

A Commentary on

REVELATION

Standing Firm in our Time



BrookyStockton

A Commentary on Revelation

Standing Firm in our Time

Seminary Lecture Notes

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Preface

When properly understood, the Book of Revelation drives out fears and blesses the reader with a fresh vision of Christ. It not only cleanses timidity that hides in the heart, it fuses steel into the souls of men. This book inspires hope and drives pure hearts to dig deeper, to climb higher, and to walk closer with Christ. In the midst of a culture hostile to the Christian faith, this book provides perspective for the battle; vision to preach the gospel; and courage to stand firm in our time against the forces of darkness.

This work is not a roadmap to end times. Rather, it seeks to perceive how the early church would have interpreted this book. While many interpreters have relegated the visions to pertain to presumptive future events, this work seeks to understand how these visions pertain to the seven churches; that is, our first duty as interpreters is to recognize the original readers and to interpret the work in light of their time. This is not always an easy task as we do not have all the information we would like to have about the context of this book. For example, we would like to know more about the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” but information is sparse. Nevertheless, we do our best to discern the meaning of these visions to the first century readers.

This does not suggest, however, the Book of Revelation does not apply to our generation! The forces and pressures upon the early readers are also common to our age and should be applied to our time. This work does not take a perspective that the apocalyptic vision of John is describing the last seven years of history future to us. But, this work does seek to find lessons in the book that apply to our age and the forces of evil that confront the modern day church.

Interpreting this book correctly has been a struggle for me. After I wrote my first book on Revelation, I literally threw it in the trash. Not only was I merely parroting other men’s thoughts, my perspective was fatally futuristic. I realized I had to start over and interpret the book from one main perspective: *What did John’s revelation mean to the first century mind?*

Secondly, I had to study the nature of apocalyptic genre. While I believe in a literal interpretation of Scripture, the genre of apocalyptic literature demands we use a different set of rules—rules that apply to apocalyptic literature. While John’s work has a literal message, the lessons come to us through a series of apocalyptic, mythological visions; that is, the task of the interpreter is to recognize apocalyptic images as a vehicle of truth rather than a literal historical figure. The key is to ask, “*What did the code language mean to the John’s audience?*”

Thus, this commentary started as unedited lecture notes.

This work still needs to be edited by a professional editor as this task seems to go on forever. Please forgive the grammatical errors as this was work evolved from simple lecture notes in its

present form on three different computers and on four or five versions of Microsoft Word. Sometimes I feel like a Christian typist where my left hand doesn't know what my right hand is doing.

The work was not written for scholars, though it has scholarly characteristics. It is written for average Christians wrestling with the meaning and application of Revelation. At times it is heavy on application. Hopefully, the reader will forgive the author of his over exuberance. It is my hope, however, this work will provide refreshing insight into John's work and be a guide to those who want to interpret the book correctly and apply it accurately.

While Revelation does not predict the current events of our time, its lessons are definitely meant to be applied by all believers throughout the Christian age to their struggles against apathy, heresy, gospel resistance, and even tyranny at work in modern democratic states; that is, it is a work that teaches how to stand firm in our time.

Brook Stockton,

Pastor and Professor of Theology

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife, Jo Ann, who has born the heat of the day and the cold of the night in our gospel ministry. May the Lord reward her for her encouragement and patience with this pilgrim.

Introduction to the Book of Revelation

(Hendriksen, 1967) (Bray, 1996) (Poythress, 2000) (Clouse, 1979) (McDowell, 1951) (Caird, 1966) (Metzger, 1993)

Authorship

John “the divine” was a former pastor of Ephesus. *Divine* was the Old English word for theologian. While it does not imply deity or sainthood, it does involve the pursuit of God. John’s authorship is confirmed by Irenaeus (170), pupil of Polycarp. For three hundred years after the book was written, Revelation was credited to the aged apostle. Justin Martyr credits John, one of the twelve, with writing the book. The three evidences of John’s authorship are (a) quotes from the fathers, (b) the fact his name is mentioned five times in the book, and (c) his use of terms like “logos” is consistent with John’s letters.

Date

The traditional date holds that John wrote about 90 AD. during the reign of Domitian (Caird, 1966, p. 6), but some scholars argue for an early date of 65-69 AD. These scholars believe the book was written before the torrential destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. during the reign of Nero.

There is one powerful reason to believe that John wrote Revelation before 70 AD. The temple, to the Jews, even the Jewish Christians, was paramount in the Hebrew psychic. There is no way John could symbolize his beloved city as “heavenly Jerusalem” without a reference to the catastrophic destruction of earthly Jerusalem and its majestic temple if he wrote his book after 70 AD.

If John wrote this book after 70 AD., the silence regarding the destruction of Jerusalem is deafening. The Neronian persecution of Christians, the dying off of the apostles, and the rumors of war provide the context for John’s masterpiece. Though it is difficult to say with absolute certainty the book was written before 70 AD., this is the perspective of this work.

Relationship to the Bible

Genesis is the book of beginnings; Revelation is the book of endings; Genesis is the book of origins; Revelation is the book of consummations. To understand Revelation one must draw upon our knowledge of Genesis, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and parts of the Old and New

Testaments. Knowing with certainty when the Book of Revelation was written would solve numerous interpretative differences among scholars¹.

A Special Blessing Connected to the Book

Because there is a special blessing pronounced to those who read and cherish the hope embedded in this book, we are treading on holy ground.

However, not all have tasted of its blessedness: Jerome said the book has as many riddles as it has words. Luther wanted to remove this book from the Sacred Canon. He felt he could not obey it because he did not understand it. One time I was in my serious professorial role lecturing on the interpretive issues of Revelation in a seminary class. We discussed the differences of interpretation of the seals, trumpets, beast, bowls, and the millennium. Puzzled one student raised his hand and asked, “Now that I understand the issues, where is the blessing?” The class roared with laughter, but the point hit home. It is easy to get wrapped up in the interpretive issues and miss the blessing of this book.

The blessing is at least threefold:

(a) The first blessing is in understanding Christ and His present risen ministry. He is at work among men during the Christian age to defeat man’s enemies and to advance the gospel despite the opposition of the anti-God forces at work in history; and,

(b) The second blessing is found in God’s special care and concern and oversight of His people. The King calls the people of Asia Minor to be completely devoted to Him and completely separated from the godless system around them. Because devotion is so precious and so costly, His people are the object of His affection. Furthermore, if there is an argument for the eternal security of the true believer, Revelation is it. Though God’s people may suffer at the hands of wicked men (governments), they are known, sealed, and safe under the altar.

¹ Evidence for the early date include: 1) the time references of soon coming cataclysmic events of Jewish importance fit well with the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.; 2) the 2nd C. Syrian version of Revelation has the title, “John the Evangelist in the Isle of Patmos, where he was thrown by Nero Caesar.” Nero died in 68 AD.; 3) Some MSS known to Tischendorf read the number of the beast as 616 (Latin number for Nero Caesar: rsq wrn) instead of the Hebrew 666 (Nero Caesar in Hebrew characters: rsq !wrn). 4) Judaizers were still present in Revelation 2:9, 3:9; According to Revelation 2:2 there were “other apostles.” All apostles were dead by 70 AD. except John; 5) Nero fits well the description of the sixth king in Revelation 17. See footnote; 6) Nero Caesar does fit the number of the beast in Hebrew and Latin; 7) The reader is told to calculate the number of the beast, which seems to have immediate relevance. What purpose would immediate calculation have if the number only has relevance two-thousand years removed from John’s time; 8) Seven churches are mentioned in Asia Minor which fits well with 70 AD. In 90 AD., there were many more churches; 9) Matthew’s parallel in Chapter 24 regarding Jerusalem’s destruction fits some of the catastrophes mentioned in Revelation; 10) The whole book, not just chapters 1-3, had to have immediate relevance to the original readers.

(c) The work adds perspective about the resistance to gospel, cleanses the heart, fuses steel into the soul, and inspires the devout with courage to confront the evils of their time with sword in hand and garlic on the breath.

Meaning of Revelation

The word “revelation” (apoka,luyij) means “to disclose” or “unveil.” The work is an unveiling of the powers and forces at work behind the scenes of history. It discloses the sovereign rule of Christ and His authority over all of history. It has one message: Our God Reigns (Psalm 97:1). Therefore, the Book should be understandable, but it may not be totally comprehensible.

The Grand **T**heme of the Book

The Hebrews saw the kingdom of God as the ultimate goal of history where the wicked would be destroyed and the righteous would live in peace on a renewed earth (Malachi 4:1ff). See B. Stockton, The Gospel of the Kingdom, Seminary Lecture Notes (2005) at NikeInsights: <https://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/forums/forum/biblical-insights/eschatology/>

Christ’s entrance into history to defeat man’s enemies changed everything. Early converts to Christianity, however, did not totally understand the church age in between the suffering Messiah and the reigning King. Peter, Paul, and others had no idea how long the church age would last.

Therefore, the book was designed to give hope to the early Christians seeking to understand their role as they faced the hostile, anti-God forces of Rome. John’s message assures believers that Christ is the present, reigning Sovereign Who is in control of the events of history. He is purifying His church and He will judge his enemies. Christ knows the suffering of His people and calls them to be strong as they face hostilities of governments acting under color of law to resist, slander, and imprison the uncompromising Christian. A grand and glorious future awaits the people of God. John’s message is, “Live for Him now! Don’t compromise! Stand strong!”

Purpose of the Book

Perhaps, it is best to let others speak on the purpose of this marvelous book.

William Hendricksen: “The purpose of the book of Revelation is to comfort the militant church in its struggle against the forces of evil.” (Hendriksen, 1967, p. 7).

Edward McDowell: “The Seer of Patmos recognized the irreconcilable nature of the rising conflict between Rome and Christianity. He realized that it was a battle to the death. He saw that two sovereignties, each claiming absolute allegiance, could not exist side by side. Christ or Caesar must win the struggle. In the meantime Christians were dying in the conflict and others would suffer and lose their lives because of their loyalty to the gospel . . . Its message was one of encouragement and hope and of ultimate victory for those who were loyal to Christ. No doubt

the message fired many an anxious Christian heart with holy zeal for the gospel and made him ready to die in the cause, if death was to be the price of his loyalty” (McDowell, 1951, p. 6, 7).

Paul Kroll: Apocalyptic writers did not generally speculate about the end-time as coming in some far-off future time. This would have held little meaning for the people to whom they wrote. The apocalyptic writers were interested in the here and now. God's Messiah was coming very soon to take away the burdens of the Jewish people, and lift them on high over the gentile nations. Writers of apocalyptic, says M. Eugene Boring: “Addressed their own generation with the urgency of those who cry out for meaning in their struggle and suffering. Their question was not ‘When will the End come?’ but ‘**What is the meaning of our suffering?**’ It was not speculative calculation but the tenacity of faith which came to expression in their conviction that the end must be near” (Kroll, 1999; Boring, 2011, (Kroll, 1999)p. 43).

Paul Kroll, quoting G.B. Caird, summarizes the nature of apocalyptic literature:

. . . to encourage Jewish resistance to the encroachments of paganism, by showing that the national suffering was foreseen and provided for in the cosmic purpose of God and would issue in ultimate vindication. It is characteristic of these writings that they portray the present crisis. . . against a background of world history, the present struggle as part of the age-long struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, and victory over the immediate enemy as the embodiment of the final victory of God. It is also characteristic of them that they are written in symbolic language (Black's New Testament Commentaries, "A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine," 2nd edition, p. 9).

To make sense of the Book of Revelation the student must try to understand, and even cultivate, the apocalyptic frame of mind. This means putting away certain twentieth-century biases and reserving judgment about the religious experiences that underlie this book and the images with which it is filled (Interpreting the Book of Revelation, p. 15).

Perhaps, the NIV Bible, captures the purpose of the Revelation better than any other:

Since the Roman authorities at this time were beginning to enforce the cult of emperor worship, Christians—who held that Christ, not Caesar, was Lord—were facing increasing hostility. Some in the church were advocating a policy of compromise; this had to be corrected before its subtle influence could undermine believers’ determination to stand fast in the perilous days that lay ahead (Zondervan Publishers, 1984, p. 1698).

Revelation is not so much a message about the Second Coming of Christ as it is a message from the Enthroned Christ on how the Christians should respond to Caesars mad with power while demanding total allegiance to the State. *When government is god in the minds of men, the Lord’s servants, cannot expect other Christians not to attack them.*

And, here lies the **key to application**. Every age has its madmen drunk with power—men who believe the only god on earth is government; that allegiance to the State is the highest good. Francis Bellamy (1855-1931) was one of these men. Bellamy, a liberal socialist, believed the State was the key to building the socialist utopia on earth. It was Bellamy who designed the first Pledge of Allegiance . . . and the name of “God” was not in it. His goal was to produce a nation of statist, and he succeeded!

The thesis of Christianity is, “Christ is King.” The antithesis is, “The government is god.” The synthesis of these two propositions can be summarized in themes like, “Serving God and Country.” And, it was doctrines like this that threatened to compromise the purity and power of first century Christianity. Thus, the Book of Revelation was delivered to the original readers to extinguish polytheism, pluralism, and statism. The purpose of the book is to produce pure virgins; i.e., Christians totally dedicated to Christ (Chapter 14:1-5).

According to the German historian, Ethelbert Stauffer, the religious principle of the Roman Empire, from the days of Augustus on, was **salvation by Caesar**: “Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved.” (CA Farmer 241:5 (Oct. 5, 1974), p. 28).

This helps us to understand the boldness of St. Peter, and the truth he declared about Christ:

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

When Peter preached that Jesus was Lord, he declared war on Rome!

War between Christ and Caesar, the Christians and Rome, was inevitable. The State and its emperors claimed to offer salvation and demanded unlimited devotion to the State. The church declared that salvation was only in Christ. The Christians had the truth, but Rome had the power. Thus, this book is about how Christians should respond when governments enforce devotion to the State through their penal codes and LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL.

We are again living in the age of Caesars and political messiahs. All over the world, politicians, whose cornerstone is man, offer their plans for salvation: “Look to me . . . Vote for me . . . and be saved.” Modern Christians, by their devotion and their 30% tithe to the democratic State, have fallen into the pre-Christian error that the State is god; that only the State can save us, that the State is the source of law and must be obeyed.

Thus, the need of our time is to learn afresh the lessons of Revelation; that Christ is Lord and Savior; that government cannot save us.

However, this truth does not mean that Christians are to surrender their government to be ruled by pagans. The gospel demands believers responsible political action. Christians of every age must do the best they can to call kings to surrender to the King of kings.

Interpretive Approaches to Revelation

The following is adapted from Ray Summers, 1951, Worthy is the Lamb, Broadman Press, p. 28-51

Futurism: This view regards Revelation as wholly eschatological, addressing the events of the end of the world including but not limited to: a seven year tribulation, conversion of the Jewish nation, rise of an Antichrist, the collapse of civilization as we know it, the millennial reign, and the final judgment. Futurism is divided into two groups: (a) Darbyite dispensationalism² (Lindsey), and (b) historical premillennialism (Ladd).

The main weakness of this view is its insistence the majority of the book has nothing to do with “those to who first received the writing, for those who have used it, or for any who use it up to the last seven years of history; that is, it only applies to those living during the alleged “great tribulation period.”

A second great weakness of this method is that by pushing the vision into the future, the average Christian may not see a need to apply the central message of this book to his life now.

Furthermore, futurism diminishes the importance of the present reign of Christ during the Christian era. The hope, to them, is not that Christ reigns in this age, but that He will reign during an alleged, future, distant, utopian millennium. Thus, all hope and all solutions are wrapped up in the “rapture” and the alleged establishment of a millennium. This book does not call Christians to sit on a cushion of strawberries and wait for the rapture.

The Continuous Historical-Method: This method looks at Revelation as a forecast of church history, particularly the corrupt papacy during the 16th century and the great apostasy of the Catholic Church in history. This view arose in theological literature before and after the Reformation. The main weakness of this approach is that it, like futurism, fails to consider what the book meant to the original readers. A 15th century power-hungry pope would have little interest to the first-century mind.

Summers comments: “No interpretation can be regarded as the correct one **if it would have been meaningless to those who first received the book.** What

² Darbyite Dispensationalism comes from J.N. Darby, a Plymouth Brethren, and it is based on the sin qua non of dispensationalism; that is, the belief that the church is a “parenthesis” in history and that those called “Jews” will replace the church in history during the supposed tribulation period.

could be more meaningless than the consideration of apostasy 1600 years removed from the original readers?" (Summers, 1951).

The General Symbolic Approach or Idealistic Method: This method correctly sees Revelation as a pageant full of symbols, but interprets the symbols as **universal** expressions of God's government whose operation may be observed with men in every age. The symbolic-apocalyptic approach sees the visions as giant, holy, political cartoons³ with mythological proportions like we see in daily newspapers where artists portray political struggle with images of dancing donkeys and snorting elephants in dynamic tension. In this book, however, the struggle is not between democrats and republicans, but a struggle between God's people and the anti-God forces in history. An adaptation of this approach sees the conflict that was raging in John's day having a grand consummation at the end of time.

John is attempting to unveil the forces behind the scenes of history. Thus, we have an unveiling, a revelation. These symbols reveal forces and powers on the landscape of politics as time marches toward the climax of history. These spiritual powers are at work in the world and will be with us until the end of the age.

The strength of this position is that it seeks to interpret the symbols and apply them to our time. The weakness, however, is the symbols in Revelation are not universal symbols, but esoteric symbols known primarily to the mind of the Asian Christians—a mind familiar with the Old Testament (OT.). Bruce Metzger explains, "In attempting to understand John's symbolism, we must consider not only the book itself, but also his use of the Old Testament" (Metzger, 1993, p. 13).

These symbols have relevance and meaning to the original readers that is sometimes difficult for modern readers to grasp. Thus, we are at a disadvantage because we can't always discern what the symbols meant to the Christians in Asian Minor. Consequently, we may have difficulty applying John's lessons accurately in our time.

Preterism: This view is the opposite of futurism. It asserts rather narrowly that the book has already been fulfilled. There are at least two types of conservative preterists:

(a) radical or early preterism believes the majority of the book was written before 70 AD., predicted 70 AD., and was fulfilled during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.; and,

³ The term "cartoon" is not meant to blacken the holy character of this extraordinary book, but to compare the images in this book to modern day political cartoons found in newspapers that capture our attention and stimulate our imagination about present political conflicts and anomalies. John paints pictures with mythological proportions to stimulate our imaginations.

(b) late preterism which views the majority of the book relates to the first century Roman Empire under Domitian.

The strength of this position is that it is true to the original readers. The background, the time, and the meaning of the book relates to those who first read the book. Any true interpretation of Revelation must include and relate to the first century church. Perhaps the only objection to this method is that some preterists may seek to limit its application to people living in John's day and fail to apply it to similar pressures facing Christians today (Ladd, 1972).

Historical Background Method: Summers lists this as a separate method, though it is closely associated with preterism. This method seeks to rediscover the mind, emotions, culture, images, morality, values, myths, religious beliefs, and political policies being practiced between 60 AD. and 95 AD. in order to provide a context for the interpretation of John's symbols. There is hardly a thing wrong with this method save the difficulty of completely discovering the first-century mind.

Combination Schools: Many interpreters combine two of the schools of interpretation in order to resolve their own interpretive issues. Ladd, for example, said the following: "We conclude that the correct method of interpreting the Revelation is a blending of the preterist and the futurist methods" (Ladd, 1972, p. 11).

Most interpreters combine several methods. The goal, I believe, is to do all we can do to interpret the symbols in the book consistently with the first century mind and leave room to apply its lessons to present day readers. This interpretive method may not be as exciting as futurism which often envisions images as Apache attack helicopters and patriot missiles exploding over Israel in an imagined invasion of Russia into the Levant, but it is a sound method that will lead to the real message and virtues of the Book of Revelation.

In wrestling through the meaning of this book and how to interpret it, it is important to understand that Christ came to his battle-weary church to minister to his exhausted people in order to impress upon them that they were loved, that they were on the right side of the spiritual war, and that Christianity would be victorious over the anti-god forces of their day; that is, they should be encouraged and strengthened to stand for Christ even though loyalty to Christ may cost them their lives.

Interpretive Principles

See the **Appendices** in this book for the Rules of Interpretation followed in this work.

Whatever approach one takes regarding the Book of Revelation, it must perform the following:

(a) It must relate to the original readers of Revelation. Any approach that removes the meaning of this book from the first century truncates original intent; and,

(b) it must have relevance to Christians who will appear in time on the stage of history. Any approach that binds the apocalypse to the first century or pushes it entirely into the future all but destroy a proper application of the Apocalypse. The book should be interpreted in light of the first-century mind, but its lessons apply to all saints in all ages; and,

(c) the symbols of the book must be interpreted, not literally, but figuratively in light of the Hebrew mind. The symbolic fulfillment of a tree is not a bigger tree. If a tree is a symbol then it must mean something besides being a tree. John's revelation is codified. There are over 400 references to the Old Testament in this book. Apocalyptic literature is *sign-i-fied* to frustrate hostile powers and *cod-i-fied* it in a way that those familiar with the subject could decipher its message.

Interpreting Revelation is a challenge. Two extremes must be avoided: (a) hyper-literalism: the result of literalizing symbolic images, and (b) hyper-symbolism, the result of applying symbolic meaning to literal terms.

One should **not** interpret Revelation with a newspaper in one hand and a Bible in the other.

The key question is **not**, "What does Revelation mean to me?" but "**What did the book mean to the seven churches?**"

Get into the mind of Original Readers!

John's work utilizes Hebrew-isms and apocalyptic language to convey truth. Truth is transported from heaven to earth using mythological imagery to impress the mind. Images are the conduit through which truth travels. Though John borrows from the OT, he infuses those images with NT meaning.

The use of a symbol is **not** the reality conveyed. Rather, the use of a symbol is the vehicle of communicating reality.

John's revelation is **not** an engineering, mathematical, lawyer-like presentation of the last seven years of history. It is written to right-brain people with an artistic, creative, imaginative, and intuitive set of skills. An engineer who uses his calculator and slide rule to interpret this book will end up in Looneyville near Lake Silly.

Quoting Pieters, Summers says, "Revelation is addressed chiefly to the imagination."

Writers of apocalyptic, says M. Eugene Boring:

Addressed their own generation with the urgency of those who cry out for meaning in their struggle and suffering. Their question was not "When will the End come?" **but "What is the meaning of our suffering?"** It was not

speculative calculation but the tenacity of faith which came to expression in their conviction that the End must be near (Boring, 2011, p. 43).

John does not tell. He shows. John does not analyze. He paints truth on the canvas of men's minds. He does not pile on information and facts never allowing the reader to deduce anything. He stirs the imagination. He impresses the mind with images that stir hope and faith.

Those who approach Revelation seeking a logical explanation of history or a roadmap of the future will be disappointed. Revelation is NOT a manual on the events preceding the *Parousia*. Apocalyptic writers did not generally speculate about the end of the world and some far-off future time. Terminal concerns about the end of history held little meaning for the people to whom they wrote. The apocalyptic writers were interested in the here and now. Why am I suffering? Why won't city official allow me into the market place? Why are Roman legions banging on my door coming after me?

There is only one correct interpretation . . . but there are many applications.

Revelation should not be interpreted in light of modern day politics or American life. But, it must be applied to the modern life. It does not predict future events in the United States or Britain or Europe or South Africa or Australia!! But, it can be applied to modern politics because modern States often become hostile to the true gospel.

*References to the modern State or even the United States in this work are simply observations on how the political forces at work in John's day are present in our time. No reference to the United States should be considered as part of the interpretation of John's work. Rather, these references are simply an example of how the truth in the Book of Revelation can be applied to our times.

Structure of the Book

THE FIRST VISION

The Vision of the Glorified Christ

The Message to the Seven churches

THE SECOND VISION

A Glimpse Into the Heavenly Throne Room

The Lamb and the Scroll

The Opening of the Seven Seals

The Blasting of the Trumpets

The Woman and the Dragon

The Beast and His Followers

The Lamb and His Followers

The Seven Bowls of Wrath

THE THIRD VISION

Mystery Babylon

The Dirge of Babylon

The Rider on the White Horse

The Thousand Year Reign of Christ

The New Heaven and the New Earth

THE FOURTH VISION

The New Jerusalem

The Prologue

Consistent with the ancient literary style of writing, the first few verses inform us about the author, how the book came to be written, and the destination of the work.

Revelation 1:1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

The word “revelation” comes from the Greek word “apocalypse” (Vapoka,luyij). Apocalypse is from “*apo*” meaning “from,” and *kaplipsis* meaning “that which is hidden,” “unveiling,” “manifestation,” or a “burlesque;” hence, we get the word “revelation.” The word *kaplipsis* describes its content as well as its type of literature. It is an unveiling of truth in apocalyptic⁴ tradition. The title is not plural, but singular.

Revelation employs the apocalyptic to convey truth. Apocalyptic language uses hyperbole to carry the message and to impress the mind. The language is dynamic, figurative, and cataclysmic. The first apocalyptic book was Daniel. Daniel was written to excite faith among the Hebrews who faced political bondage. Like Daniel, Revelation is full of mythological images designed to stir the imagination about God’s work among His servants. The symbols are vessels that carry a literal cargo, but the symbols are not to be taken literally.

The phrase “of Jesus Christ” describes the source of the book. The source of the book is divine because it contains that “which God gave unto him.” Jesus received the revelation from God, and Jesus gave it to His servants. The recipients are Christian ministers, the people with an ear open to heaven’s message. Thus, here lies the purpose of the book, to shed light in dark times: “The entrance of Your words gives light,” (Psalm 119:130).

Shortly; John explains the relevance of His revelation: that “what must shortly come to pass . . .” This kind of language makes it difficult to accept a futuristic interpretation of the Apocalypse. A futurist will surely say, “that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). But, does the word “shortly” (gene,sqai evn ta,cei) refer to human time or God’s time? The Greek word for “shortly” is *tachos* wherein we get the word *tachometer*. It

⁴ The genre of apocalyptic literature is marked by “end time” themes using mythological metaphors to stir the imagination about concealed realities.

means “quickly,” or “immediately.” By “shortly” John means that his message is imminent and relevant to the Christians in the first century; that is, it was intended for the original readers⁵.

