. They are messages that when heeded equip the church for the present life and prepare them for the next life. The time for those words is indeed near. The events introduced in chapters 4-5 which commence in chapter 6 await us, but they are near in the sense that they could unfold at any time. There is no sign or event that needs to happen before the first horseman of the apocalypse rides on to the scene.

**22:11 Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and let the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and let the one who is holy, still keep himself holy.**

This is the day of man on earth—humanity. Within the limits established by God, humankind is being allowed to rebel and that rebellion is being allowed by God under His watchful eye, to run its course. As John wound down the writing of this book, the angel tells him to allow the message of the book to be accessible and that the time for God to address the state of things, though near, had not yet arrived. Things must continue to run their course until the purposes of God have been fully achieved. And so, humans were to continue doing all that humans do until the appointed time. Some would do so to their eternal pain and shame, others to their eternal reward. This is not to say that it is all in line with the character of God, but it is in line with His plan and purpose.

**22:12 Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.**

The idea of Yahweh’s appearance on earth with His reward is spoken of by Isaiah (40:10; 62:11). Humanity has been given freedom. There has been a kind of letting go on God’s part, but they are held accountable. Again, the word used here to describe the coming of Christ is one that conveys a swiftness, which gives strength to the idea that we are accountable. To ones not obeying their master, his return seems very sudden and swift.

The word translated reward in the NASB is μισθος which means wages. The event of Christ's return will be a fulfillment of what Jesus proclaimed while on earth when he said, "even now the worker is laboring for his wages (John 4:36). Earlier in this chapter (7), He said, "I am coming quickly, blessed is he who heeds the words of this book." Here He repeats that He is coming swiftly and tells why such a person who heeds the message is blessed. He is blessed because he will be rewarded for his faithfulness by the One who cannot be outgiven, who measures out liberally, pressed down, shaken together, spilling into the lap (Luke 6:38).

**22:13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.**

Christ is the originator of all that we see. It is to His glory and benefit that all the things and events that have occurred in His creation point. He was what it was all about in the beginning, and He will be what it is all about when it is concluded, when all His actions against evil have been completed.

There is an eternality to Christ and a constancy to Him that we do well to ponder. Because He is coming swiftly to render payment for services rendered, we do the only legitimate thing when we serve His purposes and carry out His will. All that we do finds its true significance in how it relates to what He is seeking to accomplish and bring about. What we do may be gold silver and precious stones, the very heart of His heart. Or, it may be wood, hay, and stubble, valueless in terms of what He desires (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). It's true value is assigned by him to whom all things point.

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

This verse must be taken together with the one that follows it. There are several things that are difficult about the two verses. What is meant by washing one's robes? Whatever it is, it is important, because it allows one to enter the new Jerusalem and to eat of the tree of life. And whatever is decided in this verse must allow for the fact that in the next verse we clearly see those who do not wash their robes are perhaps present on the new earth but outside the city.

The washing of robes is apparently symbolic of personal action with respect to certain deeds since the next verse specifies deeds characteristic of those outside the city. If the washing of robes symbolizes belief in the gospel—justification and imputed righteousness—then we are left to assume that those who have not washed their robes are unbelievers and that they may be present on the new earth, no longer in the lake of fire. If the verse is speaking of sanctification, then the washing of robes symbolizes personal decisions and choices that result in holiness. In that case, those outside the city are believers who have not allowed the sanctification process to have free course and who now pay for that spiritual sloth. The problem is that they are not given access to the tree of life, and presumably have no eternal life.

This is a problem that can only be resolved by accepting less clarity than is generally desired in interpretation, in the sense that either conclusion has its lingering problems.

It seems best to conclude that the washing of robes is a picture of justification. Those excluded from the city are unbelievers. Their presence outside the city can be explained in this way. John is not seeing a scene at all here but is being given verbal information about the eternal state by an angel. It is accurate to say that only believers will be in the city and that others will be excluded from it, and that they may be all that is being said without reference to the specific place where the unbelievers are. While it would be more specific to say that they are in the lake of fire, it is certainly accurate to say that they are outside the city gates. They are excluded from it. We are not required by the words themselves to place the believers just outside the city gates, or even on the new earth. They are simply “outside.” It could also be that the city is used as an expression of the entire new creation, just as we speak of Washington D.C. as representing the entire United States. It seems best to work with these elements of the statement and find the explanation in them rather than to try to place sinful people on the new earth or to make those outside the city disobedient believers who have no access to the tree of life.

**22:16 I Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright morning star.**

With these thoughts the authority of the book is once again made clear. It is a message from Christ Himself to His people, for their understanding and progress in the faith. He further identifies Himself as the root and offspring of David. The significance of this statement is not just that He is the source that brought life to David, though as Creator that is certainly true. The term has prophetic significance in that it was projected that the root of David, the holy root, would be that which brought life and a kingdom to a believing remnant of Israel through whom God would bring about the fulfillment of His promises to Israel (Isaiah 11:10-16). He is the offspring of David so that He is the fulfillment of those prophecies which spoke of one of David's seed who would rule the world (Ezra 34:23-24; 37:24-25; Zechariah 12:7-13:1). He is the bright morning star, one of the earliest symbols of the dawn of the age of the Messiah who would bring hope, salvation, and restoration (Numbers 24:17). The terms together are an uncompromised claim to the title of Messiah, a clear testimony to Jesus being the Promised One in whom believers have hoped.

**22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.”**

The united voice of all that is God or God's is an invitation, given during the time of John and through the present day. It is a picture of God's grace appealing to all of humankind, while there is time, before the events of this book run their course. The Spirit invites all who will to come. The bride, in this context the new Jerusalem, the entire community of the redeemed, take up the message of the Spirit and together extend God's offer of reconciliation. Those who respond immediately become part of that united voice. The invitation extends to all who thirst, who long for their spiritual needs to be met, who long to be reconciled to their Creator. The invitation extends to those with nothing to give, who simply wish to have eternal life.



In this verse Jesus is wrapping up His words. This will be the message of the Godhead through the Church to the world until the time of the events in this book begin to unfold. Some terrible things have been projected. It is imperative to ponder those events, most of which transpire over a seven-year period against the backdrop of hundreds of years of this gracious appeal and continual pleading. The message of reconciliation has been always present and ever God's heart for humankind. Nothing is required except for them to come.

**22:18 I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in this book.**

When dealing with the Scripture, it is easy to add our words and our thoughts to it. This is Satan's great evil, and it is the grand ambition of our own flesh to make God's message say what we want it to say. Particularly in prophecy, when we would love to know more than we know, and where we can get so much recognition and gain such a following when we show a measure of understanding, it is easy to go beyond what is written.

We must carefully separate our words from God's. God promises trouble to those who drift in this direction of adding to His words as they hear what God has revealed. In prophetic matters God has revealed just enough by His own measure and plan. It is obvious from the language in Revelation that there are things it is not God's will for us to know (10:4). When we speculate on what is not plainly revealed we must be careful to separate for our hearers our own words from those of God. Adding to God's word, as Eve found out, is tantalizing. It is the first great error we must avoid.

**22:19 and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.**

The second great error we must avoid is to take away from the prophetic word. To take away from its content, to leave sections out or to diminish its inspired nature, to relegate it to the realm of literature rather than truth is taking away from it. The penalty for such action is plainly spelled out here and amounts to loss of eternal life.

That is a staggering thought to ponder as this verse plainly states. The verse presents some problems. It appears that the inheritance of a part in the tree of life and in the holy city has clearly been granted, then taken away. This verse appears to be one that clearly threatens the security of the believer. Some would resolve this by suggesting this could never happen to the elect.

About the only way of justifying the idea of eternal security and this verse is to suggest, as spoken of earlier (see 20:15 discussion), that the names of all who are granted physical life are written in the book of life. Then the names of those who die in unbelief are blotted out. This position has its own problems, particularly when placed alongside the doctrine of election. But that can be resolved with greater ease than the idea that the elect can lose their salvation. We can envision God having written every person's name in the book of life, when they were determined before time to be granted physical life. We can imagine Him choosing from these other specific individuals who would be granted spiritual life. We can imagine God blotting the others out when they die in unbelief. It is tough to envision God choosing certain people for spiritual life, then changing His mind based on their deeds, particularly when He knows their deeds ahead of time. So it is best to understand those who change the words of Revelation as unbelievers, who demonstrate their unbelief by not believing the book and changing its words. They lose out on what had been freely offered to them—eternal life.

**22:20 He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

It is Christ who testifies to the words of John. He verifies that they are true. He adds His own affirmation of His quick return. John adds Amen to this testimony of Christ.

For the third time in this chapter the phrase “I am coming quickly” appears. In each case the word for quickly is the same, *ταχυ*. As stated earlier, it does not have to mean in a short time. It can be the manner of coming that is being described--a swift or sudden coming. In terms of other Scripture, Christ's coming is portrayed as an unexpected coming, a coming at a time when it is the last thing people are expecting (Matthew 24:44; Luke 18:8).

The words of the book of Revelation were given supernaturally to John so that they came to Him without error. He wrote them down and Christ affirms them so that they are approved as written. Therefore, we can say “Amen!” Even so come, Christ, as you have planned and proclaimed in this book! It is good and may what you have finished come to us!

## Appendix 1

The terms “week” in Daniel 9:24-27 and the term “months” in Revelation 10.