The one saying that “shortly” means two thousand years makes mincemeat of meaning and intent of language — a modern duplicitous invention designed to empower Zionism and end times schemes.

Note the source, agency, channel, and author. John is the author. Unlike Jewish apocalyptic, pseudonymous writers, John identifies himself. While we can’t say with 100% assurance that the Apostle John was the author, he is the logical choice. John is not to be judged by the likes of Judas, one of the five worst books in history, or any of the Jewish apocalyptic writings during the Intertestament Period. The Apostle John was well known to all the saints in Asia Minor.

The word “angel” means “messenger.” A special angel was assigned to John to aid him in receiving the difficult portions of this revelation and to assist him in writing it to the churches. Use of angels in delivering messages to John suggests the seriousness and gravity of the apocalypse.

Revelation 1:2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

Record: John identifies himself as a witness of the incarnate work of Jesus Christ and His Divine personage. Jesus is the *logos*⁶, the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Normally, a “word” is something one hears. John saw the Word; that is, John sees himself as a juror receiving legal, evidential proofs that Jesus indeed was from God and was God.

The word “testimony” denotes the legal nature of the life and message of Christ as a sworn witness. He is God’s affidavit. This is consistent with his other writings (John 1:1; 1 John 1:1-4). The use of the word “logos” provides evidence that the author is the Apostle John. Great events of history are revealed to God’s prophets and John now has the honor of being God’s prophet to His generation (Amos 3:7).

⁵ Though one day is as a thousand years to the Lord, I am of the opinion that the word *soon* must refer to human time for the following reason: What possible comfort could the saints in Asia Minor, of whom many would face martyrdom, extract from a letter if 80% of the work applied to saints two or three thousand years removed from the people in John’s day? Preterists have a point: The imagery of the book was designed to disclose to the prospective martyrs the real nature of their suffering and its place in the eternal purposes of God (Caird, 1966).

⁶ In Greek philosophy, the term *logos* was used to describe the first principle of a thing, the fundamentals of a system. Greeks saw the *logos* as the intermediate agency by which God created material things and communicated with them. In John’s gospel, the *logos* was thought of as a bridge between the transcendent God and transient man. Therefore, for his Greek readers, the term *logos* brought forth the idea of a Christ as the Mediator between God and man, the physical manifestation of the invisible God; truly God, truly man.

Revelation 1:3 Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

John expected his book to be read out loud in public. This is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing to those reading and keeping (throu/ntej, tereo) those things written in the book.

The word “keep” means “to preserve” or “to watch” or “to treasure the light coming from the message.”

The pronoun **“he”** is singular implying personal responsibility and interest.

“They that hear” references the reading of Scripture in the churches. There were no printing presses, but there were skillful orators assigned to read John’s message in the church. It is a blessing because it records the final triumph of Christ over Satan, sin, and death.

Blessing: It is a blessing because it instructs believers on how to live during times when the villain appears to triumph over the “good guy” on the world stage. It is a blessing because the revelation explains the meaning of their suffering. It is a blessing because Protagonist defeats the antagonists. The work called for a response to Christ and resistance to the anti-god forces at work in history—thus, there is a blessing to the one who hears and obeys.

Luther struggled with the Book saying, “My spirit cannot accommodate itself to this book. There is no sufficient reason for small esteem in which I hold it -- that Christ is neither taught nor recognized” (Luther, 1960, p. 399).

Unlike Daniel’s prophecy (Daniel 12:9) which was sealed till the end, the Book of Revelation is unsealed signifying that it had relevance to the original readers (Revelation 22:10).

Time at hand: Again, John gives us a time reference for the events of this book: “for the time is at hand” or “near” or “upon us.” John’s message is not about events two thousand years removed from his day. The temporal impression in the first three verses is that John was expecting his visions to be inaugurated in and during the life time of the original readers. This same time reference is used at the conclusion of the book in 22:10.

What possible encouragement could the churches of the first century receive from a message intended for the people living two millenniums in the future? It is important to note that the term “at hand” or “near” is in the didactic portions of the book and not in the visionary, symbolic portions of the book. Thus, we can conclude that the term “at hand” is literal and not figurative; that the entire work has immediate application to the saints living during the time of John. Do not hear what is not being said. While Revelation was written for the original readers, it does have applications for our time. Those who hear and obey will be blessed.

John's Address

Revelation 1:4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

Seven churches: John wrote to seven churches of Asia Minor (Modern Turkey). The seven churches were in Asia and formed a circle by their geographical location. These communities of Christians were established by the missionary activity of the Apostle Paul and his co-workers. Later, John became a pastor in the area and all looked to him for leadership. While the book is addressed to these communities, John intended it to be circulated to other churches. The word “church” (evklhisi, aij, ecclesias) means “assemblies” implying local congregations of people, not buildings. A gathering of believers created a local temple, the dwelling place of the Eternal Spirit.

“**Grace**” and “**peace**” are conferred. Grace presents dynamic agape that gently persuades hearts to do the will of God. Grace must be received before peace can reign in the heart.

The author, *Theos*, is defined in relation to time: He was. He is. He is to come. This is a Christian elaboration of Exodus 3:14 where YHWH (the Tetragrammaton is generally pronounced “Yahweh”) identified Himself as the “One Who shall be what He shall be” to His people; that is, He is the all sufficient “I Am” of the Old Testament.⁷

The number “seven” is used fifty-four (54) times in Revelation. Sometimes it is used symbolically, and at other times it is used literally. The adjective “seven” (hepta) is not literal in this text, but symbolic of Divine perfections.

Seven spirits: God does not have seven distinct spirits. Symbolically, seven is the number of completion and perfection. The “seven spirits” represent the Holy Spirit in fullness of activity and power. Possibly, John is referencing Isaiah’s seven fold blessing of the Spirit (Isaiah 11:2), or Zechariah’s vision of the lamp stand where the angel identified the lamp stand as “the eyes of the Lord which range over the whole earth” where the burden is “not by might or power, but by my Spirit” says the Lord of Hosts (4:6).

The seed doctrines of the Trinity can be seen in these two verses. The word “apo” (from) is used three times as an ablative of source. This book is “from him” (The Father), from the “seven spirits” (The Holy Spirit), and from “Jesus Christ” (the Son).

⁷ The four Hebrew Letters of the Tetragrammaton (hA"lhy >, YHWH) form the sacred name of the Creator. The four consonants are without vowels. Thus, the exact pronunciation of the Holy Name is uncertain; therefore, modern Jews rarely quote The Name in public. The Tetragrammaton is translated “LORD” in most English translations to inform the reader of the use of YHWH in the text.

The Titles of Christ

Revelation 1:5-6 And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

The Second Person of the Trinity is described in four ways:

As Messiah: Jesus is the “Christos” or Messiah, the anointed of God.

Faithful witness: As a witness He faithfully proclaimed the truth as a good prophet.

The word “witness” and “martyr” are the same word. Jesus experienced martyrdom for his witness. Likewise, many in Asia faced the possibility of being executed by Roman authorities for their witness to the truth of the gospel and their resistance to the totalitarian State. These Christians are encouraged to remember the One they are following: He is faithful; He is Ruler over earthly magistrates. By virtue of his death and resurrection, He is highly exalted above all earthly authority. (See Stockton, B. (2014). The Five Pillars of the Gladiator Gospel)

But, there is another use of the term “witness” which is much more primary to our understanding of Jesus as a “faithful Witness.” The Scriptural idea of a witness is one who testifies to the truth in a trial and who participates in throwing the first stone at the condemned (Deuteronomy 17:6, 7). That is, as God’s Witness, Jesus is the Executor of the wrath of God. John’s vision is one that portrays Christ not as one who has more sugar than the fairy godmother, but the Executor of the Divine vengeance upon rebels. This is certainly a fitting title for Christ in the Book of Revelation. “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord” (Isaiah 63:4; Romans 12:19)

First Begotten of the Dead: Jesus is the first begotten from the dead. As the First Begotten, He heads a new race of people, a new humanity destined to share in the glory of His resurrection. This new humanity is a new Israel or the true Israel of God.

As “firstborn” he was the first to pass through death in the resurrected state. Therefore, because of Who He is, others will have opportunity to bear witness to His historical triumph over death and His sovereignty over the kings of the earth. If called upon to make the ultimate sacrifice, His witnesses are assured they will pass safely into the presence of God.

As King: John uses the term “prince” (archon) which can be translated “chief,” “ruler,” “king,” or “Supreme Ruler.” He is not one among many for there is only one Lawgiver (James 4:12) and one Mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5). Jesus is the Ruler of the kings of the earth, the Potentate, the Chief Justice of Heaven’s Supreme Court, the Chief Legislator, the Commander and Chief of the Father’s will: “For the LORD (Jesus) is our judge, the LORD (Jesus) is our lawgiver, the LORD (Jesus) is our king; he will save us” (Isaiah 33:22). The

critical message of Revelation is the Sovereignty of Jesus! His reign is not something in the future, but a present reality to believe and enjoy now. Neither Satan, nor men, nor chance govern the affairs of men.

If God is the Creator of the entire universe, then it must follow that He is the Lord of the whole universe. No part of the world is outside of His lordship. That means that no part of my life must be outside of His lordship.

God does not rule by the consent of His subjects but by His sovereign authority. His reign extends over me whether I vote for Him or not – (R.C. Sproul).

“To argue that God is “trying His best” to save all mankind, but that the majority of men will not let Him save them, is to insist that the will of the Creator is impotent, and that the will of the creature is omnipotent.”
-- (Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*)

Jesus is the Referee over all the events of history. If we miss this truth, we miss the main message of the book. He is the highly exalted Christ. The Lord Jesus reigns now! And, if Jesus is not sovereign, He is not God. If He is sovereign, then the kings of the earth are accountable to Him.

The blessing of being a saint is mentioned. Saints are cherished, cleansed, crowned, and chosen.

As loved ones, saints are the objects of divine affection and favor. Christians are loved not because they are lovable, but because it is God’s nature to love His creatures.

Washed in the Blood: believers are presented as cleansed ones. By virtue of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, the saints are washed and purified from sin. The agent of this purification is blood. Since blood is the currency of the spirit world, it is by Christ’s blood believers are cleansed and redeemed. This takes us back to the story of Cain and Abel where Cain offered beets, broccoli and beans to God and was rejected, and where Abel offered blood and was accepted. Let us remember, there are only two religions in the world, the sweaty religion of Cain and the bloody religion of Abel. Christianity rejects the way of Cain, and follows the way of Abel, the first prophet (Luke 11:50-51).

Kings and Priests: The proper translation of this is, “He made us a kingdom of priests to God.”

As crowned ones, saints are citizens of His kingdom (a kingdom: basilean, singular) by virtue of their association with Christ who sits at the right hand of the Father. The term *basilean* is translated “kings” in some versions, but the better translation is “a kingdom” (*basilean* not *basileis*) with the idea of rule contained therein—not ruled, but reigning triumphant over all enemies (Barnes, 1975); not slaves, but sovereigns sharing in the reign of the Sovereign (1 Corinthians 7:23). Moreover, America was built on the foundations of Christianity wherein the

People are considered sovereign by virtue of their endowment by the Creator (See the Declaration of Independence).

John attributes glory to Christ for his accomplishments. Glory is fitting for Him who stooped so low, even to the death of the cross, to raise us so high. John's benediction includes increased "dominion" (kratos = strength) or political power. Only an all wise, all loving, all powerful, humble Savior is worthy of increased dominion.

See the **Appendices** for more on Christians as "Kings and Priests of God."

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

He cometh with clouds: In modern times, men have understood this verse to refer to the second coming of Christ. However, we must ask, "What did this phrase mean to the original readers?" The phrase "coming in the clouds" is apocalyptic language. The Christians of Asia Minor would have linked this verse with Daniel 7:9-14 where Daniel sees the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven before the Ancient of Days to be given "dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed."

The time had come for the world to know the gospel, even mourn over earth's treatment of God's Anointed. The One the Jews crucified is the Lord Christ reigning at the right hand of God. His coming is not the *Parousia*, but sovereignty in action by virtue of His coronation as King of kings and Lord of lords.

When the Lord Jesus entered His ministry, He announced: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). The Kingdom of God is the rule of God. God's rule came in the Person and ministry of Christ. By virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, He ascended into the clouds to sit at the right hand of the Father as Ruler of Mankind (Acts 2:33). Sitting at the right hand of God is another way of saying that Christ, as our Representative, is reigning now as King of the Nations. John is assuring his people that the One they are following has absolute authority over the events taking place in history. Though evil exist around them, "he is coming in the clouds." God is at work through the Lord Jesus Christ saving men and purging out evil through the gospel now, today!

See B. Stockton, [The Gospel of the Kingdom](https://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/forums/forum/biblical-insights/eschatology/), Seminary Lecture Notes (2005) at NikeInsights: <https://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/forums/forum/biblical-insights/eschatology/>

See a study of clouds in the index of this work.

Present Exalted Life of Christ: Revelation is more about the present exalted life of Christ, our Lord's concern for His people, and His superintendence over the events of history than about His second coming. Selah!

Pierced: Saints may rest assured that no matter what happens, history is in the palm of nail-pierced hands. His eye is upon them, and He will always be with them. They need only to recognize the fierce power of the Son of Man. The need of the hour is to gloat over the sovereignty of the Christ. He is the "King of the Nations." Oh, that Christians would remind their pagan politicians of the Sovereignty of Christ (Jeremiah 10:7)!

At times, the powers of evil appear to prevail, but we can rest assured that our Lord is the "Alpha and Omega" of history. Evil men will come and go, but God will outlast them all. In the end, He will triumph and bring history toward its ultimate conclusion, the kingdom of God in a new heaven and new earth (21:1ff).

Revelation 1:8 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

The "I" appears to be the voice of God the Father . . . but could very well be the voice of the Lord Jesus Christ. See 1:10, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18; 22:13). Alpha and Omega is the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. He is the source and the conclusion of history. He created all things, and by Him all things will be consummated. He is the uncaused cause, the "I Am," the One being and existing, the perpetual beginning and ending, the everlasting eternal Creator.

Almighty: By this title, Abraham knew the Lord (Genesis 17:1). The LXX uses omnipotent (ο` παντοκρα,τωρ, παντοκρατορ) for the expression "Lord of Hosts." But, to John, omnipotence is not the power of unlimited coercion, but the power of invincible love (Caird, 1966, p. 19).

1 THE FIRST VISION

1.1 The Vision of the Glorified Christ

1.1.1 Origin of the Vision

Revelation 1:9 I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

This passage describes John’s circumstances when he wrote the book. He was a brother and fellow-participant in the distress, and reign, and exercise of endurance because of Jesus.

Brother: John was a believer writing to fellow Christians (John 1:10-13). John was not sitting under a shade tree while his brethren worked in the fields during the heat of the day. He shared their affliction.

A “**companion in tribulation**” indicates that the churches in Asia Minor were undergoing some form of persecution. This is a key to understanding the book. Alone in communion with the Lord, John gained perspective . . . and, he was able to inform these believers how to respond to Christ under the political pressures of their age.

Kingdom: The phrase “and in the kingdom” refers to his position under the rule of God as a de jure citizen of the Age to Come.

[See B. Stockton, The Gospel of the Kingdom, Seminary Lecture Notes (2005) at NikeInsights: <https://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/forums/forum/biblical-insights/eschatology/>]

Patience: The term “patience” means that John was waiting for the consummation of the kingdom to be manifest in history; and, that he was enduring the hardship inflicted on him by Roman *tibuni plebes* with little tolerance for Christians.

Patmos is about eight miles long from north to south in the Aegean Sea composing about fifty square miles. Romans sent prisoners to this penal island. Caird mentions two types of criminal sentences: (a) *deportatio in insulam* which involved the loss of all rights and property, and the lesser sentence, (b) *relegatio in insulam* which involved neither loss of property or rights. Caird followed Ramsey’s argument for the latter because (a) only the Emperor could punish crimes against the State, and (b) because at this time in history, Christianity was punished more severely through exile. Probably, some governor banished John to the island based on his own rules and authority (Caird, 1966).

The Word of God: The phrase “for the Word of God” suggests John was on the island because of Roman hostility to the faith. Any man who advances the principles of the Bible as the authority for faith and conduct can expect resistance, even imprisonment. John was not

imprisoned because he was a Christian, but because he applied the gospel to politics. Keep in mind, early Christian preachers preached about another King, King Jesus. This proclamation threatened Caesar worship (god-government) in the first century (Acts 17:1-7).

Revelation 1:10-11 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

Spirit: “In the Spirit” refers to a spiritual state of being conscious of Christ, a condition necessary to receive revelation. Ezekiel uses the same phrase “in the Spirit” (Ezekiel 37:1).

First-day Sabbath: The “Lord’s Day” is Sunday. It refers to the first day of the week; that is, to the “First-day Sabbath” (*mian sabbatou*), the true Sabbath, the restored Sabbath mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:1-2. Early Christians recognized Sunday as a holy day, the day the creative Sabbath was properly restored. It was the day that Jesus rose from the dead. It is, therefore, appropriate for Christians to meet on Sunday and to keep the “First-day Sabbath” holy as unto the Lord. Any religious order that holds up the old Saturday Sabbath disgraces the NT gospel.

“**On the Lord’s day**” and the “day of the Lord” are equivalent phrases in English, but not so in Greek. In Greek (evn th/| kuriakh/| h`me,ra|), the word “Lord” is in an adjectival position and refers to a day which belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ. When the Scripture refers to the “day of Jehovah,” the word “Lord” is in the genitive.

In 1 Corinthians 11:20, Paul refers to the “Lord’s supper” (*kuriako.n dei/pnon*) where again the word “Lord” is in the adjectival position. The use of “Lord” as an adjective implies something instituted. In the latter, it is the supper; in the former, it is a day.

The “Lord’s Day” refers to Sunday⁸--the day Jesus triumphed over the grave and proving that He is Lord over all negative forces operating against mankind. In Christian history, Sunday appropriately replaced the Saturday “Sabbath” and became the “day of rest” for believers. But, as the values of humanists took over the culture, and because modern Evangelicalism experiences a paucity of conviction on this subject, many churchmen lost their reverence for this holy day.

Trumpet: John heard a voice like a trumpet -- clear, piercing, commanding attention.

⁸ Though Sunday is considered a holy day by Christians and a day of assembling for worship, it is important not to treat the day as a legal “Sabbath” or to transfer the legal Sabbatical restrictions to Sunday. Sabbatical law ended with Christ (Romans 10:4; Galatians 4:1-15; 5:1; Colossians 2:14ff). We observe Sunday as the Lord’s Day, but without it OT Sabbatical punishments.

Alpha and Omega: The title alpha and omega is now identified. Christ claimed to be the “first and the last,” and “the beginning and the end.” He is not one among many. He is not just a religious teacher. Jesus is not only the Center of history but the Creator and Consummator of history. Since the OT called YHWH the “first and last,” and sense the Spirit calls Jesus the “first and the last”; this statement identifies Jesus as Yahweh (Isaiah 41:4). Only Yahweh is Savior, but since Jesus manifested his power over death by virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection, then Jesus must be Yahweh / Yeshua. All others are imposters.

There is only one, true absolute, unchanging God, and Jesus is the physical manifestation of the invisible God. He is the LORD of the OT sharing the same substance of Almighty God but distinguishable from the Father in His person (See the Shema: Deuteronomy 6:4).

The book is a scroll. “See,” “write,” and “send” are the duties of a prophet.

The recipients are the seven churches, and everything in this book was for their edification; that is, this book must be interpreted in light of the first-century mind.

1.1.2 The Description of Christ

Revelation 1:12 And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

The imagery in this section of Revelation is designed to correct any misnomers that unbelieving Jews are God’s chosen people or favored by God. The Lord is at work and His kingdom program continues through Christians, not Jews, till the end of history.

Seven golden candlesticks: John turned to see the voice, but saw seven golden candlesticks which represented the seven churches of Asia Minor.

The church’s imagery was drawn from Israel’s most sacred symbol – the candlestick. The OT candlestick had seven stems. The imagery here presents each church as a candelabrum with a purpose of shedding light on the Lord Jesus Christ. Should the light fail, the church will be removed. Each church is a trustee of the gospel, a light upon a hill. This is analogous to Paul’s teaching that each church is a pillar of truth (1 Timothy 3:15).

Israel’s most sacred symbol is transferred to the church of Jesus Christ. The church has become the stewards of Hebrew symbols.

These icons were identified with the church, the true Israel of God composed of the spiritually responsive of Israel and the spiritually responsive among the Gentiles. Together, they form the family of God, the true Israel, the church of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, the “synagogue of Satan” and their Jewish members stand in juxtaposition to the church, the chosen people of God. These false Jews who were actual physical descendants of

Abraham had no right to claim Israel's sacred icons because they rejected the gospel announced to them through Christ the Messiah.

It is, therefore, more appropriate for the Christians to light a candelabra than it is for Christ-rejecting "Jews" to do so. We must remember that the church is composed of believers, Jews and Gentiles, who compose the restored "tabernacle of David," the true Israel of God (Acts 15:15).

Revelation 1:13 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the waist with a golden girdle.

Candlesticks: Jesus walked in the midst of the candlesticks which is a symbol of the churches belonging to Christ. Theology, not anthropology, was John's grand focus. Christ, not man, occupies center stage. Enough of man in the church! Let us see the Christ of God!

Son of Man: John beholds the Lord Jesus Christ, not as a disembodied spirit, but Christ in his glorified, resurrected body. The title is not a reference to His humanity as much as it is to the apocalyptic personage of our Lord. He likens Him to the "Son of Man," a title taken from Daniel's vision (7:13ff) and a Messianic reference to the glorious apocalyptic Christ. John described Jesus' garments, not to give information, but to supply inspiration!

Garments: John's description of our Lord's clothing is not a literal picture of Jesus, but a symbolic representation of Christ's regal, priestly ministry. This was King Jesus the Sovereign, crowned and glorified; Jesus, the High Priest of His people; Jesus, the Judge of All Mankind serving in the heavenly temple metropolis which housed the great candelabra.

Revelation 1:14 His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

Wool: White "like wool" suggests wisdom that comes from a righteous life. Jesus possesses greater sagacity than an Eastern sage or room full of PhDs. This is John's way of saying, "a greater than Solomon is here." Furthermore, the symbol emphasizes deity—the divine nature that the Son of Man shares with the Ancient of Days as the Second Person of the Triune Spirit (Matthew 12:42; Daniel 7:9).

Eyes as a flame of fire: His eyes like "a flame of fire" signify burning intensity, vigor, and penetrating perception. This image highlights Jesus' omniscience as Judge of all mankind. He sees all and knows all—past, present, and future. Court is in session. The books are opened. He knows the law and the facts in each case. And, He is ready to judge all that is contrary to His holy character.

Revelation 1:15 And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

Feet like fine brass: This is symbolic language, not a literal description of our Lord's feet. Polished brass represents judgment. The figure communicates uncompromising, unyielding integrity, the ability to prosecute complex cases in the Supreme Court of Heaven. Quite possibly, the imagery was designed to show the strength of holiness and purity of Christ. The Holy One was ready to purify His people. As a "faithful witness," He throws the first stone (Deuteronomy 17:7). The Lord is serious about holiness, about love, and about the need for gospel proclamation.

Sound of Many Waters: The phrase, "sound of many waters," is imagery for unmistakable, indomitable, and regal authority. His words command the attention of every living person, but especially in the church which reverences the Word of God.

This vision of the glorified Christ is not a picture of a passive Christ sitting at the right hand of God waiting for His reign to begin. He is not some effeminate caricature sitting on a cushion of strawberries serving cotton candy to children at this circus on earth. We see a manly Christ who is robed in splendor actively judging, rebuking, enabling, and rewarding His people. Judgment must begin at the house of God and He does so with bone-crushing strength and iron convictions (1 Peter 4:17).

Revelation 1:16 And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Seven stars: The seven stars are angels, ministering spirits, ready to serve the interests of Christ on behalf of the church.

Two-edged sword: Priests not only served in the ministry of reconciliation but as law enforcement personnel in the temple complex. The Scripture exhorted the priest to have a song on their lips and a double-edge sword on their hip (Psalm 149:6). You didn't want to mess with a priest. These men were the elite the Green Berets of their day. Kings and military priests leading their armies to war would be fully armed with a sword and buckle eager to march into the killing fields to slaughter rebels.

Christ is a king-priest. This King-priest had a two-edged sword in His mouth showing us that it is not through force and power that Christ conquers hearts but through preaching of the gospel that souls are won. The imagery represents the Word of God that pierces, divides, and severs. This was His only weapon, and it was sufficient to conquer the world (19:5). He speaks and it is done. He commands and all must obey. The war for dominion on earth cannot be won with military weapons, but by words—the Word of God. The war is not a physical fight, but a spiritual battle for the hearts and minds and souls of men through gospel proclamation.

Let us learn a lesson: It behooves every believer to enter the coliseum in the contest for hearts and minds. The ministry demands skills to conquer adversaries with the Word of God. Unlike

Islam, Christians do not win souls through force and intimidation, but through the art of gentle persuasion and sweet reasonableness. We convince, but do not coerce. Force is the way of governments; “sweet reasonableness” is the way of Christ.

Christians may indeed be armed, but this is only for self-defense (Psalm 149:6). Offensive weapons do not promote the gospel. Our sword for advancing the gospel is the supreme authority of the Word of God. All truth is not God’s truth. The truth that wins hearts is not in science or psychology or philosophy, but in the Holy Scriptures.

Humanists criticize Christians for quoting Bible verses in politics, but this is the power of the saints! Only as we cling to the Word of God can we be victorious on the floors of debate. Unfortunately, many believers have laid down their swords in political controversies. Let us **not** do the same. The Word of God is our only offensive weapon. Let us read His Word, study His Word, and memorize His Word always ready to wield its power to bring clarity to the moral issues of our time.