**“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.”**

We find in Daniel this rather remarkable prophetic statement about Yahweh having a series of decrees for Israel, Jerusalem, and their land that would be carried out over a “seventy week” period. Furthermore, it says that from the time a decree is issued to rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah, seven weeks and sixty-two weeks would pass, a total of sixty-nine weeks. This is intriguing because if we could figure out how long a week was, it would shed light on the seventieth week, a time frame involved in later prophecies of the New Testament.

There are several challenges connected with determining just what is meant by Yahweh’s “week”. It is made difficult by the differences in the ancient world in the calendar. The Hebrew’s year was 360 days and extra months were inserted to right the calendar when needed. They simply did not have the solar system rightly figured out. No one knows when these extra months were inserted. Also, events in their written history were reported in relationship to other events, like this; “In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri began to reign over Israel . . . (1 Kings 16:29). There was no particular “anchor event” to which passing years could be anchored to give history a context, as the birth of Christ came to be to us for the past 2,000 years. Each generation had their own reference point for time.

Establishing how long a “week” might be is also complex because Daniel says that the clock starts on the 69 “week” period when a decree is given that orders the rebuilding of Jerusalem. That event would start the countdown to their Messiah, their hope.

Now, the controlling empire of the day switched during Daniel’s time. He himself was taken captive from Jerusalem by the Babylonian armies. He served that empire and various of its kings for a good portion of his life. Then the Persians destroyed the Babylonians and Daniel served the kings of Persia. Their kings did make decrees regarding Jerusalem. In fact, there were four different decrees that can be construed to be a decree to rebuild it: First, 2 Chronicles 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-4; 6:1-5; second, Ezra 6:6-12; third, Ezra 7:11-26; fourth, Nehemiah 2:1-8. Of these four the last decree in Nehemiah 2:1-8 is the one that most clearly gives a command about the entire city. But that is not a settled matter in the minds of all scholars.

The reality is that there is much disagreement on what is meant by a “week,” so much so that many astute scholars have simply said it is an impossible task to determine it. They are certainly right in the sense that it cannot be absolutely proven. So many have chosen to treat this expression of time as a mostly symbolic one and the entire meaning of the passage develops many different threads of meaning.

There are some who have demonstrated that a “week” means seven years. Sir Robert Anderson, a prolific writer in his day, in his work *The Coming Prince*, published in 1894 was among the most thorough. Though his work is old to us, it is quite informative and demonstrates that a meaningful understanding of the term “week” is both possible and verifiable within the limits of the data we have on the dates of events of the ancient world. Many have affirmed his conclusion. They have shown that it is possible to identify a specific starting point when a decree was issued by a Persian king to rebuild Jerusalem. They demonstrate how sixty-nine weeks of seven years each looks superimposed on historical events. That period is 483 years. With reasonable allowance made for faulty calendars, 483 years after the Persian decree recorded by Nehemiah (445 B.C.), fell on the day Jesus entered Jerusalem as Israel’s king on what we know as Palm Sunday.

The work of Sir Robert Anderson and those that have retraced his calculations is complex and convincing, but again, not among all scholars. Much criticism can be leveled at it because of all the uncertainties connected with ancient records. The proposition however, that a “week” refers to a seven-year period, should be seen as legitimate where something so lacking in data is being examined. Most interpreters of the Bible, though different in their view of the interpretation of the passage, believe it best to view a “week” as a seven-year period.

Now for our sakes, living in the 21st century after Christ and given the fact that there is so much unknown as to calendars and year length and the amount of total years inserted to make up for these errors, it seems best to affirm that we cannot verify with absolute certainty that we have solved the mystery of what a “week” Isaiah It would seem that our best expectation would be to establish what is reasonably close. This is all we can do.

From a biblical point of view this is quite easy. The account of Nehemiah 2:1-8 has the Persian King Artaxerxes granting Nehemiah’s request to rebuild the city of Jerusalem (verse 5ff). That event has been said by scholars to have occurred in 445 B.C. Daniel tells us that from the time this decree was issued, 445 B.C., there would be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. Our questions then are two. First, how long is 69 weeks if a “week” equals seven years?”) Its simple math. 69 weeks equals 483 years. The second question is if we fast forward from 445 B.C. 483 years, with NO attempt to account for time added to the calendar, what year are we in? The answer is 38 A.D. That’s really close to the time of Jesus! It is particularly close given calendar inaccuracies, the inaccuracies of historical records and inaccuracies connected with pinpointing the advent of Jesus. It is very easy to see that a “week” can be reasonably understood and trusted to be a seven-year period.

## Appendix 2

The “layering” employed by Yahweh in Zechariah’s prophecies.

We frequently see a layering employed in Zechariah’s writings. By this we mean the prediction of an event that will re-occur during Israel’s future story. Israel’s history tended to repeat itself due to their chronically “unprepared” hearts (Psalms 78:8; 95:8-11; Hebrews 3:7-19). They were typical of humanity in that their hearts were never prepared for Yahweh’s presence and rule.