As the sun: How can we describe the glory of Christ? John does so by comparing the brilliance of His appearance with the blistering, overpowering rays of the sun at high noon. This was not “sweet Jesus” holding lambs and smiling at children, but the Lord Christ with salt on his tongue and a gavel in hand.

Revelation 1:17 And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

Fell at his feet: Unlike a teenager who might have said, “Wow!” or “Cool,” John fell at his feet like a man with a massive coronary. Falling was not just a proper reaction to Christ. It was the only response John could render. Any other reaction would have been an act of insanity⁹.

Falling was an amazing reaction considering John walked with Christ for three and a half years during Jesus’ earthly ministry. During our Lord’s sojourn on earth, John never fell to the ground in stunning awe. When the apostle saw His Lord in His present risen life in great glory and great power, his knees buckled. So overwhelming was this scene that John had to be strengthened by a touch and a comforting word. It does not seem like much, but it was His Word and His touch.

⁹ The sane mind accepts the historical truth about the Lord Jesus Christ regarding His death, burial, and resurrection. The mind that rejects the Lord Jesus Christ and his historical visitation in history comes from an unsound, irresponsible, and a foolish mind. Politically, we call the latter, “liberalism.” Liberalism is a belief set with unreasonable ideas. Liberalism is not light but darkness, a belief that “suppresses the truth in unrighteousness;” a belief system that promotes the sins of Romans one; a belief set that promotes feminism, abortion, sodomy, debt, and women in the military on the front lines. The insane are not people living in the gutter, but men and women in blue suits parading as legislators. They are people that believe that sheep and wolves can live together in the same pasture; that Christianity and Islam deserve equal protection; that both are a way to God as long as you are sincere. This is insanity.

Christ speaks: He commands John to not to be afraid. As “first and last,” Christ reminded the original readers that He ordained life, and that He outlasted death. “If God before us, who can be against us?”

What was true for the seven churches needs to be applied to us. In order to succeed in our mission, we need to see with the eye of faith the ascended Christ in His present, risen life. Because Christians think too little about their Savior and Lord, the need of the hour is a fresh vision of the Sovereign Christ in His highly exalted status.

Revelation 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Liveth and was dead: The rehearsing of the history of Christ by the risen Lord was designed to provide comfort to John who was shocked and overwhelmed by the vision. Religion is ultimately about man’s fundamental problem: every man is going to die! Because Christ solved man’s fundamental problem through His death, burial, and resurrection, we have hope. John received assurance that the Christ in his vision was the same Christ he knew on earth. It was like a cold drink on a hot day to the shocked apostle.

Keys of hell and death: Keys are used for unlocking doors and for solving mysteries. Keys are symbols of authority. Because Christ is the only religious leader that has conquered death, He alone has the keys that unlock the doors of death and hell (Isaiah 22:22). All other religious leaders are imposters.

Christ, not Greek philosophers, has the answer to the metaphysical challenges facing mankind. Christ, not Caesar, has the ability to solve the problems of mankind. Christ, not the medical profession has authority over death . . . and for this reason believers serve Christ, not man. Christians confront the powers of darkness from a position of authority as ambassadors of Christ.

Care not what man (a human judge) may say, act on His authority. Know who you are and exercise your heavenly commission to act as His ambassador on earth. In going before a federal judge, a defendant said, “Unless your authority is greater than the authority of my Heavenly Father who endowed me with unalienable rights, I demand you release me immediately or I will be forced to arrest your bond.” The judge ordered his release (January 2008).

1.1.3 Instruction to John

Revelation 1:19 Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

Apparently, John was so caught up in the vision, he forgot his commission. The threefold instruction may best refer to the whole of John’s visions. To interpret the three verbs as past (chapter 1), present (chapters 2 & 3), and future events (chapters 4-22) as the literary structure of

the book including the premonitory signs of the *Parousia* fails in the literary analysis of this book¹⁰. All sections of John's work are equally concerned with the interpretation of past, present, and future events. Though John's entire message was relevant for the people of his day and must be interpreted in light of the original readers, it also has application for our time -- something futurist interpreters seem to protest.¹¹ Because the Spirit designed the work to disclose the spiritual and political forces at work behind historical events that confront all men in the course of history, the principles and commands in this book must be applied by modern Christians though the book is not directly addressed to them or about them.

Revelation 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

Mystery: A "mystery" is something that has a hidden meaning not readily understandable to an ordinary mind. The imagery is identified. The candlesticks are seven churches.

Seven stars: The "seven stars" are the angels or messengers of the seven churches. Are the angels / messengers pastors or literal angels? The use of *aggeloi* in Revelation refers to an angel, not a human messenger. Real angels are also referred to as stars. Lucifer was called a star. In Revelation twelve, one third of the stars were cast out of heaven. A star came down from heaven to open the pit. Jews honor the star of Remphan (Acts 7:43). It appears, however, that the stars in this context are angels. We know that angels are in attendance at church services, and that they are instructed by the *décor* of the saints. Their activity here shows the gravity of the hour and seriousness of the message (1 Corinthians 11:10).

Candlesticks: The seven churches are called "candlesticks." The candlestick refers to the menorah, Israel's sacred icon. As the candlestick shed light upon the table of shewbread in the temple, local churches shed light on Christ, the bread of life. This is the key to the book. John applies Hebrew symbols to the church. The use of Hebrew symbols informs us that the church has become the trustees of the Word of God and stewards of Israel's icons. Israel's sacred

¹⁰ Futurists hold to a past-present-future literary structure of the book. The weakness of this position is that it fails to answer the most fundamental question interpretation, "What did the book as a whole mean to the original readers?" Surely, the whole book, and not just chapters two and three, ministered to the critical needs of the Christians in Asia Minor.

¹¹ Futurists insist that 80% of the Book of Revelation applies to the future, and if 80% of the Book is addressing alleged future events, then it has little application for today. If the "beastly government" is always in the future, then the modern day Christian is blind to the "beastly" aspects in their own government at work in history now. The result is that a futuristic interpretation prevents Christians from applying the admonitions of the book to present-day conflicts. Such a view tends to create sweet, compliant, non-offensive slaves of the tyrannical state hell-bent on the total subjugation of the total man to total government. This book was written so Christians would know how to respond when their government takes on the character of the Great Whore of Babylon.

symbols are absorbed and embraced by the true Israel, the ecclesia of Jesus Christ, the spiritual sons of Abraham by faith, the one true people of God.

1.2 The Message to the Seven churches

The Book of Revelation is a message from Jesus Christ to the seven churches. Besides receiving the whole of the book, each church received an individual letter. The Lord addresses the virtues and vices of each congregation. Our job is to understand the message and to apply its lessons to our times.

1.2.1 Ephesus

Revelation 2:1 **Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;**

This church is a study on the importance of doctrine, service to Christ, and the necessity of having a balance between truth and love.

“**Write**” is another way of saying, “thus saith the Lord.”

“**Holdeth**” communicates the personal control and care of our Lord over His church. He loved these people and held them in His hand.

“**Walketh**” conveys business, fellowship, and focused attention. Christ is identified as the Investor and Inspector of the churches. The mere fact that He owned and inspected this church realigned this community and brought it back into balance.

Ephesus: This city was a large metropolis containing about 250,000 people. It was one of the elite cities of the ancient world, a great influential metropolis located near the coast of the Aegean Sea. Three ancient roads merged at Ephesus. The city grew into a powerful commercial center with a great seaport in the ancient world. Incorporated with Rome, the city became autonomous and free. The honor expressed Rome’s confidence in the city’s loyalty to its political system (Metzger, 1993).

Religiously, the great Temple of Diana, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, adorned the urban center (Acts 19:35). The temple was approximately 400 feet long, 200 feet wide, 60 feet high, and it boasted of 137 polished marble pillars that strutted 66 feet into the sky. Thirty massive pillars overlaid with gold beautified the complex. The worshippers erected a huge grotesque statue of Diana in the holy of holies. The carving of her feet / dress represented an image of the Tower of Babel. From her upper torso, hang fifteen female breasts--a symbol of the

ancient fertility cult from Babylon. Thousands of eunuchs and prostitutes served in the temple. Young girls earned their dowry by prostituting themselves at the temple before they were married. No matter what law was broken, criminals could be protected if they reached the temple area – an independent sovereign State sanctuary.

The Roman world included Britain, Germany, Spain, Babylon, Egypt, and North Africa. The bulk of Christian influence was in Asia Minor. The church of Ephesus was founded by Pricilla and Acquila, and later pastored by the Apostle Paul (Acts 19). Timothy was commissioned by Paul to silence the false teachers in the area and to build the infrastructure of the congregations (1Timothy 1:5ff). Quite possibly, it was due to Timothy's influence that the church attained such doctrinal integrity.

Paul spent three years in the area. So powerful was the influence of Christianity in this region that the silversmiths started a riot to protest diminishing temple souvenir sales. Later, Paul warned of ravenous wolves that would come in and not spare the flock (Acts 20:29-30). John wrote to the second generation Christians and commended them for their patience and toil.

Revelation 2:2 I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

The Ephesian Christians emerged a great church and possessed many admirable characteristics. We would do well to eat the grapes and spit out the seeds; i.e., emulate its strengths and shun its weakness. While some churches have more sugar than the fairy godmother, this congregation ate Iron-man Wheaties for breakfast and wore steel toed boots.

Works: Their “works” referred to their activities of faith and service to the Lord. Ladd says the good works included the entire course of life and conduct (Ladd, 1972, p. 38).

Labor: The term “labor” (kopus) is translated as “trouble” and “weariness” in the NT. This church contained early risers and late night workers; i.e., they were the energetic, tireless servants of the gospel. This body of believers possessed doctrinal integrity, tested false apostles, and exposed fake gospels. They did not tolerate apostates or apostasy. They confronted the wolves and ran them out of the pasture.

Patience: The Ephesians excelled in patience (u`pomoh,n), endured hardship, and possessed a “thick skin.” They worked under pressure and zealously opposed false teachers. These people did not flinch under the war whoops of a doctrinal dispute, but remained strong in the face of opposition. This was a discerning and courageous church. Intolerant of apostates, the believers became holy and perceptive. What a blessing it would be if we had more congregations in America like the Ephesian church!

Revelation 2:3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted.

The Lord continues his praise of this church.

Borne: The term “borne” refers to a pregnant woman carrying a child or a man carrying a pitcher of water (Mark 14:13); i.e., this church carried responsibility well.

Patience: Patience is mentioned a second time. This church excelled under pressure (patience) and endured the heat of social and legal conflict. Not only did this church stay in the battle, they remained true to His name and true to the Word of God despite the pressures to walk down Easy Street.

Labored: The word “fainted” (kekopiakes¹²) is preceded by a negative. The term was used of a woman’s travail in child birth. Laboring day and night “for thy name’s sake, they were not weary of soldiering for Christ This battalion of Christians showed no signs of surrender. The test of a man is not how much he enjoys the benefits of the gospel, but where he stands when the faith is under attack.

These soldiers did not quit or “tuck tail and run” on the battlefield. They charged to the battle front. Unashamed of the gospel, these believers were tomcats scrappin’ and fightin’ for Biblical truth. Like a sweaty mule team pulling a wagon, these believers did not complain about the iron cargo they carried.

This church shared the spirit of Winston Churchill:

“We shall fight on the beaches. We shall fight on the landing grounds. We shall fight in the fields, and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender!” churches today would do well to follow the example of the Ephesians by remaining true to Christ and to not grow “weary in well doing” (2 Thessalonians 3:13).

The spirit of the Ephesians rested on Billy Sunday who said,

“Listen, I’m against sin. I’ll kick it as long as I’ve got a foot, I’ll fight it as long as I’ve got a fist, I’ve butt it as long as I’ve got a head, and I’ll bite it as long as I’ve got a tooth. And when I’m old, fistless, footless, and toothless, I’ll gum it till I go home to glory and it goes home to perdition.”

¹² The word “fainted” (kekopi,akej) means “to be tired” or “to grow weary.” It is a perfect tense indicating the energy of the church had not waned during its past and present conflicts.

Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Nevertheless: The word “nevertheless” (*alla*) marks a strong contrast. This powerful church with military discipline had one serious defect. While this church excelled in the marine virtues of strength and courage, it was notably deficient in love and grace.

Against thee is a term of contempt. This church had a strength that degenerate into a fault. This was a simple rebuke. No long lectures are given. No whip was used to correct this congregation. It wasn't needed.

First love: The phrase “left the first love” (h.n avga,phn sou th.n prw,thn avfh/kej) meant “to leave,” or “to forsake.” It is the same word used of the disciples when they “left” their nets to follow Christ (Matthew 4:20). The word “first” is in the adjectival position. The word “of you” is a genitive meaning that this church, though doctrinally pure, had ceased producing love. Churches fail along one or two lines: (1) a failure to be holy, or (2) a failure to love.

In fighting for truth, this church failed to nurse the wounded back to health. Intolerance of sin is a virtue, but intolerance of weakness is a vice. A balanced life includes holiness and grace. It is not easy to reflect both of these virtues, but it is our calling. We are chosen to be holy and to resist sin, but we are also ordered to love and to care for the weak.

Possibly, the original affections of this church for Christ cooled over time. These believers had a fondness of Jesus, and felt frisky when his name was mentioned, but they lacked a deep, deep love for the Shepherd and His sheep. Sermons became intellectual and rigid. Their desire to be doctrinally pure made them harsh and censorious. In attacking doctrinal error, many good brethren were wounded by “friendly fire.” They knew how to jab people with the Sword of Truth, but no one remembered to put band aids in their first aid kit.

They were strong in truth, but weak in grace; strong in confrontation, but weak in consolation. A church that crosses its t's and dots its i's can be a graceless church. Iron replaced velvet, and bitterness replaced thankfulness. Thus, this church was all broccoli and no brownies. Someone needed to teach them that it's O.K. to have dessert once in a while. Their condition called for a feast on the grace of God. These believers needed to taste the sweetness of Jesus and drink from Calvary's love—to realize “a spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, the medicine go down-wown.”

We are apt to be very pert at censuring others while not enduring advice to ourselves.

*“Nothing shews our Weakness more than to be so sharp-sighted at spying other Men's Faults, and so purblind about our own” (William Penn. (1644–1718).
Fruits of Solitude. The Harvard Classics. 1909–14).*

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Remember: Lovelessness is no trivial matter. Christ called the Ephesians to remember the love that permeated the congregation at its inception, to repent of gracelessness, and to return to the duty of loving one another. To love and be loved is the best blanket for keeping warm.

Remove candlestick: So serious was this error, the Lord threatened to remove their “candlestick”; i.e., their testimony unless they balanced out truth with love. Christ called for repentance. Without truth, they would lose their witness for Christ. Without love they would drive imperfect people out of the congregation.

Is there any doubt this church responded to the Lord’s gentle rebuke? Surely, they did!

Revelation 2:6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

Nicolaitanes: Again, the Lord commends this church for its doctrinal purity—for fighting the Nicolaitan heresy.

But, the identity of the Nicolaitanes is uncertain:

- (a) Some scholars see this as a moral battle and identify them with Nicholus of Antioch (Irenaeus) an early Christian disciple who led his disciples into unrestrained indulgence; i.e., toward free love and lawlessness.
- (b) The deeds of the Nicolaitans could be an extreme reaction to restrictive practices common among the stoics. Others see it as a form of antinomianism wherein people became lawless. Possibly, the Nicolaitanes were the first “liberals” that rejected absolutes and embraced permissiveness.
- (c) Some even see this name as a reference to St. Nicholus¹³ on which some traditions of Christmas are based.
- (d) Possibly, the Lord is addressing a form of “works-righteousness” associated with Judaism that seems to crop up in every age. Since overcoming this false doctrine is necessary to “eat of the tree of life,” the Lord may be commending the Ephesian church for clinging to the gospel and its “spiritual blessings” (Ephesians 1:3ff).

¹³ The Restored church of God) somehow errantly identifies the Nicolaitanes with “St Nicolas” and the winter Solstice, and turn this passage into a condemnation of the celebration of Christmas. Without going into this with any detail, Christians need to be reminded that the Book of Revelation dealt with first-century issues.

The term “Nicolaitans” means “to conquer” (nikos) “the people” (laos). Thus, the Nicolaitans could be a code-term in the political sense. It may refer to the Nimrod cult, the man who stole human sovereignty to control men with force and coercion (Genesis 10 and 11). The Book of Revelation has much to say about civil powers such as the white horse that went out to conquer, the Beast and his followers, and the whore of Babylon that conquered the Mediterranean (6, 12, 13, 17, 18). If this be case, the “deeds of the Nicolaitans” would refer to those who manipulate the masses through coercion and intimidation whether religious or civil. Both religion and politics have their forms of power. Both tend to advance the belief in the total subjugation of the total man to total government.

Definitely, the Lord is commending the Ephesians for not falling into the power cults.

Hate: Hate is an attribute of God. It is hard to be a good man unless one hates evil . . . and evil men. This church hated evil, but it failed to love those that Christ loved. The call to love does not mean the assembly had to depart from principle and to let the pendulum swing toward doctrinal laxity. Love is not a cure all, but it is a multivitamin essential for a healthy body. A congregation can be grounded in doctrine and in love. It can adhere to truth as well as to grace.

Revelation 2:7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

Ears to Hear: “Let him hear” reminds us of the Shema, “Hear, O Israel . . .” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Spirit calls the newly reinstated Israel to heed His instructions. The exhortation is to all saints of all ages for all of time. God gave us one mouth and two ears. Let us close our mouth and be all ears.

Overcome: *Overcoming* suggests warfare. The word “overcome” is derived from the Greek word “nikon” (nikw/nti), which means “victory.” A *nike* Christian is one who is true to Christ; one who strikes a balance between truth and love, justice and mercy, steel and velvet.

Truth and mercy are opposite virtues that kiss at Calvary (Psalm 85:10). Christians are called to be tough and tender. Too often, we are tough when we should be tender and tender when we should be tough. In our endeavor to avoid being a bowl of mush, we must avoid being transformed into iron-platted armadillo. We must not only shun timidity in truth battles, we must avoid the temptation to turn every disagreement into a sword fight. Love seeks a way to reconcile; a way to mend fences; a way to bridge the gap between generations. We should not ignore those who espouse doctrinal error, but neither should we correct everything with a whip of nine tails. We win others to the side of truth using the art of gentle persuasion, not by bullying them with Bible truth.

A reward is promised: Everyone who accepts the shepherding care of Jesus will enter life. The “tree of life” takes us back to Genesis. The imagery is that of entering paradise, the kingdom of God, the eternal life of the *age to come*. Who are the overcomers? Overcomers are people of faith who seek truth and love in conformity with law (1 John 5:1-4).

1.2.2 Smyrna

Revelation 2:8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

This church is a study on ultimate values, true wealth, and the true nature of Judaism, the main adversary of the gospel throughout the centuries.

Smyrna: The city is located 35 miles north of Ephesus. Its name means *myrrh*. It is the only city of the seven that is still in existence today. It accommodates more than 100,000 people. At that time, it had a large Jewish community. The metropolis contained five temples representing five major deities. In an attempt to unify people, Rome subjected defeated peoples to humiliation by taking their gods and placing them in Roman temples. Romans assimilated the conquered into their civilization through religion. Rome defeated so many ethnic groups, it lacked a single religion that could unite them all.

Multiculturalism weakened Rome and divided the Mediterranean world. *Pluralism was not a strength, but a weakness to overcome!* Assimilated people preserved their hatreds, prejudices, and conflicts of their country’s origin. They sequestered themselves in closed and aggressive enclaves, and often expressed their opposition to public policy with violence. The only way to keep the peace was through the crushing rigors of a military police State.

Caesar worship: Rome brought law and order to the region through rigid and repressive controls. A powerful military presence subdued the Smyrnans. Over time, civil rulers began to court the favors of the Roman Senate and their emperors. Julius Caesar was the first to accept the title of a god, and he did so in order to unify the masses. Not all cities had a temple dedicated to Caesar, but Smyrna did. Three hundred years before Revelation was written, the Smyrnans dedicated a temple to Roma.

In John’s day (26 AD.), Smyrna completed a temple in honor of Tiberius Caesar to win the praise of Rome. Once a year, authorities required the people to go to the temple to offer a pinch of incense to Caesar. In so doing, people demonstrated allegiance to the State. Loyal citizens received a certificate indicating their patriotism—a license that permitted them to conduct business in the city market. Without a permit, how could an artisan conduct trade and earn a living? To Christians, however, indulging the emperor cult was repugnant to the gospel. How could believers participate in Caesar worship without compromising their faith? (Ladd, 1972; Metzger, 1993).

Polycarp: Christians in Smyrna felt the raw power of government when they declined to participate in Caesar worship. Polycarp (70-155 AD.), a bishop of Smyrna, was martyred in this city for his refusal to share in the emperor cult. Polycarp, says Ladd, was accused of attacking the city gods and forbidding Caesar worship in the city (p. 43). To Roman officials, Polycarp was a terrorist because he practiced a dangerous religion. Polycarp believed that Christ was Lord and that His law applied to all men and all of man's institutions. When authorities demanded Polycarp pledge allegiance to Caesar, Polycarp refused saying, "Eighty-six years I have served Christ, and He never did me any wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

Polycarp's great confession stands in stark contrast to modern day Christianity which sees no problem with confessing Christ and pledging allegiance to the modern State and its statutory control over men. In practice, government is God. Few ministers have the courage to confront the ultra vires acts of the State. Out of fear of the IRS or some other government agency, pastors refuse to address the Godless policies of the U.S. government. Such contradiction and duplicity was not tolerated in Smyrna. No man can serve two masters!

First and Last: The inscription of Christ, "the first and the last" and "he that was dead, and is alive," encouraged believers to resist the emperor cult and to endure the suffering that ensued. These believers served the *Protos* and the *Eschatos*, the Beginning and the End, the One Who died and rose again. As Victor over death, Christ is Lord of all. As King of the nations, rulers owe Him ultimate allegiance. In Smyrna, devotion to Christ and devotion to the State collided. Conflicted erupted, and many in Smyrna were hauled into court to face charges of treason against Rome by the totalitarian State.

Revelation 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

I know: Jesus stated, "I know thy works." The Smyrnans learned that though they were rejected by the State, they were accepted by the Lord. He knew their trials and stood by to assist them in their legal conflicts.

Tribulation and poverty: The "tribulation" referred to here is the trial of living in an explosive, politically-charged environment. Trade guilds expected loyalty to their deities and knew nothing of "affirmative action." Because Christians could not do business in the market place without taking an oath of loyalty to the guild and or to Caesar, they scrounged for a living in the black market. Refusing to apply for a State license resulted in a lower standard of living—the cost for confessing Christ as King. Possibly, their property was looted by mobs or confiscated by local government officials acting under color of law (Hebrews 10:34).

Rich: A human perspective about the dire straits of the Smyrnans might provoke pity or even hostility, but Christ announced, "thou are rich!" They were rich in insight about Christ; rich in

faith; rich in courage; rich in patience; rich in so many virtues esteemed by Heaven's King. They did not possess the wealth of this world, but they possessed the wealth of heaven. These were princes a foot; kings without gold; paupers without shame.

Synagogue of Satan: The term "synagogue of Satan" is a reference to Jewish hostility against Christians. The Jews were the problem because they are generally antichrist, anti-Bible, and anti-man . . . and Christians would do well to wake up and recognize that the Askenazi *goi* Jews of today have adopted the same antichrist spirit and hostility that existed in the synagogue of Satan in first century (1 Thessalonians 2:15).

The "true Jews," by way of implication, are those who believe that Jesus is Israel's Messiah, and who accept Him as their Savior. False Jews, in John's time, were physical descendants of Abraham that claimed to be God's people by virtue of their genetic relationship to Abraham. See the **Appendices** in the Book for a lengthy explanation of "the Synagogue of Satan" and its implication for our time.

Blasphemy: The word "blasphemy" means "to speak against." Slander was not directed against God, but *against the followers of Christ!* Slander is a form of murder, and it was the weapon of choice by the Jews. By registering false complaints against them in court, the Jews incited civil rulers to issue warrants for the arrest of Smyrnan Christians. Since the physical descendants of Abraham rejected Christ, they were not Abraham's true children (Galatians 3:1-14). They were members of Satan's army.¹⁴

Revelation 2:10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

Fear Not: Smyrna was a difficult neighborhood to live in. Hostility was high. Tempers were short. Gangs ruled the streets. Political and legal harassment waited for opportunity. Without a doubt, the Jews stirred up Roman authorities to charge Christians with crimes against the State.

"Fear not" was an admonition to be governed by faith and principle rather than by circumstance and emotion. *Greatness is determined, not by the size of one's friends, but by the size of one's enemies.* The enemy of these believers was none other than Satan himself. Jesus let His people know that Satan had gained control of the political system and that the authorities were being used by this ancient adversary to crush the advancement of the gospel. Bias in favor of the State

¹⁴ In Romans 9:6, Paul says that not "all out of Israel, are of Israel." That is, there is a true Israel of God, the people of God, the church of God. A Jew who believes in Christ is a member of true Israel. A Gentile who believes in Christ inherits Israel's promises and becomes member of the true Israel of God. But, a physical descendent of Abraham who rejects Christ is not a member of true Israel; and is, in fact, a member of the "synagogue of Satan" and the anti-God forces highlighted in the Book of Revelation.

dominated the courts. Hostile to Christ, pagan authorities urged on by Jewish calumny marked Christians as targets of police action. Without a doubt, believers would be labeled “atheists,” “tax protesters,” or “traitors,” and charged with contempt for Roman law.

Prison: Some believers were indicted and thrown into prison because they were non-conformists—a threat to State cohesion. Imprisonment and death are viewed as Satanic weapons designed to test the validity of the Christian witness. No doubt Satan used the Jews to put Christians in jail. Interestingly, the Christians had to face charges for violating man-made statutes in a corrupt legal system.

Ten Days was a symbol representing a short period of time or limited affliction.

Faithful: “Being faithful unto death” was Christ’s way of telling the Christians not to idolize life, but to serve Him. Just as Olympians are crowned for their achievements, Jesus promised these victors a reward for their allegiance. Christ, not the State, has the right to demand unlimited obedience from the people. And, when government is god in the minds of citizens, active Christians cannot expect not to be targets of political harassment by their neighbors.

Revelation 2:11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

Hear: The letter to Smyrna alerted the Christians to prepare for conflict—conflict caused by men calling themselves *Jews but are not*—Jews using the power of the state to crush Christians.

Hearing is a virtue. All men have ears, but not all hear. Since Jesus Christ is Lord, and since governments seek to be a god, it is not possible not to have conflicts with the State! The more statism gains a foothold in the minds of men, the more embolden officials become in exercising police powers.

There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them (Esther 3:8).

Overcoming in this section is a reference of loyalty to Christ in the face of Jewish opposition to the gospel. He that is faithful unto death will not be hurt by the second death, that is, he will not suffer the fate of Christ-rejecters which involves eternal death. Because he lives, all who live for him . . . or die for him will share in his resurrection.

1.2.3 Pergamos

Revelation 2:12 And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

This church is a study on the turpitude¹⁵ of tolerance, the dangers of statism, and the importance of correct doctrine among believers.

Pergamos: (Pergamun or Pergamon) was not a giant commercial city, but an epicenter of politics, religion, and education. The Romans envied the educated Greeks and Hellenistic schools established in Pergamos, Rhodes, and Athens. The Caesars encouraged schools in Rome to pattern themselves after the Greek model.

Bequeathed to Rome by Attalus II, Pergamos became the capital city of the province in Asia; that is, it incorporated with Rome. Built on a hill 1000 feet high, it eventually became the acropolis of the later city. Elder Pliny deemed it the most brilliant city in Asia.

On the Acropolis stood magnificent buildings: a state statuary, palaces, and the great library. The library boasted two-hundred thousand volumes and rivaled the great library of Alexandria in Egypt. Because their library was the envy of the world and rivaled the library of Alexandria, the Egyptians placed an embargo on papyrus destined for Pergamos. Thus, the Greeks created their own brand of papyrus on which they could write and record important legal documents. In the second century AD., Hadrian's building program made the city one of the "wonders" of the world.

Pergamos was also the famous site of the **Temple to Aesculapius**, the Greek God of healing. Allegedly, Aesculapius founded the medical sciences. He is also called "Asclepius," the serpent-god of healing (serpent symbol). Thousands of harmless snakes inhabited the shrine. He is immortalized in the constellation Ophiuchus. Over time, the city developed a reputation for healing blindness. Thus, a cult of healing arts arose in the region.

Pergamos was the first city of Asia to embrace the emperor cult. In 29 BC., the people dedicated a temple to the divine Augustus and the goddess Roma (Athena). On the huge altar of Zeus, the priests burned sacrifices 24 hours a day. The smell of burning flesh filled the air in honor of the god. Observance of rites associated with the cult became a test of loyalty to Rome. The government was dedicated to Caesar and the Pergamon Christians were expected to offer a pinch of incense to the emperor and confess, "Caesar is Lord." Thus, Satan worked through the State. This juggernaut challenged the courage and convictions of the church.

Autonomous Rome declared war on King Jesus and God's law order. The indomitable weapon by which Christ waged war against the emperor cult was an Eastern Samurai sword known as the Word of God. A perfected instrument of war, it could slice the Emperor cult in two as well as fuse steel in to the soggy souls of the Pergamon Christians.

¹⁵ Turpitude: from the Latin *turpitude* ugliness, from *turpis* base; i.e., that which is base, depraved, and twisted.

Though the saints at Pergamon had not denied the faith, they had lost their snap, crackle, and pop . . . and were quick to raise the white flag of surrender when Christians causes encountered State opposition. God’s people needed healing that could only come by looking at the Serpent lifted up on the Cross. Further, they needed to grasp God’s Samurai sword, let out a war whoop, and wield the two-edged sword against the State propaganda machine.

The Sword with Two-edges was the Word of God, the only weapon used by Christ to win hearts and souls. The description was a reminder to the Pergamon Christians to dust off their Bibles and to rely on the authority of the Holy Scriptures – to take the Bible more seriously and to use it in the service of the gospel.

Our strength is the Bible, and the Bible is our strength.

Revelation 2:13 I know thy works and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

I know: Christ knew the deeds of these saints and the soil upon which this church was planted. This community of believers knew the Master. Even though they lived in a pagan culture dominated by democratic tyranny, they did not deny His name. The Pergamon residents would say, Ku,rios Kai,saros (Lord Caesar), but the Christians said, Ku,rios Cristo,s (Lord Christ) in their hearts. This difference threatened to erupt into a conflict with governing authorities who promoted absolute allegiance to Caesar.

Throne of Satan: The “throne of Satan” is mentioned twice in this verse. It refers to the seat of government in that city as Pergamos was the capital city in the province. The fact that it is mentioned twice may be a reference to (a) the cult center where the temple of Zeus was located, and, or (b) the emperor cult that demanded allegiance to Rome. The city initiated Caesar worship in Asia. Thus, the believers were fighting “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”—that is, evil perpetuated through government officials “which frameth mischief by a law” (Psalm 94:20).

Not only are religious cults a threat to society, but the absolute State with all its desire to be god-like is a pit-bull that unleashes raw police power against non-conformists.

The use of the term “Satan’s throne” means that Satan controlled the government and was using the totalitarian State to squash gospel proclamation—a gospel that announced “that there is another king, one Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7). Christ called for freedom fighters. Where Jesus is Lord, *Christians must resist total subjugation of the total man to total government.* Since freedom fighters cannot serve two masters, King Jesus and the totalitarian State, many in Pergamos faced the crushing, judicial wrath of Roman officials.

Antipas: We know nothing about Antipas except what the text says. “Martyr” is the original word for “witness.” He was probably slandered and then executed by the government because he would not say, “Caesar is Lord.” He did not believe, as modern Christians do, that the church ought to surrender itself to the godless, democratic State. To their credit, this church did not abandon their faith during this crisis. In fact, the Lord credits them with holding fast to his name and not denying the truth about Christ. Under political pressure, this church did not ‘tuck their tail and run.’ They did not succumb to timidity. They stood their ground for Christ. This was a courageous church, but they needed more guts and grit; more “skin in the game;” more blazing spurts of pugnacity for the gospel.

Revelation 2:14 But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balaak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

Unlike the Ephesian church, Pergamon Christians were not doctrinally strong. They were nice people, but not Theologically grounded. Bible study and the pursuit of truth was a weak point in this church. Their tolerance tended to degenerate into moral turpitude.

The One with the sharp two-edged sword pierced the heart of the problem in the church at Pergamos. Drawing a lesson from Numbers 22-25, our Lord instructed His people. These Christians were engaged in a battle against indifference arising from carelessness, from absorption in material pursuits, and from the difficulty arising from an aggressive, overreaching government. Pergamon believers were too tolerant of government that deified itself. Paul chastised the Corinthians for their turpitude when he said, “For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face” (2 Corinthians 11:20). Likewise, the Pergamon Christians needed to collect some tiger tails to increase militant courage in order to resist the swagger of the emperor cult.

Balaam: Balaam was the for-profit prophet. Paid highly for his services by King Balak (Balaak), Balaam sought to place a curse on Israel because the nation’s livestock grazed on the Plains of Moab while migrating from Egypt through Moab to the land of Canaan. But, God prevented Balaam from divining against His holy people. Unable to fulfill the State’s will to curse Israel, and in order to collect his prophetic fee, Balaam acted insidiously against the will of God by giving King Balak hemlock to poison God’s holy people. Balaam advised King Balak to enlist flirty Moabite women, many of whom were temple prostitutes, to seduce the young men of Israel. These steamy seductresses invited the youth to a “temple church service” to copulate with them in acts of love and devotion to the gods of Moab. The idolatry and naivety of the young men aroused the wrath of God against His own people. This clever plot did what no man-made curse could ever do—arouse the anger of God against His people. God’s holiness offended, twenty-four thousand Israelites died.

Doctrine of Balaam: The Scriptures warns us against the “error of Balaam” (Jude 11); against the “way of Balaam” (2 Peter 2:15); and against the “doctrine of Balaam” (Revelation 2:14). The “error of Balaam” appears to be Simony or commercializing a prophetic gift; that is, abusing a ministry for wealth creation¹⁶. The “way of Balaam” appears to be duplicity, “double-mindedness,” or hypocrisy; that is, maintaining a public image of piety while cloaking one’s love for money and power.

“What is the doctrine of Balaam?” There is no shortage of answers among Bible teachers. Some have identified the teaching as “evolution” or “fornication,” or the advancement of “mixed marriages.” Others generalize it and say it is any teaching contrary to the Bible, or any promotion of sexual promiscuity. None of these answers are very helpful. The “doctrine of Balaam” is certainly easier to describe than to define.

The doctrine of Balaam is anti-Christian brainwashing used by anti-god forces to seduce Christians to compromise the faith or Biblical morals in order to arouse the anger of God against His own people. Jews call it the *demoralization* of Christian culture. Hollywood sitcoms and pornography are the backwash of propaganda.

It is “any policy or program adopted by the State to diminish the devotion of Christians to the will of Christ in order to increase the people’s devotion to the will of the State.”

The “doctrine of Balaam” involves the devilish advice from a “political advisor” to a head of State on how to corrupt, destroy, **or control** the people of God **in order to advance the will of the State**.

Few regimes in history have ever been interested in subjecting themselves to the Ten Commandments. Governments have an aberrant interest in the advancement of State policy, and they do not appreciate pastors telling them what to believe or how to behave. Both church and State compete for the devotion of people. While the church uses persuasion to influence the State, the State is not opposed to using force to compel allegiance. Thus, the Pergamon church appears to hold to a doctrine that one could confess Caesar as lord in public as long as they acknowledged Jesus as Lord in private.

Guilds and Commerce: The “doctrine of Balaam” at Pergamos surfaced among the guilds—a doctrine used by the guild leaders to seduce the Christians into compromising their faith by participation in guild rituals which involved idolatrous practices. In the temple, the priest sacrificed animals to a deity. Guild leaders would take the meat home and invite guests to

¹⁶ The term “extreme wealth creation” is used in contrast to the proper payment of a minister of the gospel. Those in the Christian ministry deserved to be paid for their services. Christian churches are ordered not to rob their ministers by stingy giving (1 Corinthians 9:9). Responsible, reasonable salaries are a Biblical mandate . . . but in some cases there are “evangelists” who abuse the right for the purpose of “extreme wealth creation.” Balaam was of this ilk.

participate in the cultic feast in honor of the guild god—a feast that often involved drunkenness and depravity. Some churchmen taught you could participate in this “BBQ” without offending the true God. Participation was preferred to losing one’s job. *The doctrine of Balaam taught that compromise was necessary for the advancement of commerce.* These teachers advised their followers to play the guild game and avoid confrontation with the officials so they could make a profit in the market place. But, this spiritual compromise led to ethical compromise; and, ethical compromise invited the judgment of Christ.

Fornication: “Fornication” may refer to *sexual fornication*. Not far from Antioch was a beautiful spot called Daphne, a temple dedicated to Apollo and Diana. The temple area was surrounded by thick grove of cypresses and bay trees, and was beautified with numerous lovely fountains. Daphne was famous for her corps of temple prostitutes, and the place was a favorite for guild celebrations. The Christians at Pergamos may have participated in acts of fornication and not have condemned the moral laxity at guild festivals.

“Fornication” may refer to *spiritual fornication*. Participation in these cultic feasts compromised the Christian faith. Such acts betrayed Christ. This was not mere purchasing meat offered to idols in the open market, but co-participation in the religious ceremony. Instead of standing up and walking out, the sat down and joined in guild rituals. Thus, participation in immorality betrayed the Christian ethic.

“Fornication” may refer to a *commercial intercourse*—or contracts among people for the purposes of trade. Commercial contracts may have included stipulations that placed a duty on parties to pledge allegiance to the guild god or to Rome. Acceptance of a commercial contract that demanded allegiance to the State or to a god compromised the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Tithing to the State is a form of idolatry.

See **Appendices:** “The Doctrine of Balaam in the United States”

Revelation 2:15 So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.

This church not only tolerated the doctrine of Balaam, but the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. These two woodpeckers were knocking holes in their faith . . . and the church exercised ooey-gooey tolerance of these pests!! Tolerance degenerated into a vice and the house of God was suffering from an infestation of pluralism in the church.

The Doctrine of Nicolaitanism: The precise doctrine of Nicolaitanism is uncertain. Two Greek root words are brought together to form "nicolaitan:" *nico* and *laos*. "Nico" means “to conquer or bind.” "Laos" means "the common people." The modern term "laity” is derived from this word. Thus, Nicolaitanism is any dogma which seeks to undermine and replace the gospel of Christ.

The doctrine of Nicolaitans refers to any teaching that enslaves the people; any teaching that empowers absolute authority over others—religious or civil.

Nicolaitanism and Religion: Real “religion” as practiced in Christianity leads to moral purity and liberty. But a false religion¹⁷ enslaves. Thus, the doctrine of the Nicolaitans could refer to some type of aberrant, ecclesiastical control. Papal authority comes to mind but this didn’t develop until centuries later. However, this passage should not be used to condemn pastors who exercise assertive, godly, decisive leadership in a church. God’s work calls for strong leadership, but there is no room for tyrannical leaders in any body politic.

Nicolaitanism could refer to any doctrine that supplants the gospel and undermines its basic tenants: Romanism, Judaism, secularism, statism, Mormonism, prosperity cults, “Christian” psychology, evolution, feminism, “name it and claim it,” women’s rights, environmentalism, nationalism, liberalism, libertinism, etc. All these doctrines seek to control the minds and actions of people.

Nicolaitanism and the State: In light of the context, it seems more appropriate to view Nicolaitanism as civil annoyance rather than religious; that is, those who taught *unlimited submission* toward the Roman totalitarian super power for the sake of commercial gain. The Whore of Babylon threatened all the churches in the Mediterranean. Nicolaitanism is linked to the rebellious political philosophy of Nimrod who through force and coercion organized people into city states in order to control them. *This passage is a proscription against statism in a culture where the State arrogated to itself all power and bowed before no other.* In such conditions, the church needed to develop a policy of resistance with an emphasis on the Kingship of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Resistance to tyranny is service to God* (Jefferson). See comments on Revelation 2:6.

Christians would do well to reflect on how the church promotes the Doctrine of Nicolaitanism (propaganda) by supporting a federal government that seeks to control the person and property of its citizens through legislation and taxation. When men’s labor is taxed, the government has conquered its citizens; which by the way, is a “conquest of the people.” Selah!

*None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.
~ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

Revelation 2:16 Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

¹⁷ Webster's traces the word “religion” back to an old Latin word *religio* meaning "taboo or restraint." A deeper study discovers the word comes from the two words *re* and *ligare*. *Re* is a prefix meaning "return," and *ligare* means "to bind" or "return to bondage."

Repent: This church tolerated doctrinal error in the form of statism. The response desired by Christ was repentance. Government is not God. Devotion to the State is not the highest good. These believers needed to stop indulging State worship and start resisting Roman absolutism; to stop complying with idolatrous guild practices; and start confronting the idolatry in these guilds. This church needed a huge increase in devotion to Christ and a Herculean decrease in their idolatrous devotion to the State.

Sword of my mouth: The remedy for this doctrinally weak, compromising church was to take the Holy Scriptures seriously. It needed to pick up the two-edged sword and “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Men perform according to their theology, and when they believe error, their works are skewed.

Super Sugar Slap Cereals were not on the breakfast table of Biblical prophets; that is, this church needed to start eating *Iron-man Wheaties, Fuel for Champions* in order to serve in the army of their Captain and Commander Who was at war against idolatrous Rome. Christians needed to toughen up, straighten up, and stand up for truth against the emperor cult. Thus, this passage has application for the modern church which appears to be eating from Pergamon’s Boo Boo Bear’s sugar-plum tree.

Come quickly: The verb “come” does not refer to the *Parousia* of our Lord but to his coming in time to rescue the faithful and to judge the disobedient. In this case, it appears to be a warning to the nice, sweet, tolerant, believers at Pergamos. If they make peace with the emperor cult, these believers faced a fight with their Lord. The pronoun “them” implies that only a few were guilty of compromise and that not everyone in the church was infected with the spirit of compliance toward totalitarian Rome. The means of removing the cancer was spiritual surgery using the sword of His mouth.

Revelation 2:17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

Hear: Hearing and obedience are closely related. Obedience to Jesus implies resistance to a State that sees itself as having total jurisdiction over the total man including his marriage, his income, his beliefs, and his travel. These Christians needed courage to resist absolute government. The word “courage” stems from the Latin word “cor” which means heart. The opposite of courage is not cowardice, but compliance. Standing up to the State required steel in the soul. Victors who heed the command were promised hidden manna.

Manna sustained God’s people in the wilderness. Manna was in the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was taken and hidden during the time of Jeremiah. Manna an emblem of provision, care, and

love. Promising manna is our Lord's way of pledging spiritual sustenance and power to those who dared to resist statism. Moreover, the manna may refer to God's provision during the Kingdom of God, and, or, it represents admission to the Messianic Feast, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

White stone: Judges used black and white stones to cast verdicts: a black stone was the symbol for guilt, and a white stone was the symbol for innocence. Christians who resisted State powers were familiar with the black stone. According to some traditions, people wore white stones or amulets to ward off evil. Some even used secret words written on the amulets to protect them from evil spirits. White stones were also used as admission "tickets" into public festivals. Here, it represents a ticket into the kingdom of God.

New name: The new name is in contrast to the profane charms of this world; i.e., the new name would imply the approval of Christ or the development of Christian character. If this is the imagery intended, possession of a white stone communicates faith in the true gospel, the approval of Christ and admission into the Messianic Age.

1.2.4 Thyatira

Revelation 2:18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass;

The challenges at Thyatira are a study on serving two masters; a study on conflict between one's duty to Christ and one's duty to his job; on labor unions and idolatry; on the choices one must make between the demands of two opposing authorities; on balance between love and truth; on the contest between the broad way and the narrow way; and, on commerce and spiritual compromise.

Thatira: Seleucus I founded Thyatira as a frontier post to guard the western approaches to his empire. It lost its military significance after it was absorbed into the Roman Empire. It morphed *into a commercial center with an emporium of trade unions*. Important to the city was a wool and dye industry. *The trade guilds possessed their own peculiar religious practices and sponsored religious celebrations*. Religious camaraderie and participation was important to succeed in the trade. Lydia, a seller of purple, represented one of the guilds (Acts 16).

It would be infeasible to participate in a trade without being a member of these guilds. Because each trade sought the allegiance of a god, they collectively sought to honor their deity for commercial blessing. Many argued that since the alleged gods did not really exist, it did not matter if one participated or not, and that one could participate without compromising one's witness for Christ. This was the doctrine of Jezebel!

Every description of Christ in this passage is a remedy for the spiritual problems existing at Thyatira.

Son of God: The tutelary god of the city, Tyrimnos, has been identified with Apollo, the Greek Sun god. John's description of Christ as the Son of God with eyes of fire was in juxtaposition to Apollo, the main god in this Roman city. Jesus is the true Son, the only begotten Son of the Father in contrast to imaginary gods in the Greek pantheon of gods. See the **Appendices:** "Meaning of the Title, 'Son of God'."

Eyes like a flame of fire: Eyes represent intelligence and holy perception—eyes like a flame of fire symbolize our Lord's omniscience. Fiery eyes represent military intensity to wage war against deception with blazing truth for the battle of hearts and minds.

Feet of bronze: Christ's feet of bronze represent an eagerness to judge everything that is contrary to His holy character. The assembly at Thyatira needed to take another look at the Son of God. He is not one among many. He is not a way to heaven; He is the way to heaven (John 14:6). He is not all sugar and cream. He is salt and light serious about truth. Chocolate éclair Christians need to taste the briny character of Christ as He is not a permissive fairy godmother that serves dessert at every meal. This military King expected obedience to His commands. With eagerness etched on His brow, this thundering Battle Commander orders war against all that oppose His rule.

Revelation 2:19 I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first.

The Son is ready to point out the good and the bad. He gladly recognized the good and praised it first. Unlike the Ephesians, this was not a loveless church. The assembly at Thyatira excelled in charity, and they did it under the stress of severe trials. These Christians had compassion in their eyes and kindness on their lips. Service was a manifestation of love, and endurance was a product of their faith.

"More than the first" indicates increasing growth in Christian virtues. Their love did not grow cold, and they managed to endure difficulty in a pagan environment hostile to their faith.

Revelation 2:20 Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

A few things against thee: As the Lord commended the strengths of this congregation; He now addresses the deficiencies in this church. This church excelled in love, but love tended to degenerate into an unhealthy tolerance of false teaching. While love is the answer for many things, love is not the answer for all things. Truth must also be summoned to the front lines. Only truth could overcome the powers of deception at work in this community.

Jezebel: The text identifies the problem as the teaching of Jezebel which would cause the first century mind to reflect on the Jezebel of the Old Testament.

Jezebel was the Phoenician daughter of Ethbaal, King of Tyre and Sidon, the sly, foxy wife of King Ahab. Ahab was a pragmatic military man who appointed his spouse as the minister of religion who imported Baalism from Phoenicia into the Northern Kingdom.

Jezebel was the painted viper coiled to strike at the heart of Israel's source of law! This woman was the evil genius behind State oppression of YHWH worship in Israel. She did not hesitate to use the power of the State to nullify Biblical law in her husband's administration or to assassinate God's people in order to accumulate power (1 Kings 21). She was a statist that believed in the supremacy of the king; that the State had jurisdiction over its citizens and their property; that it was the duty of civilians to pledge unlimited obedience to the king-state; that Israelites could believe anything they wanted in their hearts as long as they show external allegiance to Ahab's administration.

Possibly, there was *an influential woman* among the church who advised Christian craftsmen to tolerate the idolatrous practices of the guilds in order to profit from the industry. Another position is that *Jezebel* was a *spirit* or a *philosophy* or a *doctrinal position* which many followed in that day. Jezebel could be any person, lawyer, philosopher, or feminist or chamber of commerce that induced the people to contract with the labor unions for commercial benefits -- a franchise that involved spiritual compromise.

Fornicate: This Jezebel seduced believers into fornication. While the word "*fornicate*" usually refers to acts of sexual immorality, the term also designates participation in the labor unions at Thyatira. Membership in the guilds involved *commercial intercourse* a fellowship around religious rituals unique to each trade union.¹⁸ Like immorality was the by-product at the worship of the *'ēggel hazāhāv* in Exodus 32, sexual fornication was the outgrowth of idolatrous practices of the guild celebrations.

Eat things sacrifice to idols: Unfettered participation in the guild feasts became a stumbling block to the Christians because the trade union festivals practiced idolatry which also led to immorality. At the feasts, animals were sacrificed to the gods, roasted, and then distributed to all as part of the guild supper. Eating signified approval of the guild god. No doubt drinking and amorous bantering marred these festivals. Thus, joining a trade union involved spiritual compromise for the sake of Roman denarii.

This presented a dilemma for the believers. Participation in one of these merchant associations was essential for a craftsman as it was his means of earning a living. If a Christian joined one of

¹⁸ Commerce: "Commerce is a term of the largest import. It comprehends intercourse for the purposes of trade in any and all its forms, including the transportation, purchase, sale, and exchange of commodities between the citizens of our country and the citizens or subjects of other countries, and between the citizens of different states" (Black's Law Dictionary, online).

the associations, he endangered his soul. If he did not join a guild, he could not do business in the market place. When believers joined one of these labor unions, they essentially signed a contract that obligated them to pledge allegiance to the guild god and to participate in union rituals.

Sufferest: The word “sufferest” means “to permit” something. In this case, the Christian community suffered Jezebel to teach and seduce the church.

A woman: The prophetess (or spiritual doctrine) that cleverly seduced many in the church is called “Jezebel” by the Lord. Error came through a woman. Thus, Eve’s failure was repeated in history. When the Bible wants to depict evil, it usually chooses the symbol of a woman. Usually known for their gentler virtues, this prophetess stressed love over truth; unity above principle; and, peace rather than confrontation. For this reason, the Bible forbids women to lead the congregation in prayer or to teach men in the assembly (1 Timothy 2:8ff). Thus, Thyatira needed more holy testosterone in the church. This is God’s way of calling men to take the leadership role and to lead the flock into God’s green pastures.

The Prophetess: If the prophetess was a real human being, then the church violated Scripture by permitting a woman teach the flock. The service of women is essential for a vibrant church, but their roles are limited. Biblical minded people would do well to reflect on the Lord’s admonition regarding a woman’s role in the church, the neglect of which has destroyed many a congregation (Genesis 3:16; 1 Corinthians 11:1-18; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:8-15).

If the prophetess was a spirit or philosophy circulating in the assembly, then the church needed to delve into the Word of Truth and determine the correct course of action. Contracts with the guilds subjected believers to idolatrous practices. But, to disassociate with a union could involve commercial ruin. These were huge problems that demanded critical thinking and creative negotiations with union bosses.

See **Appendices:** “Jezebels, Tolerance, and Statism.”

Revelation 2:21 And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Fornication: By this time the reader should understand that the term is used (a) to describe illicit sexual acts, or (b) illicit contracts with the state guilds that involved some sort of spiritual compromise for commercial gain.

I gave her space to repent: Apparently, our Lord confronted this Jezebel directly through gospel proclamation and she refused to repent.

This served as a warning to business men. Merchants will do about anything to produce a profit even if it involves pandering to homosexuals, lesbians, and the latest politically correct fad. Truth always loses when there is a shekel to be made. Reformation and revival never come through merchants because “profit” is always their bottom line.

The Son of God called the church to repent of its intercourse with the trade unions that involved a compromise of the faith. The issues in this church were deep and complex. Jobs were at stake. Pure devotion to Christ could result in being expelled from a trade union. Participation in idolatry meant spiritual ruin. But, our patient Lord gave this church an unspecified amount of time to confront the compromise and to work through the difficult issues facing the craftsmen.