This layering occurred in this way. There were events that occurred in Zechariah’s ministry that would occur in the life of the Good Shepherd, Yahweh Himself when He came to shepherd Israel. On Israel’s part there would continue to be repetition of past failures as time moved along toward the conclusion that Yahweh had spoken of in chapter ten. Their faithlessness to the covenant meant repeated experiences of the covenant’s various curses. The conclusion for them was glorious and it was certain. The pathway there would be circuitous and filled with the self-inflicted tribulations and consequences of the hard-heartedness that Israel had historically drifted back into. So similarly, to an archeological dig, when we examine Israel’s history, we find common occurrences in the various strata of their history.

Looking forward Zechariah projects such things. He saw various sieges against Jerusalem. The payment for his services as a shepherd of thirty pieces of silver would be repeated in the case of Jesus. The miraculous intervention of Yahweh to save Israel from drifting into oblivion as other people groups had, would also be repeated. False shepherds would continually rise and abuse Israel because of their repeated rejection of their own good shepherd. So events prophesied would re-occur and be fulfilled repeated times. However, there was also in most cases some consummate fulfillment in view for these events that Yahweh’s plan was moving the nation toward. The outcome along the way was grim. The outcome would be glorious.

To repeat a statement made earlier in the commentary (at 1:18-25), this layering of similar events that would repeat themselves is frequently visible in all the prophetic writings and particularly in Zechariah. Both the ruins of Jerusalem and the rebuilt temple testified to Zechariah’s generation of Yahweh’s faithfulness to His decree. But Zechariah’s message warned that it was not the last time Jerusalem would lie in ruins. The comfort was and is that the rebuilding of Jerusalem that Zechariah’s generation witnessed was a work Yahweh’s Spirit miraculously brought about. It was a sign to them of His covenant love and His presence with them. It was also a sign that such works of restoration would be repeated and on the grandest of scales, when again Jerusalem lay in ruins. The end of these eras of prosperity and demise assuredly would be that all Yahweh’s promises to Israel would become a reality. They would bless all peoples. Jerusalem will dwell securely through the Israelite; the Anointed One whose exclusive right is to rule all creation. Yahweh’s decree remains intact.

## Appendix 3

“The Piercing,” John’s use of Zechariah 12:10 in John 19:37 and Revelation 1:7.

Through Zechariah’s prophecy around 500 B.C. Yahweh told of a glorious future He had planned for Israel. He also made it clear that the path would be circuitous and filled with the self-inflicted tribulations. These would be consequences of the hard-heartedness that Israel had historically drifted back into, rejecting Yahweh’s rule. Chapters 12-14 speak of events that would occur that would change all this, the special intervention of Yahweh in world affairs. Here’s what you’ll read about in these chapters.

- Yahweh would bring “a day” of great reversal in world governments. Those dominating Israel would themselves be dominated.
- Yahweh would bring great victory for the little kingdom of Israel, destroying all their foes.
- Surprisingly, the day would bring great mourning in Israel when they recognized that the One who brought about this great reversal was the very one they pierced—Jesus.
- Israel would experience a day of great forgiveness from Yahweh for their centuries of treacherous betrayal.
- Earth would witness Israel casting off all the false religious schemes they had embraced.
- BUT this had to happen first. Israel would kill the One appointed by Yahweh as their shepherd/king. They would go through a great period of trouble as a people. The mess would be the sign that the ending was good!
- Yahweh’s king would restore to Israel all that had been unjustly taken from them over the centuries.
- The battle on “the day” would start out badly for Israel. It would shift in their favor when the One they had pierced appeared dramatically with great power.
- That will mark a day unique in earth history, when even the geography of Palestine will be changed.
- It will mark the day when Yahweh Himself will rule the earth. It will be the end of the age of man and the beginning of the day of Yahweh.
- It will be a season when Yahweh’s will be strictly imposed and enforced on the earth, with no resistance allowed but a time of unprecedented peace and prosperity.
- It will begin an era unlike any other when Yahweh will be worshiped, and Jesus praised by all the earth’s people

Israel's "piercing" of this One who was their hope, their guarantor of all Yahweh's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was certainly their greatest transgression. At the same time, that they do it shows that Yahweh's script is accurate. It is after all, His script that will stand. Their piercing of God's anointed One does not change the fact that Jesus Christ IS God's anointed One. He will rule. He will appear again on Israel's behalf and be their deliverer.

Their mindless rejection of Him that leads to Him being pierced is awful. John is careful to record it. He does so because though it is awful, the piercing is a sign that Yahweh's gracious plan is true and real. The piercing affirms the hope of all humanity, their only hope, the return to earth of the pierced One.