The Christian life involves balance. God's throne is one of truth and mercy, justice and love. Without love, churches become judgmental and censorious; without truth, congregations become soggy and sentimental. Christians are not only called to comfort the weak, they are called to butt heads with goats and to wage war on the kings of malice. Too many live between falsehood and truth. Too many are like a pretty-boy boxers jitterbugging their way through the ring of life without throwing a punch.

The Spirit calls us to man the battle stations, to give out a war whoop, and to crunch, squeeze, and grapple with those who rebel against the authority of Christ-- *who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass*. Yes, one may lose his job for opposing idolatry, but on the other hand, Christ can preserve the man and his occupation.

1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Revelation 2:22 Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

Repentance: God is serious about repentance. The One with “eyes of fire” and “whose feet are like burnished bronze” called for repentance—that rare decision to change course, to take a different path, to reverse engines, and to trek uphill. Deep sins call for deep repentance. Passion for Christ needed to replace “get along” and “go along.” Strict devotion to the Lord needed to replace permissiveness. Love needed to yield to truth. Better to butt heads with goats than to play patty cake with get-a-longers. In the real world, you can't have all the candy. Sometimes you have to take the bitters with the sweets.

Bed: The idea of “bed” refers to a “sick bed”; the thought being that God would bring some kind of judgment on the people who participate in the religious, commercial rites. Possibly, the design of the adultery imagery is STD--an infection with some sort of Spiritual Transmitted Disease.

You can't roll in a pigs sty and come out smellin' like a rose; and, you can't sleep with dogs and not catch fleas. A church cannot fornicate with the government in commerce and not feel chains around the neck. God warns the church that unless it repents and throws Jezebel out of the house they are both gonna be sleepin' under the bridge and beggin' for their supper.

Revelation 2:23 And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searches the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Her children: Jezebel is really the daughter of the great whore of Babylon (18). This unlawful union produced children born on the wrong side of the blanket. The “children” refer to the next generation of Christians birthed during the church’s compromise with the State guilds. These are punished more severely. *What we allow in moderation may become an excuse for others to do in excess!* A church in bed with the State produces illegitimate children—bastards rejected by Christ. No man can serve two masters: church and State.

The fall of this body and its punishment was designed to be a witness to the One who “searches the reins and hearts.” Rewards awaited the obedient.

Revelation 2:24 But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

As many as have not this doctrine: Not everyone in the church compromised the faith. Our Lord made a distinction between those still wrestling with participation in the pagan guild rites, and those so involved because of the teaching of the prophetess. Though time was needed to chew on the bones of contention, working through these issues was important to the development of true Christianity. Assurance is given to the sanctified ones that in separating from this compromise, they are in the will of God. The Lord allowed this test not to impair them, but to improve them.

Depths of Satan: The doctrines of Jezebel somehow explore the depths of Satanic mysteries where evil was called good and good was called evil. Morally, adultery is considered one of the deep things that destroy marriages. When one commits adultery, they do not break just the seventh commandment, but all the commandments. Likewise, those who commit spiritual fornication walk in caverns haunted by demons. The danger in Revelation was that Christians might be choose to fornicate (contract) with the beastly State in order to increase wealth and prosperity. In the backwash, compromises wooed “Ghost depressions” and nightmares from the crypt (Chapter 13).

This be true, what can we say about the modern church that fornicates with the State by incorporating with a godless IRS? Has not the church yielded its authority to the State and compromised its sovereignty by entering a commercial contract with the government? Thus, when a church loses its true grit, it doesn’t have the strength of a cotton ball to resist the adversaries of Christ.

Revelation 2:25-26 But that which ye have already hold fast till I come. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

Our Lord wanted this church to chew on rawhide without eliminating fruits from its diet; i.e., to preserve its gentler virtues while pursuing gladiator strength: “Hold fast till I come.”

Power over the nations: According to Ladd, the promise for overcomers is the assurance of sharing in the Messianic reign. Caird understood this to refer to a personal victory over the world. Another view is that those who refused to participate in the idolatry of guilds are promised greater influence for Christ if they honor his authority.

The church cannot have political influence until she repents of her fornication with the State and returns under the headship of Christ. John's message is clear: "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (18:4). She must decide whether she will be the living body of Christ or a dead corpus of the State; a community of living saints, or a community of artificial persons. When a church surrenders its sovereignty to the State, it becomes a slave of government.

Revelation 2:27 And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father.

A rod of iron: The background to this comment is Psalm 2:9. God's Anointed shall rule over the "them" (nations) with invincible strength and power (rod of iron). He will not be opposed. Those who resist Christ will be broken to pieces. Those who are true to Him will share in His reign over the nations.

To the futurist, the rod of iron is a reminder that when Christ comes the second time, he will not come as a lamb, but as a lion.

Caird sees the cross as the iron tool God uses to transform society today. The cross is the iron bar that tames pagan cultures through gospel proclamation.

As I received of my Father: The kingdom of God is a gift to the Son by virtue of His accomplishments at the cross. Because He has authority, He promises to give authority to those forsake the idolatrous State and surrender to His rule. Because all authority is given to Christ, Christians can boldly proclaim the gospel without seeking permission from the State. Christians do not need to incorporate with the State to be a true church.

This church needed a baptism of seeing. They need to perceive the military muscle of Christ with iron rod in hand instead of possessing an effeminate caricature of Him petting sheep. The church must reclaim its prophetic status by declining State franchises. A State-created corporation can never rule over the nations and be an instrument of iron for Christ. A non-profit corporation will always be a non-prophet religious organization.

Revelation 2:28-29 And I will give him the morning star. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Morning star: The "morning star" is Venus. The star could refer to the hope of Christ's coming or to the blessing of the presence of Christ during trials (Revelation 22:16). Moreover, it could

refer or to entrance into the kingdom of God and the joy of eternal life (Malachi 4; Daniel 12:3). The Morning Star rules the heavens; and, those who repent will share in the reign of Christ.

Hear: Again we have the command to hear. Our Lord offers a contract. Those who heed his instruction are promised authority over the nations. John Stott stated, “If Christ seldom makes offers without demands, He also seldom makes demands without offers. He offers His strength to enable us to meet His demands.”

While Christians today sing, “Jesus is the sweetest name I know,” let us not forget that Jesus is the saltiest name we know. He seasons his churches with truth and love.

1.2.5 Sardis

Revelation 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

This church offers us a study on spiritual lethargy and the need for revival.

Sardis’ claim to fame lay in the past as a capitol city in the Persian Empire. A prosperous city, it became a center of trade and industry. At one time it was the capital of the Lydian kingdom of Croesus, the greatest Persian city in Asia Minor. In John’s day, Rome boasted about this magnificent Greek city. Three roads converged at the metropolis. Business consisted of a wool and dye industry. Its acropolis had never been conquered, but twice the city was captured by stealth without resistance--once in 546 BC. and once by Antiochus the Great in 218 BC.. On both occasions, the invader came like a thief in the night. Polybius described the fall of the city. One of the Persian soldiers observed a guard retrieving his helmet on the cliff. The Persian surmised he could climb it. He accepted the challenge, scaled the cliff, and the Persians took the city.

The chief cult in Sardis was that of Cybele, the goddess of one of Asia’s most famous mystery religions. Cybele and Attis were worshipped through the *taurobolium*, a rite by which the worshipper was rejuvenated in a bath of blood with the life force of a freshly slain bull. Serpents associated with Cybele were seen emerging from the earth to shed their skin—interpreted as a sign they possessed regenerative powers. Sardis, too, was engulfed in emperor worship. Luxury and moral looseness characterized the Roman city. Nothing is mentioned about the Jewish community, the Nicolaitans, Balaam, or Jezebel.

Thou art dead: This church failed to learn the importance of a spiritual watch from their civil history wherein the city was conquered while guards slept. The enemy has many strategies to conquer Christians: “lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and the pride of life” to name a few (1 John 2:15).

This church needed to wake up and sit up: “Awake thou that sleepest. Arise from the dead and Christ shall give thee light” (Ephesians 5:14). Apparently, the congregation snored bitterly while on guard duty; that is, their friends and neighbors were going to hell and the church was sound asleep — no prayer, no fasting, no gospel proclamation? The absolute State did not interfere with these catnappers sliding down hill on the butter trail. All caramel and molasses, this church offended no one. When it came to church programs, these people pushed the fun button.

This church was not plagued by pagan zeal, cultic heresy, or slanderous Jews. John addresses no outside pressures confronting the Christians. No outward signs of Satan are mentioned. No Jewish accusers emerge in this account. No apostolic imposters surfaced. No female prophetess threatened to bed the brethren. This congregation had a magnificent reputation before men as being “nice people,” but before God, their works tasted like spoonful’s of soggy frosted coco mush. Their reputation proved to be more sugar than salt, more talk than walk, more puff than stuff, more smoke than fire. Rome loved this church. *It was a perfect model of unoffensive, politically correct, cream of wheat Christianity.* “You hast a name that you live, but you are dead.”

Spiritual decay was not obvious to the outward observer. In fact, this church was the envy of all. Without hardship or persecution, the church didn’t have band aid on their skin or a hair out of place. They were at peace with Rome. The absolute State had no complaints against this compliant church. Believers walked hand-in-hand with the government and supported its policies. This was a model Romans 13 church—obedient to the will of Rome. Thus, this church is a picture of indifference and of activity void of the Spirit. A mountain of lethargy, their passivity amazed even Christ. These people were physically alive, but Jesus couldn’t find a spiritual pulse. The church seemed inoculated with slumber, drugged with lassitude, and tanked with tranquility. They had the strength of tapioca pudding. Like gravity, apathy pulled this church towards the core of political neutrality. “Yield,” “surrender,” and “obey” was how the church negotiated with idolatrous Rome.

Why is it that the most admired Christians among so many congregations are the most likeable, sweet, passive, centrist church attendees—the ones that have more sugar than a candy store . . . the ones that sit like a smiling frog on a lily pad every Sunday? Why is it the world can get along with you and I, but it couldn’t get along with the holiest man who ever lived? Are we compromised? The goal of Christian education is not to produce nice people, but cross-carrying, world-rejecting, gospel-centered, law-abiding Christians. The *cosmos* is anti-Christ in every way, and if we are not smellin’ smoke and gunpowder comin’ our way, we are not following Christ.

Seven Spirits: The One that has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars issues the charge. The “seven spirits” refer to the fullness of the Holy Spirit’s operation. Though this church acted like the walking dead, they were still the object of Christ’s love and care. This congregation went through all the motions of a church, but it needed revival flowing through its veins. Sometimes,

Christians need to be meaner than scissors. This congregation needed to be shaken at its roots and to be shocked out of its lullaby; to be infected with the spirit of the Boston Tea Party that fought being taxed into submission by the powers of an overreaching monarch. Did not William Penn write that “those who will not be ruled by God will be ruled by tyrants?” Only the Spirit can revive! Only the Spirit can infuse steel into the soul. He who gives life by His spirit also testified of their death. It was time to rock: wake up or die!

Revelation 3:2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Be watchful shouted Christ to these sleepy Christians! Wake up! “Be watchful” (gi,nou grhgorw/) suggest that the congregation was not beyond hope: “Wake up! Get up! Stand up! And, wash up! It was not too late to escape from their stupor in dreamland and soldier for Christ.

“The church of Jesus Christ is largely sleeping like a great bedroom and you have all the Christian in bed and they’re all sleeping and they’re saying, “Please don’t wake me up! I want to sleep on!” And of course when God starts to operate a revival people cannot sleep, you can’t sleep in church when the Spirit of God awakes the people . . . Isaiah 52:1 . . . ‘Awake! Awake! Put on strength!’ Wake up! Awake! Awake You sleepy Christians . . . Arise from the dead! Christ will give you life” cried the Welch Revivalists (1904).

To strengthen the “things which remain” (ta. loipa, ta loipa) does not refer to a numerical remnant, but to reclaiming spiritual vitality!” This church was a mountain of lethargy. A lack of vigilance was the cause of their comatose state. Neither persecution nor controversy disturbed this church’s superficial prosperity. This congregation needed to take a cold shower and post praying guards at the doors of the church; they needed a healthy dose of horseradish, vinegar, and Cajun chili peppers for Sunday mornin’ sermons.

When talking about revival, we must distinguish between revival and reformation. Reformation refers to a “Back to the Bible” movement—the clarification of doctrine and the adoption of a Biblical world view. Revival refers to spiritual energy at work in the soul of a Biblical people—the development of holy character and godly practices in one’s private and public life. Both reformation and revival are needed among God’s people.

When discussing revival, we must distinguish between true revival and pseudo revival. The modern madness of speaking in tongues, private revelations of God, holy laughter, rolling in the aisles, and slaying in the “Spirit” are nothing but indulgences of the flesh—a spiritual fraud launched against gullible Christians. Real revival transforms character and habits. When the Spirit works, men are captured by the love of Christ. They become tough and tender. Swearing, drinking, and carousing cease. Men return to Bible study, prayer, devotion to their family and

church, honesty in business, singing of hymns, and soul winning. Behind them are the broken chains of spiritual bondage.

Revelation 3:3 Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

“**Remember**” is a present, active imperative, and the word “received” is in the perfect tense calling attention to the believer’s continual responsibility to act on what one has received. The word “heard” is an aorist calling attention to the moment faith came by hearing the gospel message. John calls the church to reflect on the gospel and their reception of it. In the beginning, their love for Christ was true and chaste. But over time, indifference crept into this church. Christ called his people back to their primitive devotion in Him.

I will come: This coming is not the second coming of Christ because this “coming” is contingent on the church’s refusal to repent. The promise is that Christ will come like a thief; that is, if the Christians do not wake up, they will receive a personal, unexpected visit by their Master to chastise and cleanse His church—a cognitive reminder of the double conquest of this city-state by alien armies.

Know: A double negative before “know” emphasizes strong denial. The coming here is to judge and to take away the candlestick—the privilege of being a light for Christ in a pagan world. Sleep Christians are little use to Christ. Wake up or die!

According to Erwin Lutzer, Pastor of Moody Bible church, in his work, Hitler’s Cross, Hitler said the Lutheran church was “as submissive as dogs.”¹⁹ The church was so intoxicated with passivity, WWII Lutherans didn’t have the strength of a peeled onion. The situation was desperate, but the saints were not. And, the American church is drinking from the same cup. So much so, the average church member doesn’t even blink when he hears about the killing of babies and the installing of homosexuals to positions of church leadership. Wake up! Wake up, you sleepy Christians! Wake up!

Revelation 3:4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

Sardis had a dye industry. The people would be familiar with soiled garments. Soiled garments represent unholy practices—practices that made them callous to the pinpricks of good preaching. But, the spiritual lethargy in Sardis was not universal. A few had an untarnished devotion to the

¹⁹ Hitler regarded Protestants with contempt saying of them, “You can do anything you want with them... They will submit... they are insignificant little people, submissive as dogs, and they sweat with embarrassment when you talk to them.” ~ Hitler’s Cross by Erwin W. Lutzer

Savior. The devoted are given special attention by Christ. The promise of reward is a “closer walk with Jesus” . . . and sanctification (“white”). Hence, true devotion leads to true honor.

Revelation 3:5-6 He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

Overcoming is a reference to victorious faith—faith that identifies with Christ—a faith that adorns itself with a sword and buckler.

Clothed in white raiment: White clothing is a reference to true holiness and a holy reputation.

Book of life: All ancient cities kept official records of citizenship. Possibly, certain people could lose citizenship status in the city. In God’s book, he will “not blot out” a single name. This is true security. A man cannot earn a place in God’s book, but he can enjoy a place therein by believing on Christ. One cannot lose his salvation because he did nothing to gain it, but he can lose his reward by careless living.

Confess his name: With the idea of confession, John moves from city hall to the courtroom. To be confessed before the Father is true honor, the satisfaction of having pleased God. Those who share Christ’s rejection will also share Christ’s honor. If you do not feel like you are being rewarded for your sacrifice for the gospel, just remember that you are not home yet. The reward is in heaven, and very seldom on earth. Every act of obedience has its reward: “For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love” (Hebrews 6:10).

Hear: Hear is a reference to waking up and listening to the Word of God with the intent to obey.

1.2.6 Philadelphia

Revelation 3:7 And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven churches. The city was named after Attalus II Philadelphus of Pergamos (59-138 BC.) who intended the city to be a missionary center for Hellenism. An earthquake destroyed the region in 17 AD. Tiberius rebuilt the city. Under Vespasian the name of the city was changed to Flavia, but the old name persisted. Many people, because of the fear of another earthquake moved to the suburbs of city.

The pagan cult of Dionysus was there, but the main problem came not from the pagans, but the Jewish community. Apparently, the church was in a healthy condition as the Lord had no words of correction for this struggling congregation. Rather, the problem with the assembly was one of weakness. Possessing little power means the church was small in numbers.

Christ is called *true* and it can mean one of two things: to the Greek, *true* meant *genuine* or *that which corresponds to reality*; to the Hebrew, *true* meant *faithful*. Christ was true; the One who by virtue of his death, burial, and resurrections exists in reality; and, the One who is faithful in keeping his promises. True is distinguished from the false in this context. By way of distinction, the faithful Philadelphian church was contrasted with the unbelieving Jewish community.

Key of David: Because the letter is primarily concerned with the church's relationship to the Jewish community, it opens with Jesus holding the key of David—a messianic claim. The key of David is a reference to Isaiah 22:22, where Eliakim received the key from the chief steward of the king's house. As a representative of the king's house, he had full administrative authority over the king's chambers. The key of David is the key to David's house, the Messianic kingdom.

In symbolic imagery, John claims Jesus has the right to grant or deny access to God. The immediate problem was the claim by Jews in Philadelphia. The Jews claimed they were the true people of God; that they held the key to the kingdom by practicing Judaism. John disavows this claim asserting that Jesus is the key, the entrance, and the door to the kingdom. To enter the Kingdom, one must enter through Christ. The unbelieving Jew was lost in his sins and separated from the blessings of Abraham. The Jews forfeited their right to be the people of God by crucifying their King. John wants us to understand that true Christians are the true people of God by virtue of their submission to Christ (Galatians 3:3-12).

The key of David should not be confused with the star of Rimphan, the cultic symbol that Jews wear today.

Keys are symbols of access. Even to this day, mayors ceremonially give a key to their city to honored guests. Jesus has exclusive power to grant entrance into the Messianic Kingdom; that is, to open or shut the gates into the kingdom. This power of opening and shutting belongs to the risen Savior and is shared by His church. Because the Jews rejected God's Son, Jews are denied access into God's kingdom. "The kingdom of God shall be taken from you," announced Jesus (Matthew 21:43). Because of their calumny against Christians, Jews exposed themselves as members of the synagogue of Satan. True Jews have a circumcised heart—a result of the new birth due to faith in Christ. When a Gentile believes in Christ, his heart is cleansed. Thus, believing Gentiles join the Messianic community as *de jure* members of the true Israel of God. As the people of God they share in commonwealth of Israel. By virtue of its faith in Christ, the church has the keys to the kingdom; that is, the church now has access to Israel's promises and is the appointed steward of Biblical revelation (2 Corinthians 7:1ff; Ephesians 2:12ff). Christians, not Jews, are the true people of God.

Revelation 3:8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Works: Jesus said, “I know thy works,” but none are listed for us to peruse. However, they were known and approved by Christ.

“The open door” is the gateway into the Messianic kingdom, of which, believers are promised a sure entrance. The door is open, but men must come. He that comes will in no wise be cast out (John 6:36). Christ is receiving men and women from every walk of life. All that believe become sons of Abraham; i.e., sons of God (John 1:12, 13; Galatians 3:7). The wooden cross at Calvary is a door wherein the nails in his hands and feet act as hinges upon which the gates of heaven are set. Christ is the door: “by me if any man enters in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9).

The open door may have other implications such as an opportunity for gospel service (1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3; Acts 14:27). The Apostle Paul mentioned an open door in 2 Corinthians 2:12: “when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.” God opened the door, and all Paul had to do was walk through it. Further, the same term is used in Colossians 4:3 (NIV): “. . . and pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message;” an open door refers to new opportunities of service to Christ. In Hosea 2:15, the prophet mentions a door of hope in the Valley of Achor (trouble). In other words, He can open a door of hope for you in your valley of despair. Therefore, let us fully trust in our Lord to open doors of opportunity and to close those which are not the right ones for us to enter into.

No shut door: The phrase “no man can shut” is metaphoric language describing the impossibility of another (particularly slandering Jews) barring the door shut or completely preventing the spread of the kingdom gospel. The Jews were aggressive in their hostility to the church, but they had limited powers. Jews errantly believe that they, not the church, have exclusive rights to the kingdom. Christ announced that the Jewish cult will obstinately continue to prevent members of their community to enter the door of the kingdom of God; that is, kingdom doors remain shut for Christ-rejecting Jews.

Little strength: The phrase “little strength” refers to this congregation’s lack of numbers. These Christians obeyed Christ and accepted His name with joy. The Jewish synagogue refused to obey their Messiah and harassed those gentiles that put their faith in Christ and joined the Messianic community.

Revelation 3:9 Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Synagogue of Satan: The “synagogue of Satan” refers to the Jews who rejected the gospel. Having a settled persuasion regarding their Jewish customs, they vigorously opposed Christ. Notice, the Jews who do not follow Jesus and practice some form of Judaism are called “**liars!**”

Thus, unbelieving Jews are members of the cult of lies. But, by the grace of God, some have opened themselves up to historical facts regarding the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord, believe, and enter the kingdom.

Simon Greenleaf (1783-1853) was one of the founders of Harvard Law School. He authored the authoritative three-volume text, *A Treatise on the Law of Evidence* (1842), which is still considered "the greatest single authority on evidence in the entire literature of legal procedure." Greenleaf literally wrote the rules of evidence for the U.S. legal system. He was certainly a man who knew how to weigh the facts. He was an atheist until he accepted a challenge by his students to investigate the case for Christ's resurrection. After personally collecting and examining the evidence based on rules of evidence that he helped establish, Greenleaf became a Christian and wrote the classic, *Testimony of the Evangelists*.

Let [the Gospel's] testimony be sifted, as it were given in a court of justice on the side of the adverse party, the witness being subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. The result, it is confidently believed, will be an undoubting conviction of their integrity, ability, and truth (Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists: The Gospels Examined by the Rules of Evidence*, Kregel Classics, 1995, backcover.).

Say they are Jews, and are not: The term "Jew"²⁰ in this text is used in a spiritual sense. A true Jew is one who is one inwardly; that is, one who has repented of his sins and trusted Christ as his Savior and Messiah. Since the physical Jews who practiced Judaism did not profess Christ, they lacked the faith of Abraham that qualified them to be true sons of Abraham. Furthermore, they not only failed to believe the promise, they became persecutors of the church. Thus, they were members of the Satanic community.

The reader would do well to understand that Jesus was a Jew in the sense He was from the tribe of Judah, but He was not a Jew in the sense that he practiced Judaism (2 Kings 16:6; Matthew 3:9; Galatians 1:4-7).

The great tragedy of history is not persecution of Jews, but the persecution of Christians by Jews. Modern Jews cloak their animosity toward Christians but playing the victim and claiming "anti-Semitism" when someone disagrees with them. "Christians are dying for their faith at the rate of

²⁰ The term "Jew" has different meanings such as: (1) Jew as part of the Hebrew race; (2) Jew as part of the tribe of Judah; in this sense, Jesus was a "Jew;" (3) Jew as a person who practices Judaism. In this sense, Jesus was not a Jew; (4) Jew, in the modern sense, has racial connotations because nearly all Jews today are Ashkenazi gentiles from Khazaria (Ukraine) who call themselves "Jews." In this sense, Jesus was not a Jew. (5) Zionists are sometimes called "Jews;" and (6) those Gentiles (Ashkenazis) in the modern state of Israel say to be a Jew, one has to have a Jewish (Ashkenazi) mother; (7) a Jew in the sense one has repented of their sins and been regenerated by the Spirit of God due to their faith in Christ. In this sense all believing men are true Jews. Any claim by a man today that he can trace his lineage back to Abraham is self-deceived lacking proof of claim. That Jews are "the chosen people of God" or that they are "Semitic" is nothing more than Zionist propaganda designed to manipulate modern man.

one every five minutes,” says sociologist Massimo Introvigne.²¹ The problem is antichrists, not anti-Semitism. There are not two peoples of God (Jews and Christians), but one people of God (Christians) -- the church, true believers in Christ whether Hebrew or Gentile (Galatians 3:28); Christians should be praying for the peace of Heavenly Jerusalem (the church) and cease their idolatrous devotion to the peace for today’s cultic, geo-political Jerusalem (Psalm 122:6; Hebrews 12:22).

“I will make them come and worship” probably did not have an immediate historical fulfillment. This promise probably refers to the conversion of the Jews to Christ throughout Christian history.

The background of this expression is Isaiah 60:14; 45:14; 49:23. But, *there is a twist to this text.*

In Isaiah it is the Gentiles who will bow down at the feet of Jacob (See Ezekiel 37:28; 36:23), but in Revelation, *it is the Jews who will bow down at the feet of the Gentile church. John reversed the imagery!* The Jews, because of their rejection of Christ, surrendered their role as servants of YHWH. If any are to enter the kingdom, they must come on gospel ground through the church’s proclamation of Christ. Jews, who eagerly desire to sit down at the Messianic feast, must come into the kingdom on solid Christian theology, not on the quick sand of Judaism.

Christians would do well to reflect on the fact that the church as the true Israel of God has the keys to the kingdom; and, to avoid entanglement with Jewish myths and traditions (Matthew 15:1ff; Titus 1:14).

Revelation 3:10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Patience: Literally, the first phrase should be translated, “Because you have kept the word of my patient endurance.” Paul mentions the steadfastness of Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:5). Believers imitate his steadfastness under the whips and scorns of societal rejection.

Hour of temptation: The phrase, “the hour of temptation, which shall come,” introduces an interpretive difficulty associated with this book. Futurists contend the time of testing refers to the final act of history or the purported seven year “great tribulation.” Futurists see in this phrase “all the earth” a coming, global, catastrophic judgment, which leads to literal Armageddon. Dispensationalists tend to argue the church will be kept out of the tribulation period. Ladd argues the church will be kept safe as she goes through the tribulation period. However, both of these

²¹ From: “A Christian martyr every 5 minutes: the church of England Newspaper, June 17, 2011, p. 1: <http://geoconger.wordpress.com/2011/06/22/a-christian-martyr-every-5-minutes-the-church-of-england-newspaper-june-17-2011-p-1/>.

views have defects. What possible relevance could deliverance from some tribulation two thousand plus years removed from their time have for these believers? Furthermore, those who take this view usually assign church ages to the seven churches, and believe today's Christians are living in the *Laodicean Age*. But, this view is more subjective than objective, more fanciful than factual.

Radical Preterism, on the other hand, teaches the “hour of temptation” refers to the fall of Jerusalem under Titus. But, as devastating as this ruination was for the Jewish nation, the Roman world suffered no loss over Jerusalem's destruction. The fall of Jerusalem was a local calamity not a global catastrophe even though the events of 70 AD and the reign of Nero did spill over into other Roman Provinces.

The phrase “all the world” appears to introduce a new concept—a global event. The second half of the book is filled with cosmic symbols which are larger than life. Caird (1966) sees John as a sophisticated author balancing two subjects, judgment in the course of history and judgment at the end of history, at the same time for the same purpose.

The phrase “all the world” refers to the Roman world. The “hour of temptation” addresses some trauma affecting the Roman Empire and those living around the Mediterranean. More specifically, it introduces the dynamic activities of God mentioned chapter 6-19 that affected those living in the latter half of the first century. *Thus, the “hour of temptation” was immediate and relative to the first century saints and not remote and terminal.*

The “hour of temptation” is logical, not chronicle; i.e. Christianity which preached that Christ is Lord was going to clash with the emperor cult of Rome that advanced the ideology that Caesar is Lord. In being faithful to Christ, the small church at Philadelphia was promised a measure of protection by the Savior.

In this first section of the book, John's letters address historical situations within a local church. At no time did John make his audience feel like they were on the eve of history. The church was pummeled from without and within. For the unprepared, Christ comes in judgment. The promise of a coming is not the Second Advent, but a local coming to assist the weak or to correct the life of that church. “I am coming,” says Caird (1966, p. 35) is best understood as an historical, spiritual visitation meaning the church will “be kept safe through the ordeal.” In his address to the seven churches, the flavor is pastoral, practical, and personal—not the *terminus ad quem* of Christian history.

The tribulation applies to those that “dwell” upon the earth; a reference to those “who perceive their ultimate citizenship to be on earth rather than heaven.” True believers have their domicile in heaven (Philippians. 4:20) and consider themselves “pilgrims and strangers” on the earth (Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 1:1-2).

Citizenship is still a hot legal issue even today. A U.S. citizen is considered a member of the “United States” in the District of Columbia subject to Congress (Title 26, Sec. 31.3121(e)-1); that is, a citizen is not one born in one of the several states, but one subject to the “jurisdiction thereof” (See the 14th Amendment). For this reason, educated Christians reject this forced “citizen status” and confess that they are living souls, men and women on the soil (American nationals (Title 8), people belonging to God, not the government (Psalm 24:1).

Revelation 3:11 Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Again, this coming appears to have local application for the immediate needs of this church. But, it is also true that this is the keynote of the book: The glorified Christ reigns. He will come again and finish what He started. Hold fast to good works, to faith, to love. In times of oppression, many believers abandon their profession in Christ. Rewards are promised to the faithful. Crowns are given to those who persevere. Since these believers endured, they were assured a victor’s reward.

Revelation 3:12-13 Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches

Overcometh: This is the victory, the *nike* that overcomes the lies and unbelief of the world.

Pillar: A pillar is a symbol of wealth, stature, and permanence. Christ assures the faithful a permanent position in the Kingdom of God. It is said there are two types of Christians, *pillars that hold the church up and caterpillars that crawl in and out*. God does not love us because we are important, but because He loves us we are important.

Temple: The “temple” is symbolic language for the presence of God. In the New Jerusalem, there will be no temple (Revelation 21). The promises here refer to the faith that assures one a permanent place in the eternal kingdom.

“I will write on him the name of my God” is a symbol of possession and ownership, not unlike the symbolic seal placed on the forehead of His saints in chapter seven, but unlike the mark of the Beast in chapter thirteen. The followers of the Beast receive the mark of the State; the followers of Christ will receive the mark of Christ (7:8; 14:1; 22:4). You can have one or the other, but not both. You are either a man of earth, or a man of heaven; either you are devoted to Christ, or you are devoted to the government; either your hope is in the Savior or your hope in in the State.

City of my God: The phrase “city of my God” is symbolic language expressing heavenly citizenship. The promise is for Christians, not the unbelieving Jews. Only those who discover Jesus Christ is Israel’s Messiah will find permanent residence in the heavenly Jerusalem; not in the earthly temple, but in the most sacred part of Jerusalem, the true temple of the living God (evn tw/| naw/|).

New name: Christ issues a promise to the faithful that they will receive a new name from him. This is not some kind of literal tattoo. Physical tattoos are forbidden (Leviticus 19:28). Biblical names represent the character or destiny of a person. “His new name” is John’s way of saying that believers will share in Christ’s glory at His revelation; that is, the obedient in faith will receive fresh insights into the Savior and be marked by His character.

Hear is a reference to listening with the intent to obey.

1.2.7 Laodicea

Revelation 3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

Laodicea was a prominent and wealthy city. Three main roads converge into the urban center. Laodicea, the most important city in the Lycus Valley, was named by Antioch II (261-46BC.) in honor of his wife Laodice. A strong, affluent Jewish population prevailed in the city. Laodicea was known for its commerce and banking industry. In 60-61 BC., the region suffered from a severe earthquake and the town was able to finance its own recovery without other municipal subsidies. The city was known for its beautiful black woolen cloth and carpets. The city also boasted of a medical center that produced healing ointments. An ophthalmology school made the city famous in the healing arts. “Phrygian powder” was used in the manufacture of eye-salve. Demosthenes (Philaethes), a well-known ophthalmologist studied there. The city was also known for seismic activity and the danger of earthquakes. In the nearby village of Carura there were hot springs called the “fountain of boiling waters.” Sick people visited the hot springs for their therapeutic values.

Epaphras of Colossae may have founded the church (Colossians 1:7; 4:12). Paul wrote a letter to the fold during his first imprisonment in Rome (Colossians 4:16). John’s letter makes no reference to pagan persecution or to Jewish hostility. Like Sardis, the church was nominal and affluent. Nice and sweet, everyone liked the Christians at Laodicea. Unlike Sardis, the Laodicean church appears to have been infected more deeply with complacency due to their financial ambitions. Need is the basis of spiritual growth, and this church had no need. Thus, it was not growing in numbers or knowledge of the truth.

The word “Laodicea” is composed of two Greek words, which are “people” and “righteous.” The church at Laodicea may have taken on the character of this name. Thus, we have a clue. The

Christians gathering in the city may have thought themselves to be the First Righteous church of Laodicea.

Amen: The title “Amen” expressed the idea of veracity (Isaiah 65:16). The term means “truth” or “true God” in contrast to false gods. The word “amen” is a transliteration of the Hebrew word “*amon*” (!Ama) found in Proverbs 8:30. It means “faithful” or “faithfulness” as compared to *unreliable*. The word can also be translated “master,” “architect,” or “workman.”

True Witness: The appellation “true witness” stands in contrast to what is false and delusive. Christ is reliable and genuine and can be depended on to fulfill his promises. The delusive light of Laodicea fooled the people.

“Beginning of God’s creation,” inform us that He is the cause of creation. He is the “First,” the transcendent One existing before creation. *The idea is not time, but source.* He is the Source of God’s creation; i.e., the Ruler of God’s order. It could be translated “Beginner of God’s Creation;” that is, He is the Architect and Chief Engineer of creation.

Henry Morris commented, “The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ was our Creator before He became our Savior” (John 1:1-3,10; Colossians 1:16; etc.). But Christ taught that it was ‘from the beginning of the creation’ (not billions of years *after* the beginning of the creation) that ‘God made them male and female’ (Mark 10:6), quoting from the record of the creation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:27), (Henry Morris, 2004).

Revelation 3:15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

Know: Christ knew their spiritual state. No word of commendation is given this body of believers. Think about it. Jesus did not commend this assembly for a single virtue or good deed.

Cold nor hot: The predicate nominative, “cold nor hot,” may be a play on words referencing the hot springs at Hierapolis which were located six miles away from Laodicea. The waters of Colossae were considered cold, pure waters. The Laodiceans were neither zealous nor hostile toward Christ. Few things are more despicable than a product that is mediocre, lukewarm, and half-baked. This congregation did not heal (hot waters) nor refresh (cold waters) the weary.

Revelation 3:16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Lukewarm drinks tastes blah. “Spit out” is language of great displeasure, not ultimate rejection. Christ does not cast out his people even though they are not pleasing to Him. He loved these people enough to dictate a letter to them. There was hope for this church.

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

I am rich: This church had a positive self-image much like failing 9th graders in a government fool system. They considered themselves healthy and wealthy. Literally, the verse can be translated, “I am rich, and I have gotten riches.” The city was known for its commerce and the citizens enjoyed a luxurious life style.

Spiritual complacency coupled with spiritual pride is a deadly duo. Self-esteem books abound in book stores and church libraries. We have to wonder what Christ would say to the modern psychologized church that believes in the gospel of self-esteem and that a “poor self-image” is at the root of man’s personality disorders. What we need is not more self-esteem, but more Christ-esteem.

Wretched . . . blind: The word “wretched” (talai,pwroj) means “desolate,” or “destitute.”

The word “**miserable**” (evleeino.j) means “pitiable.”

The word “**poor**” (ptwco.j) refers to beggarly existence. Many came from around the region to the medical school for help with their eye sight. Phrygian powder mixed with oil was used to help heal the eyes. But, these believers were suffering from a form of spiritual blindness. While the city was known for its wool industry and supplied clothing for the Roman Empire, believers stood naked in dire need of some kind of garment to cover their spiritual shame.

Blind: Sight is the most important sense we have. Our eyes are a wonder of engineering, but our eyes can only behold physical realities. Christ informs John the church at Laodicea was spiritually blind. When a person believes, he is blessed with spiritual sight. The lights come on. Heavenly realities become real and gospel promises become certain. But, the unbelieving are blind to light of the gospel:

*But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, among whom the god of this age has **blinded** the minds of those who do not believe **so they would not see** the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God ([2 Corinthians 4:3-4](#), emphasis mine).*

And, if a Christian doesn’t nurture his spiritual eyesight by pursuing the things of Christ, he may get caught up in material pursuits that blind him to kingdom realities. This is what happened at Laodicea.

Naked: The term “naked” is used 104 times in Scripture. It is not the same as being nude. Nudity has the idea of innocence and a natural state of being. Being nude is not sin, but nakedness has a sense of shame, vulnerability, defenseless, shame, or guilt. Shame is that pin pricking feeling we

get when we suddenly realize that we are not properly clothed for a social occasion or that our response to a dilemma was tasteless. Lacking spiritual virtue, the Laodiceans were naked in the eyes of God and didn't know it.

Need of nothing: Physical prosperity is not a measure of spiritual prosperity—but, you would never know this by listening to preachers in American churches. Health and wealth teachers abound, and Americans eager to increase their holdings on Earth congregate by the thousands to hear how they can obtain God's material blessings. Testimonies flourish in the prosperity cult on how they got their stuff.

The average Christian thinks that if God is blessing a man, he will have great wealth. Affluence and influence are the first attributes congregations look at in choosing their spiritual leaders. Every church wants a pastor that has the financial wisdom of a corporate CEO, the good looks of a Hollywood star, the humor of a nightclub comedian, and the oratory skills of a Roman poet. Many young pastors dream of pastoring one of these mega churches so he can be successful. Churches will generally chose a young, handsome pastor over an old, wrinkled one, a rich man over a poor man, a politically correct teacher who doesn't upset the apple cart over a biblically correct pastor who risks stepping on toes while trying to make disciples (Luke 14:33).

Consider the meditations of A.W. Tozer:

"The flaw in current evangelism lies in its humanistic approach. It struggles to be supernaturalistic but never quite makes it. It is frankly fascinated by the great, noisy, aggressive world with its big names, its hero worship, its wealth and its garish pageantry. To the millions of disappointed persons who have always yearned for worldly glory but never attained to it, the modern evangel offers quick and easy short cut to their heart's desire. Peace of mind, happiness, prosperity, social acceptance, publicity, success in sports, business, the entertainment field and perchance to sit occasionally at the same banquet table with celebrity - all this on earth and heaven at last. Certainly no insurance company can offer half as much" (Born After Midnight).

Consider the words of J. Packer:

"If we do not preach about sin and God's judgment on it, we cannot present Christ as Saviour from sin and the wrath of God. And if we are silent about these things, and preach a Christ who saves only from self and the sorrows of this world, we are not preaching the Christ of the Bible . . . Such preaching may soothe some, but it will help nobody; for a Christ who is not seen and sought as a Saviour from sin will not be found to save from self or from anything else"- (Packer, 1990, pp. 164-165)

Spiritual strength is possessed by those with purity. Pure devotion to Christ is the key to spiritual power and spiritual sight. Samson was strong. But, his amazing strength was not due to his size, but his Nazarite vow. Devoted to God from his youth, he possessed ten times the strength of normal men. Spiritual power is attached to the faith of those genuinely surrendered to the will of God: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isaiah 57:15).

And, like Samson who lost his sight due to spiritual carelessness, the Laodiceans lost the spiritual sight due to their indifference to the Word of God.

Revelation 3:18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

“**Buy gold tried in the fire,**” is metaphorical language for refined, purified metals. “Gold” speaks of spiritual wealth, not material wealth. The church needed true faith and true love to be rich in God’s eyes (1 Peter 1:5; Galatians 5:6). Like wine purchased without money (Isaiah 55:1) and a field purchased with shekels (Matthew 13), John uses the language of the market place to express the individual need to seek true riches that are valued in the Kingdom of God.

May be rich: This church had three great needs: First, they needed real wealth, that is, blessings from heaven. Second, the church needed clothing to hide their shame. Third, they needed healing for their spiritual blindness.

“**White linen**” (Christ’s righteousness) was needed to cover nakedness and shame. This church was self-righteous and had the appearance of being holy. But, they lacked purity. Entangled with the world, their garments were dirty. Apparently, they felt no shame over their material pursuits and moral compromises. Vance Havner use to say, “*When the Lord’s white sheep become dirty grey, the black sheep feel more comfortable.*” Like the emperor who prided himself in his new invisible clothes, the Laodiceans seemed unaware of their spiritual nakedness in the eyes of a holy God.

Eye salve was needed to heal their spiritual blindness. This is God’s way of telling the church they needed insight into His Word and a vision for the mission of the church in this world. A.W. Tozer once said, “*We need a baptism of seeing.*” Oh, to have 20-20 spiritual vision!

One wonders what Christ would have to say to the church in America with all its material wealthy, appearance of propriety, and its incorporation status with the State. The offerings controlled by America’s leading twenty-five church denominations in 1928 in America totaled \$532,368,714.80 stated a critic of the church, Theodore Drieser (Dreiser, 1931). Neither Standard Oil or U.S. Steel could boast of such holdings. Money is important to have so a man

can provide for his family, but whatever happened to taking up the cross and following Christ? *“Unless a man forsake all, he cannot be my disciple,”* said Jesus.

No matter who we are or where we are, all of us would be wise to purchase true spiritual wealth, grow in pure devotion to Christ, and pray for a fresh vision of Christ. Prayer is the gateway to spiritual power.

Revelation 3:19 As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Rebuke: There was hope for this church. The strong rebuke to this church did not mean that He loved them any less. He loves because of who He is, not because of who we are. Discipline is a mark of love. It is the bridge between mediocrity and success. Modern man shuns discipline, but the Biblical man seeks correction.

Be zealous: The command “be zealous” is a present imperative implying that zeal, the desire to please God, should be continually burning in the furnace of a man’s soul. Zeal is a godly virtue activated to preserve something precious. In this case, the church was called to activate godly jealous and to punish the seductress wooing their affections away from Christ.

Repent: We hear of those zealous for fame, but Christ wanted this church to be zealous in repentance. The word “repent” (metano,hsen) means to “change one’s mind.” It is an aorist active imperative meaning that repentance should begin at once! In this case, it means to change one’s mind about self; to view one’s self accurately, that is, to perceive one’s own poverty and blindness; to divorce one’s self from a marriage with the State and its Babylonian commercial system and to be purely devoted to Christ. Because people entertain thoughts that do not conform to reality, God wants his people to think accurately about themselves. Be humble, or stumble.

Revelation 3:20 Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

The door is the gateway of the church where Christ is seeking entrance. They were on the inside. He was on the outside. This church had everything . . . but Christ. They were happy and content, but lacked true communion with Him. The Lord appealed to individuals not to the whole group. The objective of his knocking was to find individuals that wanted a deeper relationship with Him.

Behold: The word “behold” is an aorist imperative demanding immediate attention.

Sup with him: Sharing a meal was a covenant of salt, a meal between two neighbors, a fellowship, a bond of friendship. It was probably the evening meal, the principle meal of the day. This may refer to immediate fellowship, or it may refer to the eschatological meal in the kingdom of God.

Knock: The word “knock” is *krouo* (krou,w) in Greek and it is a present, active, indicative verb meaning that Christ was continually knocking, continually seeking entrance into this church. The phrase “if any man hear” is an aorist, subjunctive—a second class condition which expresses the possibility that some might actually hear Christ knocking and open the door for Him.

What would Christ say to the modern church that is engaged in musical sensationalism and the pursuit of prosperity? What would He say to the churches that surrender their sovereignty to be ruled by IRS regulations rather than the Word of God? What would He say to those preaching health and wealth instead of the cross? What would he say to those preaching psychobabble instead of the gospel to their congregations? Christ is knocking on church doors in our generation seeking entrance. Will they hear?

Revelation 3:21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

“To sit with me” is metaphorical language for honor and authority. The Laodiceans were miserable and wretched in the eyes of heaven. Repentance meant a change in position as well as reputation. Christ’s reign does not begin at His *Parousia*. His reign began at His ascension to the right hand of the Father. It is better to reign with Him now in His rejection rather than to be trampled under His feet later at His *Parousia*.

Revelation 3:22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

The Greek word “hear” (avkousa,tw) and “obey” (u`pakou,ete) are very similar. Christ is calling His people to hear and to do – to be all ears; more walk and less talk. The relative pronoun “what” (ti,) stresses the content of what the Spirit seeks to communicate. “What” comes before “why” and “how?” The Spirit is telling us to seek Him Who is in Heaven, and not the things that are on earth; to seek Him, not religious experiences.

“God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” ~ 1 Corinthians 1:9

“We do not segment our lives, giving some time to God, some to our business or schooling, while keeping parts to ourselves. The idea is to live all of our lives in the presence of God, under the authority of God, and for the honor and glory of God. That is what the Christian life is all about.” ~ R. C. Sproul

1.2.8 Summary of the Message to the Seven churches

To summarize, in the letters addressed to the seven churches, we have seen Christ’s commendations as well as his corrections to the churches in Asia prior to 70 AD. The modern church would do well to emulate their strengths, and to repent deeply of their weaknesses. Like these churches, the modern church has conflicts between heaven’s call and earth’s pull; between

a desire to please Christ and a desire to please men; between Government pressures to be devoted to the State and the command of God’s Word to be devoted to the Savior. Like these churches, many modern churches have compromised its faith. And, like these churches, there is a need for repentance and a fresh vision of our Lord and Savior.

Table 1: Summary of the Seven churches

| Location | Title | Strength | Weakness | Response Required |
|--------------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Ephesus | The Hard Working church | Doctrinal purity | Loveless | Remember, hear, repent. |
| Smyrna | The Suffering church | Spiritually rich | None mentioned | Hear. |
| Pergamum | The Tolerant church | Loyalty to Christ | Too tolerant of doctrinal / moral error | Hear and repent. |
| Thyatira | The Permissive church | Love, faith, service, perseverance | Too permissive of doctrinal / moral error | Hold fast and hear. |
| Sardis | The Sleepy church | A few unsoiled Saints | Spiritually Dead | Wake up and hear. |
| Philadelphia | The Open Door church | Obedience | None mentioned | Hold fast and hear. |
| Laodicea | The Lukewarm church | None mentioned | Spiritual poverty | Zealously repent and hear. |

Table 2: Visions of Christ

| church | What the church Needed to See about Christ |
|--------|--|
| | |

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Ephesus | Christ who holds the churches in his hand, and walks in their midst. |
| Smyrna | Christ as the first and the last, who was dead and who has come to life. |
| Pergamum | Christ with a two-edged sword in His mouth . . . and the One who makes War with the sword of His mouth. |
| Thyatira | Christ, the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and feet as burnished bronze. He rules with a rod of iron, breaks pottery vessels to pieces, and has authority from the Father. |
| Sardis | Christ who has the Seven Spirits of God and seven stars. |
| Philadelphia | Christ as holy and true, who has the key of David, who opens doors and shuts doors. |
| Laodicea | Christ as the “Amen”, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the Creation of God, the One standing at the door and knocking. |

Table 3: Rewards Promised to Overcomers

| church | Rewards Promised to the Overcomers |
|----------|---|
| Ephesus | The privilege of eating from the tree of life in the paradise of God. |
| Smyrna | The crown of life . . . and not being hurt by the second death. |
| Pergamum | Hidden manna, a white stone, and a new on the stone that know man knows. |
| Thyatira | The morning star |
| Sardis | Clothed in white garments, a name not to be erased in the Book of Life, confession of his name before the Father. |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| Philadelphia | Christ will make the victor a pillar in the temple of God, permanent position in the temple. Christ will write on him the name of God, the new Jerusalem . . . , and My new name. |
| Laodicea | Special fellowship with Christ, a place of honor at His throne like Christ received from the Father following His ascension. |

2 THE SECOND VISION

As we meditate on this marvelous heavenly vision, we would do well to remember that the letters to seven churches were addressed to flawed Christians teetering under the crushing power Rome. Their staggering, messy problems and the strength of their adversaries must have sucked courage even out of the heart of John. But, darkness turns to light. Looking up at the gray fog hovering over the Isle of Patmos, the clouds pull back, and John finds himself in a time warp wherein he obtains a glimpse into eternity. Securing heaven's perspective, flames of hope ignite his hearth. Oh, how John's description of heaven must have inspired the trouble ridden churches in Asia Minor.

2.1 A Glimpse Into the Heavenly Throne Room

Revelation 4:1 After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven: and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter.

This is the 3rd door mentioned in the book. There is the “door of the kingdom” (3:8), the door of the heart (3:20), and now the door of revelation (4:1). Suddenly, John escapes earth and its dirty politics and the imperfections of God’s people. He is ushered into the throne room of Almighty God.

The idea that the open door is the rapture lacks exegetical integrity. This is not the language of rapture, but of revelation.

By door, John means he was able to see life on earth from God’s perspective. After John heard the Lord’s rebuke to the churches in chapter’s 1-3, he may have doubted the destiny of the church. Summoned into God’s presence, he has no doubt about the outcome of the battle. The destiny of God’s people is in the nail-pierced hands of God’s Lamb.

Caird compares the following scenes to a war room with giant maps, soldiers, tanks, and flags. Either the clusters of soldiers represent a wartime move waiting to be executed, or they represent recent movements on the battlefield. Likewise, John takes us into a strategic meeting designed to help us understand the conflict between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. But, this war room is more than a military headquarters. It is the Holy Temple Complex in which the holy scrolls are read, with an altar (8:3), and a courtroom which judges the Accuser of the brethren (12:10).

Revelation 4:2 And immediately I was in the spirit; and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

In the spirit: This phrase refers to John’s spiritual condition. John was in a spiritual state where he could respond to this ineffable revelation. John was permitted to see what no man has ever seen before, the throne room of Almighty God.

The Throne: The first object John sees is a throne. The throne is a key symbol in the book and a key to understanding Revelation. The throne represents authority, majesty, and power. Earth is ruled by a throne in heaven. John cannot describe it. Nor did he attempt to describe the One sitting on it. All anthropomorphisms are removed. John’s vision is dominated by images of sovereignty. The original readers lived in the shadow of Caesar’s throne, were under the cloud of Satan’s throne (2:13), and many would face martyrdom. Now they were made to see the greatest

throne of all. *All that matters while living below is that we understand the throne above.* Before John exposes his readers to the ghastly events on earth, he pauses to let them gaze at the symbols of majesty.

Revelation 4:3 And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

Jasper is a clear cryptocrystalline quartz like stone that comes in many colors. Sardine or Carnelian is a bright red-like stone--the same colors describe the Holy City (21:19). These are also the colors described on the breastplate of the high priest. This is similar to Ezekiel's vision, but it is unlike Ezekiel's vision in the sense John makes no attempt to describe the One on the throne. The Almighty is beyond description. John describes the radiating light cluster fractions illuminating the throne room to let us know that God is light. John sees the holy One sitting upon the throne. Like the sun, John can't see to the core of the throne, he can only describe its brilliance in terms of precious gems that men understand.

Rainbow: Second in importance to the crystal throne is the rainbow encircling it. The rainbow's appearance was green like an emerald, and it appears to encircle the throne. It reminds men of the faithfulness of God in the past and in the future. The rainbow reminded the readers that the Lord promised Noah that He would never destroy the world again by water. The full rainbow instructs us God will keep his promise of salvation when believers stand before God in judgment. Though God is sovereign and just, He will never forget mercy and grace.

Revelation 4:4 And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

Twenty-four elders: The identity of the 24 elders has no lack of interpretations. The number twenty-four has challenged Bible interpreters. There were twenty-four courses of priests in Israel. Twelve apostles plus twelve patriarchs equal twenty-four. And, the twelve gates and twelve foundations in the city of God equal twenty-four.

B. H. Carroll (1913) saw them as representatives of the priesthood of God's people.

Ladd (1972) presents a good argument that the twenty-four presbyters are angels based on the fact that they were not redeemed, but that they spoke about those who are redeemed. The twenty-four elders speak in the third person about "them" being redeemed indicating that they were angels and not men (5:10). But, angels are never called elders unless it is a reference to Isaiah 24:3.

Summers (1951) and Hendricksen (1967) see the twenty-four elders as representing the twelve patriarchs of Israel and the twelve apostles of the church. The view that the twenty-four presbyters are a combination of the twelve sons of Jacob which composed Israel past, and the

twelve apostles which compose the new reconstituted Israel, the church of God, is appealing. The symbolism of the twenty-four elders unites God's work in the OT. era and God's work in the present through the church in the NT. era. The same God who worked with Israel before the cross is the same God who works with the new Israel after the cross. There is continuity between Testaments as there is only one people of God. John wants his readers to know that the God of the past is at work in the present directing the affairs on earth so that His ultimate objective will be achieved.

The problem with the view that the presbyters are a combination of the sons of Jacob and the apostles is John was an apostle, and he was not among the twenty-four representatives sitting on thrones.

Secondly, the elders say, "And hast made them unto our God kings and priests," indicating these being are not among the redeemed. Ladd may be correct. The 24 elders are angels.

Dressed in white suggest holiness and righteousness (a holy position). Sitting on seats suggests authority.

Crowns of gold suggest authority and majesty--a reward for service. Thus, the view the twenty-four presbyters are unidentified angelic hosts also has appeal.

Maybe, the best way to look at the twenty-four presbyters is to see them as angelic beings which are not identical with the church but mirror the reality of the church. Possibly, the twelve patriarchs and the twelve apostles reflect the heavenly, angelic sages seen in this vision. Angels help execute God's will on earth. They are clothed in white (Matthew 28:3; Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). Angels are referred to as principalities and powers (Ephesians 3:10; Colossians 1:16). God's council of "holy ones" refers to angels in Psalm 89:7 and angels are called "ancients" or "elders" in Isaiah 24:23. Furthermore, the Book of Revelation reveals angels about the throne of God (7:9-11; 19:1-4).

This remarkable symbolism emphasized the surpassing Majesty of the Sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. The blasphemous boasting by Rome's emperors that they are divine suddenly appears infirm and insignificant against this extraordinary representation of the Majesty of Almighty God. Christians in the Province of Asia facing pompous Roman officials would not fail to take note of this revelation and seize the comfort it offered.

Revelation 4:5 And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Lightning and thunder are glorious manifestations of the divine presence. Voices like battle commanders rumble from the throne. When God appeared to Moses at Mt. Sinai, Israel saw abrupt electrical discharges across the sky and trembled at the thunder claps. This is John's way

of describing a holy storm brewing in the Holy of Holies. (Exodus 19:16, Ezekiel 1:13; Psalm 18:13-15).

Seven lamps: As if this surging electrical storm was not enough, John describes seven huge, brilliant incendiaries illuminating this heavenly complex. Seven is the number of completeness and appears to represent the fullness of God's eternal Spirit. The seven lamps on the original lampstand in the holy place of the tabernacle reflected heavenly realities and were but a copy of the heavenly pattern. Israel's most sacred symbols are now identified with and given to the church to enjoy. While God is transcendent, He is also immanent in this world through His Spirit. John is in the presence of Israel's Judge, Legislator, and King—He will save and He will judge (Isaiah 33:22).

Court is in session. The vision calls for silence: "the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him" (Habakkuk 2:20).

Revelation 4:6 And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind.

The sea of glass: Some commentators say it represents the distance that separates God in his holiness from the fallen evil world—the unapproachableness and majesty of God; others because of its translucence understand it as a symbol of omniscience; some interpret the glass sea as a mute reminder of the old earthly sea, the barrier in the fallen world, the river which all must cross to reach God. Other connect this image with the sea before Solomon (1 Kings 7:23). Ladd interpreted it as a picturesque element adding to the divine presence. However, it may picture peace and quiet in contrast to the turbulent seas on Earth. When Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and his train filling the temple, Isaiah was undone by his vision. But, Isaiah's vision pales in comparison to what John describes.

The sea as a lake of glass reminds us of the Red Sea and the distance between John and the One on the throne. Unlike the turbulent seas on earth, this sea is smooth and clear—a picture of rest and serenity. Through the gospel, God is offering peace to mankind. At death, believers will cross the great sea to be in the presence of the Lord (15:2-3). Jesus stilled the sea and through His death, burial, and resurrection provided a way for believers to safely cross Jordan's River into the presence of God.

The beasts are most likely angelic beings similar to the seraphim of Isaiah 6:1-3 and Ezekiel 1; 10:14. The four beasts full of eyes are connected with God's providence and His unlimited prescience, omniscience, and intelligence.

Revelation 4:7 And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

These four beings represent aspects of nature that are trophies of redemption: wild beasts, domesticated animals, man, and birds. “Like a lion” suggest nobility, ferocity, and possibly a willingness to kill and destroy. “Like a calf or young bull” represents strength and service. “Like the face of a man” represents intelligence. “Like an eagle” represents transcendence, knowledge, and swiftness.

Revelation 4:8 And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

In one sense, these beasts symbolize all life and all that breathes before Him. Six wings represent mobility, speed, and energy. Full of eyes inform us of their intelligence and knowledge. The fact that these creatures do not rest day or night suggests unyielding faithfulness, enterprise, and determination. Like the creatures in Isaiah’s vision, these creatures praise God saying, “holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty”—Holy is the Father, Holy is the Son, Holy is the Spirit. This is YHWH robed in royal holiness, the eternal One of Israel who was, and is, and is to come. This focus on holiness reveals that these creatures are an angelic guard ready to judge all that is contrary to the character of God.

Revelation 4:9-11 And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

The beasts: The chief purpose of these heavenly beings is to worship Him as the Creator and Sustainer of life. As do Isaiah’s seraphim, these creatures join in giving glory to God. These creatures along with the twenty-four elders fall to their knees and worship the Eternal One. We would do well to do the same.

Falling down before Him: John’s book was written not only to shed light but to provide motivation; not only for revelation but inspiration.

The preoccupation of the presbytery and the beasts with worship show us the shining greatness and majesty of Almighty God. They do not add to His glories, but they do acknowledge it. He is worthy to receive glory because of His infinite perfections— jeweled perfection no man can fathom (Psalm 145:3). He is altogether beautiful. He is good and always good whether we perceive it or not. He is worthy to receive honor because of His accomplishments in creation and redemption. He not only created the worlds, but He conquered man’s mortal enemies. Through His Son’s death, burial, and resurrection, He accomplished the greatest good for the most people. He is worthy to receive power because He alone can be trusted to use it for good. The raw power that created the galaxies and created life rests in nail-pierced hands. Creation is attributed to Him

that sits on the throne. By His word alone, He called the world into existence. He spoke, "let there be light" and galaxies appeared. The universe with all its estimated 70 sextillion stars exists for His pleasure and for His glory²². And, He knows the names of each. And, these little Christian lambs standing before Roman officials understood that the Lord knows their names (Psalm 147).

Suddenly, the pompous, primitive Caesars and their legions of military muscle appear trivial and insignificant.

Why would any in the Province of Asia grovel in fear before these petty potentates who are like worms upon the earth?

Can you feel the boldness and courage that must have filled the hearts of the Christians who desired to represent the King of kings in the Roman theater? Can you feel the heat burning in their fireplace? Oh, to be tested to confess Caesar or Christ! Oh, to boldly take one's stand and proudly proclaim, "Christ is Lord!" Oh, to be a martyr! Oh, to exit this earth because of confessing Christ! Oh, to have a crown to cast at his feet! What a privilege!!

2.2 The Lamb and the Scroll

"The final vision of the universe," says William Barclay, "is a universe praising Christ; and it is our privilege to lend our voices and our lives to this vast chorus of praise, for the chorus is necessarily incomplete so long as there is one voice missing from it." In eternal glory, all will be occupied with the greatness of Another and will sing: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing" (Revelation 5:12).

Revelation 5:1 And I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

This drama unfolds in the theater of Heaven's Courtroom. The One seated in glory and majesty upon the throne is none other than the Sovereign LORD God Almighty. In a rare and precious moment, and with unparalleled skill, John the revelator draws our attention to a scroll held in the right hand of His Majesty -- a scroll sealed with seven seals.

²² That figure - presented to the International Astronomical Union conference in Sydney - is the kind that really can be called astronomical: 70 sextillion, or seven followed by 22 zeroes. Retrieved from: <http://www.brandonweBCom/sermons/sermonpages/psalms87.htm>

The scroll: There are many theories as to what this scroll represents. I favor the view that this scroll is the Last Will and Testament of the Living God which orders the events of history which ushers in of His eternal kingdom. In the Roman world the “Last Will and Testament” was sealed with seven seals and attested by seven witnesses. The execution of a will assumed the death of the testator; and while God does not die, early Christian faith made much of the idea of the inheritance of believers. Viewed in this way, the scroll stands as the symbol of the promised kingdom which was sealed but not executed (1 Peter 1:4). The scroll contains God’s redemptive plan for the denouncement of human history, the overthrow of evil, and the gathering of a redeemed people into the kingdom of God. No small task . . . who can possibly execute such a grand plan?

Ezekiel’s scroll comes into view here (Ezekiel 2): Full of woe, lament, and mourning, it had writing on both sides suggesting fullness of judgment. The fact that the scroll had writing on both sides may represent heaven’s perspective on one side and earth’s perspective on the other.

John enters Heaven’s Courtroom. Court is in session. The judge has a sealed, legal document in his right hand attesting to the authority of the instrument. We are left to ponder, “What’s in the scroll?”

Augustine’s City of God saw history as following God’s redemptive plan which will culminate in God’s Kingdom. Fourteen hundred years later, out of the “enlightenment,” emerged optimistic man who envisioned the utopian State. Super positive evolutionary speculators see the progress of mankind who envision a totalitarian communistic, equality-forced paradise on earth. Others claim we cannot even know the meaning and goal of history. The fact that the scroll is sealed may infer that Christ alone has the key to the meaning of history.

Revelation 5:2 And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?

Immediately after seeing the Eternal One with book in hand, a prominent angel challenges heaven, earth, and hell with the question, "Who is worthy (able) to break the seals and open the scroll?" The solemnity of the moment shuts every mouth. An eerie silence fills the room.

John looked . . . and listened intently. He is no longer seated in the audience; he has become an actor, a participant on stage in this pageant. He is a man, but more than a man. John is the Seer of Patmos. He knows it. He understands he has been given a privilege rarely bestowed on the best of holy men. He knows he is God’s spokesman in the crisis that has befallen the seven churches. He is standing on stage before the Fountain Head of Knowledge and knows he must gain perspective for himself and the churches he loves.

Revelation 5:3-4 And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon. And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.

In the silence, John struggles with the meaning of the vision and the angelic challenge. Weighed down, he feels that it is His prophetic duty to do something. He can't stand idly by in this emergency and do nothing. John is an Israelite that believed God must right wrongs upon the earth. He is God's man and says to himself, "This is my experience. I have seen heaven's throne and I have heard Heaven's challenge. My authority is based on my experience in the presence of Almighty God. Listen to me."

At this moment in the drama John makes an observation: of all the wise men that had ever lived, and of all the kings that had ever reigned, and of all the military generals that had ever organized a campaign, no champion could be found among men worthy to accept the commission.

Swelling with emotion, John burst into tears. His weeping breaks the silence in the Courtroom. What a cosmic crisis! John identifies fully with the struggle of humanity and the want of righteous men among us. He "wept much!" This is John's way of telling us that even the best among us has failed. All are weak. All are frail. All have sinned. All leaders are deeply flawed. Man is not as great as boosters claim. Instead of hearing, "Yes, we can," he realizes, "No man can." There is none righteous, no not one. Man needs a Redeemer, a Savior, and a fearless Champion that can execute the will of Almighty God!

In his weeping, the seer of Patmos reveals his pastor's heart. He is no hireling who flees when the thief cometh. He is truly God's gift to the seven churches of Asia Minor. His plight is one in which all good pastors find themselves – unable to move men to higher ground. John's crying reveals the anguish in his heart. He doesn't know what to do. The problems of the seven churches are not illusory. They are real, substantial, and terrifying. He loves his people. He hurts for them, and he can't leave them. He wants to provide relief for their suffering, but he has no remedy. The agony and tears of their distress compels him to search for the meaning of the suffering of the saints in Asia Minor. Tired, with callouses on his hands, and stripes on his back, he carries the burden of these churches on his heart. Pastor John is perplexed. He doesn't know what to do . . . or what to say to comfort his people. He has no power to solve the problems of his flock. He weeps much.

Revelation 5:5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

God rewards the apostle for his concern over the seven churches. "Stop weeping," orders a courtier. "Look" advises a presbyter. There is One. There is one Man in history that has not sinned and who has the authority to take the scroll, break the seals, and execute the will of God.

“Look,” shouts the presbyter. “See” the Champion. He is the Lion King, the King of Beasts, David’s Greater David, the descendent of the Giant Slayer, Who is called “Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.” He was born in Bethlehem, grew up in Galilee, and challenged the power structures of three governments in Judea. He was in the Beginning with God, was God, and is God. He marched alone against our enemies and conquered them by virtue of his historical accomplishments at the cross. He is able to open the Scroll.

John perceives what an exalted place the historical Christ plays in this drama and the destiny of history. The Jesus he knew on earth is the Lion King in this dramatic play. Jesus is not a supporting actor, but the central figure of history. Jesus is not just a man or a misunderstood teacher or one of many religious teachers. Jesus is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the Alpha and Omega, the Savior and Lord in this pageant. He is the Judge and Executor of the will of God on the throne in this Courtroom.

With great skill John informs us that Christianity is not based on subjective speculations about salvation like all the superfluous religions of mankind. Salvation is deeply rooted in Messianic history, in, though, and by Israel’s Lion. Despite the darkness caused by Adam’s fall, hope for eternal life shines from the vortex of history which is the literal, physical, material, historical death, burial, and resurrection of Israel’s Messiah. Judah was called a baby lion (a lion’s whelp), but in this drama the narrator directs our attention on the majesty of the King of Beasts, the root of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings. Moreover, his nail-pierced hands provide proof of claim that He is Lord over death and the Savior of mankind.

Revelation 5:6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

I beheld: John narrates the story. He is no longer in the audience, he is on stage as an actor in this drama. Turning to see this regal creature, John expects to see a roaring lion. Instead, he beholds a little Lamb standing in the middle of the throne. The Champion is announced as a Lion, but He is seen as a Lamb. Five wounds marred His little frame.

A Lamb: As an Israelite familiar with the OT, John expected God to right all wrongs and to judge sinners. Now, the prophet gains insight into how God begins to set things straight. Redemption is not accomplished by mere might and law alone, but by mercy and grace. It was not by the throne, but by the cross Christ atoned for sin. The redemptive love of God made the cross and the shed blood of the Lamb the means of salvation. In this manifestation of grace there was released in history the greatest power that humanity can ever know. It was not the Lamb in His pristine beauty that won salvation, but the Lamb in his weakness, the sacrificed Lamb in His bloody ordeal at the cross that saves souls, that saves civilization from complete decay. Conquest over the world is not accomplished by unlimited military coercion, but by the invincible power

of the Lamb's sacrificial love. Out of love, He left heaven's glory and faced the judgment of the cross for us. His wounds are evidence that the price was paid, that redemption is complete. John is telling us that it is love that saves sinners; love that cleanses men; love that justifies and sanctifies; love that transports weary sinners off the island of Adam's sin to Heaven's shores; love that enables struggling Pilgrims to endure the hostility of sinners in their journey to the City of God.

Judah was a lion's whelp, and the Lion was a Messianic figure in Jewish literature. Mankind needs a Lion to tear man's enemies into pieces. And, He did. The work of the Lion King was the salvation of God's people (Isaiah 11:9). Singlehandedly, He crushed man's greatest enemies: Satan, sin, and death. Man needs victory over principalities and powers . . . over Roman legions and arrogant Caesars . . . over struggles with proud and evil men. Man's need is not more effort to do better, or more work performed in order to be greater. Man needs a Champion who will rescue sinners. That Lion-Champion-Redeemer came in the form of a Lamb, the Lord Jesus Christ.

John is not telling us that Christ will reign over mankind in some purported millennium, but that He is installed NOW as Messianic King (Hebrews 1:3). Instead of telling his readers that Christ sits at the right hand of God, John paints a picture with the brush of his pen on the canvas of our minds. The future and final victory of Messiah is but an extension of the rule He now enjoys by virtue of the victory already won. In the end, He will destroy all rule and power (1 Corinthians 15:25-26).

Seven horns: A horn is a symbol of strength. The *seven horns* represent the Lamb's fullness of power.

Seven eyes: The *seven eyes* denote Christ's omniscience, perception, intensity, and intelligence (Ezekiel. 4:10). Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Together, the seven horns and seven eyes represent the Spirit of God. They do not refer to seven different spirits, but to the completeness and sufficiency of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is inseparable from Christ because the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Colossians 2:8-10). We see the seven characteristics of the Spirit in Isaiah 11:2-3:

- The Spirit of the Lord
- The Spirit of wisdom
- The Spirit of understanding
- The Spirit of counsel
- The Spirit of power
- The Spirit of Knowledge
- The Spirit of the fear of the Lord

Before John is the Holy Trinity, the Spirit of God proceeding from the Lamb, and the Lamb proceeding from the Father. This is John's way of confirming "the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

Revelation 5:7-8 And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.

What kind of person would dare approach the Judge in this Court and take this prized scroll out of His hand? Before us is a dramatic imagery depicting perfect harmonious interaction between the Father and the Son. With the gauntlet thrown down, "Who is worthy to open the book, and to lose the seals thereof?" Heaven's Champion accepts the mission.

This is no ordinary lamb. When the Lamb stands up angelic hosts fall down. One day all of creation will fall prostrate at his feet; some will do so willingly, others will bow under the power of His Sovereignty. With instruments in hand and hearts in tune, heaven erupts with thunderous praise to the Lamb. Until the final battle, heaven decorates their Champion with refrains of abounding praise. The first war and last war in Scripture is about worship. Join the winning side and worship the Lamb! Bow the knee today, and you will stand with Him tomorrow (Romans 10:9, 10).

This scene supports the view that the elders and beast are angels. Pictured are angels with harps. The instruments of praise provide sweet sounds for the ears. Vials are opened and sweet perfumes delight the senses. The bottles of perfume are the prayers of the saints – sweeter than Jean Patour Joy Parfum. The term "saint" is broader than "converted Jews." It encompasses the whole family of God where there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: but all are all one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).

Revelation 5:9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

"A new song" is a fresh song composed for this special occasion-- a new world-order based on God's Law-word (Isaiah 42:9). The Kingdom is inaugurated. New names are given (2:17; 3:12); new songs are sung (5:9; 14:2); a new heavens and a new earth are created (21:1); a new Jerusalem appears (21:2); and, all things are made new (21:5).

Worthy: The term "worthy" informs us of Jesus qualifications to be the Savior of humanity, and his accomplishments through the cross

Slain: The term “slain” is only used in the apocalypse and it is a reference to Isaiah 53:6. The word “ransom” or “redeemed” means “to purchase.” The background is the picture of a slave being purchased from the market place by large sums of money. The objects of purchase are men from every tribe, language, people and nation. The only currency accepted in the spirit world is the precious blood of the Lamb (1 Peter 1:19).

The Lamb is worthy of worship because of who He is (5:6). He is the Lion-Lamb, the Man of steel and velvet. He has "seven horns" which testify to His complete power. He has "seven eyes" which speak of His superior wisdom. It is the integrity of the Lamb that qualifies Him for the task of redemption. *Not only does He know what to do, He has the power to do it, and the character to sustain it.*

The Lamb is worthy of worship, because of the work He accomplished (Revelation 5:9): He is the slain Lamb whose throat was cut. The metaphor is intended to remind the reader of the Lamb whose blood was smeared on the doorpost to protect families from the death angel who struck all the firstborn of Egypt on the night of the Passover. It was not the Babe in Bethlehem, nor the Prophet on the mount, but the slaughtered Lamb that accomplished redemption. *It is not the crown, but the cross that gains freedom for sinners.* It is his death, not his life, which makes a prince out of a pauper, a king out of a slave. Is it any wonder the courtiers of heaven burst into accolades of praise singing, "Thou art worthy?" Elegantly crowned and luxuriously robed are those who have been rescued by the Champion, the Lion-Lamb.

The Lamb is worthy of worship because of the wealth He possesses: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand; saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing' " (5:1).

Revelation 5:10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Textual variances in this verse impact the interpretation. Some MSS have a present tense. But the verb is an aorist. The “us” should be translated “they.” The NASB has it correct: “Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God . . .” The phrase “shall reign” should be translated “they shall reign on the earth.” The tense is a present tense with future usage (Robertson). In the Lamb’s triumph, the people of God share in the benefits of conquest.

This is the second time in the book John refers to the people of God as a royal priesthood. The presbytery is still speaking. They are praising God for His marvelous accomplishments. He took the redeemed, made them a kingdom, and appointed them priests; and “They shall reign on the earth for a thousand years” (20:6). Peter called the church a “royal priesthood.” The people of God are not ones over whom He reigns, but people who actually share in His reign. *To share in his reign means the people of God can enjoy the benefits of His rule now!* Furthermore, the

people are made priests. Being a priest refers to the priesthood and the privilege of access to God. Any suggestion the reign of the saints belongs to the future is negated by the fact the redeemed are called kings and priests now!

The significance of the song is that Christ by His shed blood on the cross has brought into existence a new humanity—a redeemed people. Therefore, his redemptive work must include the breaking of the seals and the opening of the scroll so that the Kingdom may be established and promises fulfilled. In breaking the seals, both salvation and judgment are revealed.

Revelation 5:11-12 And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.

John continues to narrate the story. From the Greek word “number” (*arithmos*) we obtain the word “arithmetic.” The word for “thousands” is “myriads” which specifies a countless number above ten thousand. The seven churches learn that their small, weak work will be successful and as result of their sacrifice an incalculable number of people will come into the fold who will join this choir of praise to honor the glorious Lamb. Before us are not impoverished saints crushed by Roman imperialism, but happy victors praising their Lion-King.

The word “worthy” is the Greek word *axios*. In classical Greek, the term was used to describe a coin that balanced the opposing weight on the scales. In balancing the scale, the coin was called “fitting” or “worthy” as consideration in the purchase. Thus, our Lord measured up to the Herculean task of redemption; that is, redemption called for a righteous man, a perfect man—a powerful man who could defeat sin, Satan, and death. Christ was fitted for the task. He achieved what no other man could achieve. Thus, in balancing the scales of justice, heaven’s throng breaks out into accolades of praise that focus on His worth. Only our Lord could balance the scale.

Our ascription of worth does not make Him worthy. He is worthy by virtue of Who He is and What He accomplished in history. And, in a mindless world, it is the privilege of the saints to contemplate Christ as their greatest asset. All life is an act of receiving. However, in worship men give to Him, not to enrich Him, but to delight in Him. The great question is not whether the Lamb is worthy, but will men esteem Him as such. When His redeemed ones realize His worth, and acknowledge this with harmonized hearts, He is honored and they become whole.

The following is a **seven-fold inscription of Christ’s worthiness** that only the redeemed can sing. The virtues are arranged under a single article (the) indicating that they are a complete aggregate belonging to God and the Lamb.

His Power: The Lord showed his power by commanding winds and sea to obey Him; by turning water into wine; by multiplying the loaves and fishes; by raising Lazarus from the dead. But, He also restrained His power. When struck by the soldiers, He gave His back to be a plowed field. He permitted soldiers to bind him to the cross and strip him of His clothing. He could have called legions of angels to His assistance, but He did not. The exercise of His meekness might cause some to wrongly conclude that Christ was weak. Lambs are weak. But, this Lion-Lamb restrained his power in order to defeat the father of lies and to break the vice-grip of death by virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection. Obedient unto death, the Father raised Him from the dead and granted him all authority as Son and Heir of the Father's kingdom.

Lord Acton once said, "Power corrupts; and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Few men can be trusted with power. The Stalins of this world have demonstrated this too often. But, our Lord is able to handle power and use it for good. Because He is good and wise, He can be trusted with all power. "The scepter of universal sovereignty is held in a nail-pierced hand." Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive power.

His Riches: As the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the wealth of heaven and earth are His. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge coalesce in Him. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. He fashioned gold and silver by His spoken word: "Let the dry land appear, and it was so."

He is not only rich, He is the Great Giver. He uses His wealth to better the lives of others. The Lamb became poor that we might be made rich. He tasted poverty below that we might possess riches above. We were dressed in rags of unrighteousness, but He clothed us with the white linen of righteousness – more valuable than the finest Gucci, Prada, or Dior. Paul announces that in the gospel we blessed with "all spiritual blessings" (Ephesians one). Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive riches.

His Wisdom: Education does not make a man wise. Educated people are often the biggest fools on the planet. Wisdom is the correct use of knowledge. Not only does Christ have all knowledge, but He has all wisdom. Creation was assigned to Him. By His wisdom He spoke the stars into existence . . . and earth with its lava core, cool crusts, mountains, and oceans. He created all the animals, and man who is "wonderfully made."

Who has not marveled at the engineering of the human thumb, or eye, or ear or the laminin--those microscopic bio-proteins that download information to each cell assigning its unique function. We are born totally ignorant and have to grow in knowledge; but, our Lord has never learned anything. He is the wellspring of all knowledge. In eternity, we will all confess that everything we learned was from Him. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive wisdom.

His Strength: As humans, we face a constant dilemma; either, we do not know what to do (lack of wisdom), or we do not have the ability to do it (a lack of strength). Most men don't know how to be a millionaire. Of those that do, most do not have the investment capital to run a business

entity that could create such wealth. Christ not only knows what to do, He has the ability and resources to save men from sin and to make them de jure members of the Kingdom of God. Omnipotence rests in the bosom of a gentle Sage. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive strength.

A Christian was once criticized for his faith. “The trouble with you Christians,” mocked the critic, “is that you use Jesus Christ as a crutch.” “You’ve got it all wrong,” responded the believer, “He’s my whole wheelchair.”

His Honor: In Jesus’ trial before King Herod, Luke informs us that Herod’s brute police force “set him at nought (nothing)” (Luke 23:11). Before Herod's court was the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the King of the Nations--the most perfect, pure man that ever walked the earth. Having weighed him their balances, they considered Him as dust on the scales, a big fat zero. Herod honored wealth, but Christ was just a poor rabbi from Galilee. Herod honored political power, but the Nazarene exercised no authority in the Roman political system. In fact, our Lord wasn't even a Roman citizen. Herod honored strength and power, but Christ sat in shackles silent as a lamb. Herod estimated Christ's value as “nothing.” But, to the Christian, Christ is our everything!! He is the Alpha and Omega, our All in all! Our risen Lord has ascended to the right hand of the Father and now reigns as Lord of lords and King of kings. The issue of course, is not whether Christ is the Central Figure of History, but whether men will recognize Him as such . . . or set his value as nothing.

The One Who is heaven’s praise was cursed among men. He who is crowned with glory before the angels was marked with a crown of thorns here below. The One whose holy train fills the temple and caused the angels to shout, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty,” was stripped of his clothing on earth and beaten with whips of leather and steel. The One who represents the perfections of Almighty God was rejected by men, condemned to death, and sentenced to a criminal’s fate. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive honor.

Isaiah says of him, “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isaiah 53:6).

Fortunately, John the Seer sets the record straight. Some men deserve honor for what they know. Others for what they do or for what they are. Christ deserves honor because of all three reasons. He stooped so low and lost so much in order that we might be raised higher and gain more. He is worthy of honor and it is our privilege to lend our voices to this heavenly chorus.

His Glory: In coming to earth, our Lord divested Himself of His royal robes of majesty. The One Who littered heaven with His beauty, emptied Himself to become a man. Without complaint, He endured the hardships of being a man. There was “no beauty that we should delight in Him.” As Heaven’s Ambassador, He endured humiliation, ridicule, and insult among common men in order to complete the task of redemption. Despite the difficulty of His mission,

the Son was obedient unto death, even the death and shame of the cross. At Calvary, “he bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken of God and afflicted.” Out of the shame and ordeal of the cross He satisfied the claims of divine justice and became our salvation! By His stripes we are healed. The despised Christ of history is heaven’s Glory and heaven’s Prize. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive honor (Isaiah 53:1-6; Philippians 2:5-12).

His Blessing: The word “blessing” means “a good word” or “praise.” He taught us to bless and not curse, to love and not hate, and to give and not steal. He cursed no man. He could say to a bereaved father and mother, “Weep not,” and then proceed to raise their daughter off a sick bed. In the midst of death and grief, Christ announced that He is “the resurrection and the life.” And, then Lazarus bounded out of the tomb to the astonishment and comfort of family and friends. He even prayed for the forgiveness of those ignorant soldiers who nailed Him to the tree. He gave all and took nothing. Yet among men He received the curse. Today, His name is a common swear word. But, among the redeemed His name is associated with all that is sweet, tender, and good. “Jesus,” there is something about that name, the sweetest name I know. Thou art worthy, O Lamb, to receive blessing (Luke 8:52).

Revelation 5:13 And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.

The song is addressed to the Lamb and to the One on the throne. Here are the raw materials for Trinitarian Theology. John was a solid monotheist, yet He ascribes worship to the Lamb and to the One on the throne. Because of this kind of language in Scripture the church framed Trinitarian Theology: “one God existing in three persons.”

The whole of creation joins in singing the new song. The poetic language describes the universality of the redemption accomplished by the Son. We are never more whole than when we sing of the glories of Christ. Sane people, as Thomas, examine the claims of Christ using the rules of evidence and conclude that He is “Lord” and “God.” It is an act of insanity to reject Him because unbelief does not square with reality.

This Pastor from Patmos comforts the seven churches and informs them that their work in the Province of Asia was not in vain; that it was a vital stanza in the composition of history; that it added to heaven’s mission which is the honor and glory of the Him that sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever more.

Revelation 5:14 And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever.

All of heaven breaks into praise and adoration of the Almighty and the Lamb. These majestic creatures in heaven model for us how we should respond on earth to the glories of Christ. Praise glorifies God, and beautifies us. Praise is the reason for our existence. Our whole purpose on earth is to be a creature in God's choir and add to the adorations of the One on the throne. Praise is a return on the Father's investment for our salvation in and through His Son. When we praise God, we fulfill our reason for being. Heaven loves it; Hell hates it. Praise is to God, what complaining is to the Devil . . . and it is praise that releases His power to show us the salvation of God (Psalm 50:23).

Agno dum Spiro Jubilate.

(As long as I have breath, I will rejoice in the Lamb).

2.3 The Opening of the Seven Seals

2.3.1 Introduction to the Seals

The issue involved with the interpretation of the vision of the seven seals is the When and the What? Does this vision involve the early part of church history (preterism), all of church history (historical view and symbolic view), or the final acts of the tribulation period which are yet to come (futurism)?

Caird says the first century saints lived through a series of grim events which might challenge the belief that our Lord is really the Ruler of earthly kings: Earthquakes (60 AD.), defeat of the Roman armies by the Parthian Vologeses in 62 AD., the Neronian persecution and the death of the apostles around 67 AD., the suicide of Nero in 68 AD., the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79 AD., and the grain famine of 92 AD..

My understanding of the seals is that this is a complete vision representing the forces impacting the first century, but active in history until the end of this age. It was the common belief of the early church that Christ ascended into heaven and took His seat at the right hand of the Father where He reigns as Christ and Lord; from there He reigns until "all enemies are under his feet."

The early Christians preached another king, King Jesus—a king reigning now over the hard facts of history. To relegate the forthcoming vision to a future age two-thousand + years removed from the original readers skews interpretation and destroys the meaning of the book. The bulk of the Book of Revelation is about the present reign of the Lord Christ, not about His *Parousia*. The seals are preparatory remarks about the grand subject of the scroll: conquest, war, stress, death, martyrdom, and judgment on political powers.

The seals teach one major lesson. **Christ is in control of all the forces of history**, good and bad, and that history is marching toward the final judgment and the revelation of the kingdom of God. The opening of the seals is not something future to us, but the present activity of God existing from our Lord's ascension until the consummation of history at the end of this age. While the end may indeed be characterized by the human tragedies depicted in this chapter, these consummate forces have, are, and will be with us until the return of Christ.

The seven seals do not retain their character as the seventh breaks into the vision of the trumpets. John is not giving a lecture. **He is painting a picture!** He is not telling us. He is showing us God's rule in action. With great skill, John uses his brush strokes to paint the present reign of Christ on the canvas of Holy Writ to stir our imagination and to create inspiration to serve Him. Like a dream, actors and scenes shift without explanation. "An engineer who uses his calculator and slide rule to interpret this book will end up in Looneyville near Lake Silly."

2.3.2 The First Seal

Revelation 6:1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see.

The term "thunder" announces an electrical storm brewing in the Holy of Holies. The thunder occurred when the "faithful Witness" (1:5) picked up the stone of condemnation and cast it to earth (Deuteronomy 17:5-7). The noise was like thunder probably because of the hoof beats.

Kirban, Ironside, and Walvoord say this is the beginning of the tribulation period which is still future to us. Ladd and Rosenthal would see this as preparatory to the tribulation which is still future to us. Pieters, Caird, and Summers see this as current events controlled by Christ throughout the ages. I agree with the latter.

The seals show us that this period of history has been sealed up. A seal is a sign of ownership. Only one with proper authority has the right to open the document and execute the will of God.

2.3.3 The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

The command to "come" is addressed to the four horsemen, not to John. The Codex Sinaiticus has the double imperative "come and see" but the better translation is "Come." "Come" is an invitation to the horsemen to ride across the field of activity into the theater of this drama. A pantomime, there are no lines and no action. One of the four living beasts from the center of the throne gives the order. The book is in the hand of Christ. Christ is in charge of the evils inflicted on society. **Their purpose is to bring men to repentance and faith in Christ.**

To the original readers, horses were a king's most powerful instrument of war. Swift and powerful, horse are capable of covering territory very quickly. Rapidity is in view here. Like the pony express, the horsemen travel with an urgent message. Like Ezekiel's vision, there are four

horsemen. Unlike Ezekiel's vision, these do not survey the world. All of these horsemen represent evils that come upon men to trigger the judgmental conditions mentioned in this chapter.

Revelation 6:2 And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer.

2.3.3.1 The White Horse

The interpretation of this figure is greatly disputed and biblical scholars are not in agreement as to its identity. It is the color "white" that gives us trouble.

The rider on the white horse is not Christ, the super antichrist, false religion, or the gospel. The context demands we interpret the first horseman as an agent of evil.

The rider is an icon of a radical who advocates change and revolution for society. Terms like leader, ruler, teacher, rebel, anarchist, reformist, communist, socialist, extremist, fanatic, general, nihilist, mutineer, renegade, and insurgent come to mind. Jacques-Pierre Brissot (France's Reign of Terror in 1793–1794), Karl Marx (German philosopher), Joseph Stalin (Russia), John Dewey (Public Education), and Susan B. Anthony (women's suffrage and abortion) fit this model.

A bow represents some form of power whether it is political, military, verbal, or literary.

A crown is a symbol of authority. Revolutionaries seem to rise to positions of authority within human institutions and government.

The color white represents the appearance of goodness and righteousness. Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss. Shadows appear on sunny days. Satan comes as an angel of light. Lies hide behind compliments. Devilish ambitions lurk behind angelic smiles. In every mahogany coffin lies a corpse. Spiritual shysters love to quote Bible verses. All conquests are cloaked with a noble cause. No campaign succeeds wearing a dark mask. Every bad piece of legislation hides behind public health and welfare. White, therefore, represents a pretense of justice, equality, and goodness.

The first horseman represents political conquest using subterfuge, sophistry, propaganda, indoctrination, deception, words of art, and color of law.

Politicians use law to legitimize and to tighten their control over the people. Statutory enactments give a stamp of legitimacy to rulers while masking their crimes against humanity. "It's the law," they say. It is through the **color of law** that civil rulers deceive and subjugate whole nations (Psalm 94:20).

Christians believe in the rule of law, but civil rulers practice **RULE BY LAW**; that is, they exempt themselves from their own laws, and use law to control people through force. Christians

would do well to remember there is One Lawgiver and Congress is not it (James 4:12; Isaiah 33:22).

For this very reason the Lord ordered the church of Sardis to wake up! The thief was coming to capture the people and to make them slaves. Because men reject Christ as King of the Nations, they will be subjected to frauds and impostors. Powerful politicians, philosophers, and cultic teachers will arise at various times in history to conquer people.

The rider on the white horse represents a political movement. Political movements begin with a declaration of war. Consider these examples: the “war on poverty,” “war on drugs,” “war on over population,” “war on terror,” “war on capitalism,” “war on inequality,” “war on some virus or medical condition.”

These movements begin when a political leader throws his or her weight behind a cause and declares war on some vague problem. Marxism, the Patriot Act, and the Marriage Equality Act (DOMA) come to mind. All sound noble, but every one of these movements destroys human rights, fairness, and the rule of law.

The spirit of Nimrod is at work capturing minds and hearts. Until the end of the age, Satan shows ambitious men “the kingdoms of this world” and gives it to them (Matthew 4:8, 9). Whole populations are subjugated by tyrants that rob men of their rights and property.

The good news, however, is that the scroll and its seals are in the hands of the Lion-lamb. He controls history. War and evil are restrained by His hand. All things are working together for good to those who love God. The gospel will prevail. History is marching toward the kingdom of Christ, and He must rule until all enemies are under his feet.

Beware of sophistry.

2.3.4 The Second Seal

Revelation 6:3-4 And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.

Again, the command is “come.” It is addressed to the four horsemen, not John.

2.3.4.1 The Red Horse

Red is the color of blood. The imagery here is one of war and bloodshed, of revolution and slaughter, of turmoil and terror.

Military imperialism results in war and bloodshed. Peasants will revolt against tyrants. *Shalom* is taken from the earth. With the major exception of Jerusalem’s destruction, the first century was

not characterized by great wars. The *Pax Romana* presided over the Mediterranean. Resistance was crushed by Roman legions. But, as great as Rome was through the centuries, she could not keep peace on the earth.

John assures his readers that conflict, bloodshed, and conquest are forces under the control of Christ. War and the rumors of war will continue during the Christian age. Christ uses these political forces to cause men to question the meaning of life and to search for truth.

2.3.5 The Third Seal

Revelation 6:5-6 And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

2.3.5.1 The Black Horse

Black is a symbol of famine and pestilence. Balances represent scarcity, trade, inflation, and commercial bartering due to the breakdown of a nation's infrastructure. War creates debt and debt is paid by inflating the currency. During periods of inflation, men must scramble to survive and to earn a living. Jobs end. Careers crash. Homes are lost.

The penny here is a denarius. It was a silver coin equal to a day's wage for the common man. Grain was the main food of the Eastern world. Barley was the poor man's grain, and wheat was the wealthy man's choice. Wine and oil were also necessities of life. Possibly, this refers to an abundance of luxury goods during this period, or it could refer to the fact that this period of famine is not characterized by total devastation but shortages caused by political upheaval. Devastation is reserved for the final act of history.

John is informing the Christians in Asia Minor that the Christian era will be plagued by wars and its terrifying consequences. These catastrophes (famine and pestilence) are judgments of Almighty God upon mankind. While these devastations are negative, they are limited. Controlled by the Lamb upon the throne, these human tragedies are used to bring men to repentance and knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If perhaps, "that they should seek God" (Acts 17:27).

2.3.6 The Fourth Seal

Revelation 6:7-8 And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

2.3.6.1 The Pale Horse

The pale horse (pale green) represents death from famine, from war, from starvation, and from disease. The sword is a broad barbaric Thracian sword.

One fourth part of the earth is not a literal figure. It represents substantial but limited suffering. Disease and death always follow war. John wants the reader to understand that the forces of imperialism, war, famine, and death will continue throughout the Christian age. As awful as these forces are, they are under the control of Christ. God uses these troubles to cause men to question the reason for their existence, to bring men to a saving knowledge of Christ, and to exhibit the faith of the saints. His restraint enables man's survival.

2.3.7 The Fifth Seal

Revelation 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

2.3.7.1 The Souls Under the Altar

Suddenly, the scene switches from earth to heaven. Summers says this seal introduces us to the reason of judgment. The four horsemen represent actual judgments on the earth. Now we understand why these judgment were released. The chief reason for Rome's judgment was its persecution of God's people. And, the main reason for God's judgment on any nation is its pernicious treatment of the church.

The altar: Is this the Brazen altar or the altar of incense? Some authors think it is the brazen altar, others say it is the golden altar. The brazen altar was a place where blood was poured for libations (Leviticus 4:7). The imagery portrays saints martyred in the name of their God whose souls were spilled like blood on the altar of service (Philippians 4:7). Since the saints pray, the altar could be the golden altar.

The problem, however, is easily resolved when we realize there is only one altar in heaven. The two altars in the earthly tabernacle symbolize two aspects of one reality in the heavenly temple. The brass altar typifies the work of Christ on earth for sinners, and the golden altar typifies the work of Christ in heaven for saints.

The souls mentioned are actual martyrs, the apostles and other disciples, who confronted the evils of the State with a penetrating message offensive to Roman rulers. These souls were killed because of the word of God, but the imagery here informs the original readers that the apostles and early martyrs are safe and secure in the presence of God safe because of the Lord's accomplishments at Calvary (the altar).

“Witness” is an accusative noun, not a verb. They held “the witness” (testimony), that is, they venerated the gospel of Christ. It is likely they accepted the gospel and were put to death because

of their devotion to Christ and their unwillingness to conform to the totalitarian demands of Caesar's officials. No man can serve two masters: God and Government; King Jesus and Caesar; The Ten Commandments of God and the civil statues of man. See the **Appendices: Souls Under the Altar.**

Revelation 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

The word "dwell" is qualitative, not quantitative.

Behind this prayer is our Lord's question, "Will not God avenge His elect who cry out day and night . . . ?" (Luke 18:7).

Like Abel's blood that screamed for retribution, these souls cry out for vengeance. Cain's hatred of righteous Abel has expanded to incite governments to slaughter Christians who proclaim Christ as King and who resist the monolithic powers of the State. The martyrs are baffled by God's moratorium on judgment. God's delays have their own trial in the hearts of truth seekers (Genesis 5:10; Psalm 13:1ff).

The fact that some decry judgment saying it is unchristian is remarkable. God's throne is a throne of holiness as well as mercy. God acts according to law as well as grace. While Christians as a group have been called to express love, it does not mean they cannot cry out for justice from the One who has the duty to judge the acts of men. There is a place for imprecatory prayers. The issue among Christians is never, "Should justice prevail?" but, "Why does God take so long to dispense justice?"

Revelation 6:11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.

The white robe is a symbol of "blessedness," "rest," and "acceptance." The need is for patience. The message given to the martyrs is also intended for us. Christians grieve over the foolishness of political leaders and the crimes committed by standing officials. We are called to endure the hostility of man toward man knowing that God will act judicially against the sins of tyrants in his own time. Wearing a white robe represents the Christian's cardinal duty to seek righteousness in this present evil age.

This group of martyrs are a category and will be dealt with as a whole, not individually. John wants his readers to know that the martyrs of the first century are in heaven, accepted by God, clothed in white, secure by the blood of Christ (the altar), and at rest in His presence. Furthermore, John wants his readers to know that persecution will continue throughout this evil age and that they should not be surprised by periods of profanity in history. God's delay is really the silence before the storm. The thunder of judgment will come.

2.3.8 The Sixth Seal

Revelation 6:12 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood;

Futurists say this represents the final dissolution of society. If this is the final judgment, it comes at the wrong place in the book unless one holds to the recapitulation theory, which futurists do not usually hold. Other commentators believe that this is a temporal judgment within history, and others see this as a picture of the final judgment.

I understand this section to represent the naked truth of judgment within and beyond history. The Word of God teaches us about an eschatological judgment beyond time (Hebrews 9:27). But, it also teaches us about realized eschatology. Eschatological wrath is already leaking from God's throne on sinners now (Romans 1:18). Not only does this section vividly portray the terrors of eschatological judgment, this terror is realized within history in a limited way. What could be worse than the bombing of Dresden, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki?

John's apocalyptic presentation of divine activity is dynamic, cosmic, and catastrophic. When God acts "all hell breaks loose" sort of speak. Sinners will face the wrath of the Lamb. John wants to show us that when God judges sin, he rolls up his sleeves and starts knockin' down tall timber: stars fall, the sky rolls back like a scroll, and the earth melts.

The earthquake, Sun, Moon, and stars: This is not literal language. Earthquakes do not cause the stars to fall to the earth. John's apocalyptic imagery is a symbolic presentation of God's activity to challenge, shake, and overcome the entrenched powers of evil within human institutions. This is phenomenal language and it is consistent with apocalyptic hyperbole. This pageant acts like a giant, holy, political "cartoon" showing us the truth of John 3:36, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life (safe under the altar as in Revelation 5:9): and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him (the Sun, stars, and moon fail to shine)"

Just because this is apocalyptic language does not mean that judgment is not a reality. John uses this kind of hyperbole to impress the mind with the nightmare men experience on the Day of Judgment. The terrors of judgment are coming upon the small and the great.

It was through the gospel, God shook up the powers of the Roman Empire, threatening entrenched idolatry, embedded fornication, and its powerful imperialistic spirit.

The same is true today. The gospel confronts false religions, evils of abortion, pornography, corruption, theories of evolution, free sex, dictatorial governments, and humanistic foundations of society. Nations fear Christianity because its message threatens their base of power by teaching there is another king, King Jesus.—a King, by the way, that demands the rulers of the earth surrender to His law-order (Psalm 2:10, 11).

The statement that, “We are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights . . .” means that rights are not gifts of government, but gifts of God that cannot be dissolved by a stroke of the pen. The gospel holds men accountable to God now and announces judgment on unbelievers. When the lightning bolt of the judgment strikes, the Sun does not shine. The moon does not reflect its light. The universe of the sinner will collapse as he faces the awesome presence of a holy God. Some of these judgments occur in time, others occur in eternity (Acts 17: 31; 1 Timothy 5:24; 2 Peter 2:7).

Revelation 6:13-14 **And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.**

Stars of heaven fell unto the earth: This is apocalyptic hyperbole representing divine activity marshaled against proud, antonymous man. The language of John fits the phenomenal language of OT prophets. When God acts to judge, the world of the arrogant plummets like figs in a windstorm; the proud disappear like a political promise after an election. This description here does not necessarily refer to the destruction of the universe? If it did, there would be no more chapters in Revelation. But it does announce a truth: *When God returns a verdict in answer to the imprecatory prayers of His people, the world of the wicked will collapse.*

“As a fig tree” pictures a category 5 windstorm²³. John wants his readers to understand the loss of hope associated with the judgment of God. This judicial storm does not uproot the tree, but it shakes off its fruit before the anticipated harvest—the ultimate fear of every farmer.

“As a scroll” is symbolic language denoting dynamic upheavals in society—a seismographic catastrophe. The cosmic disturbance and the symbolic language is designed to show the power of Christ on His war against the forces of evil. Nothing is left unaffected. When God works, galaxies collide, stars melt, and humanity trembles like guitar strings at a rock concert.

Revelation 6:15 **And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains;**

First, John lets us know *what will be affected* in the physical order: the sun, moon, and stars.

Second, John lets us know *who will be affected* and *how men will respond* on the day God is aroused from His sleep: kings, officers, rich men, captains, mighty men, bondmen, and freeman will scatter like wood chips from God’s chainsaw of justice. Presidents, congressmen, senators, legislators, governors, mayors, judges, wardens, and police chiefs will tremble in terror. But,

²³ Category 5: winds 157 mph or higher that level houses and buildings.

they will not succeed in their efforts to hide from God's judgment. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Peter 2:9).

Revelation 6:16-17 **And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?**

Rocks and Mountains: John shows us the desperate state of the Christ-rejecters. When they stand before God's throne, there will be no place to hide, no place to run, no place to escape. Rattling like skeletons on a tin roof, they will mumble impotent prayers to rocks and mountains, "Fall on us . . ." But, "Mother Nature" cannot hear! This concept of terrifying judgment is not new. In the eighth century Isaiah stated, "They seek shelter in the holes of the rocks and in the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth" (Isaiah 2:19).

The wrath of the Lamb: John introduces judgment as the "great day of his wrath." Modern authors might utilize the metaphor "treading of the grapes of wrath." There is no distinction as to "the day of the Lord," the "day of Christ," or to the "day of the Lord Jesus." Each is a manifestation of the blistering fury of the Lion Lamb-King. This volcanic judicial eruption that fractures mountains and ejects streams of hot lava is announced, not by the Lord, but by earthlings standing in God's Courtroom.

Who can stand? This question must be addressed and it is answered in chapter seven.

John wants his audience to know that **the gospel not only announces the salvation of God but the judgment of God.** Good pastors preach "hell and brimstone" as well justification by grace alone. The resurrection of Christ assures men that there is *a day He will judge the world in righteousness* (Acts 17:31). The triumphant history of Christ confronted Rome then and continues to shake spiritual powers around the globe today.

What power is able to make the proud nations tremble? The answer is, "The wrath of the Lamb!" The thought of a lamb does not usually invoke fear. But this Lamb has been slain and raised from the dead. This Lamb is sitting at the right hand of God with all power and authority under his feet. Men will stand before this Lamb and give an account of their deeds. It is the lightning and thunder of this truth that terrifies men. This Lamb is none other than the Lion-King enthroned at the right hand of Almighty God (See 5:5).

A summary: The opening of the seals act as preparatory tremors to the volcanic message within the scroll. The main message is in chapter 15 and 16. Subjects are introduced that pertain to the events of this present evil age. This scene is part of John's pageant that symbolizes God's sovereign judgment routed against His adversaries. Before us is a giant, holy, political cartoon.

Politics, war, pestilence, death, martyrdom, and natural calamity are in his hands. Nothing happens in history over which our Lord does not preside. Nothing is out of control. When God acts to judge, wrenching fear of falling into a python pit squeezes courage out of the hearts of men. All are accountable to the gospel of the martyrs. All will rattle like skeletons when they stand before His throne. Don't be a fool, believe in the Lamb.

2.4 The Interlude

The last question in the previous chapter is now answered in chapter 7: "Who can stand?" So terrible are the judgments of God, even believers quiver. John's question, "Who can stand?" must be answered. There is only one reply: "Those who know the Lord!!"

We have here in this chapter two scenes: one **of the church Militant** (the 144,000), and the other **of the church Triumphant** (The Great Multitude).

The identity of the 144,000 has been a subject of controversy. The Seventh Day Adventist as well as the Jehovah witnesses applies it to those in fellowship with their communion. Dwight Pentecost identified the 144,000 as composed of all converted Jews during the supposed tribulation period (Pentecost, 1958, p. 214). Harry Ironside (1920) identified this order as Jews who will preach a gospel after the church is removed from the earth. In the dispensational scheme, the 144,000 represent saved Jews who will replace the church after the rapture during an alleged seven-year tribulation period that will come upon mankind. Popularized by Hal Lindsey in his work, The Late Great Planet Earth (1970), this is the most common view among evangelicals today. But, this view is a flawed interpretation.

The late premillennial theologian, George E. Ladd (1972), and Ray Summers, the late Southern Baptist Professor of NT at Southwestern (1951), and Ed McDowell, Professor of NT at Southwestern (1951), and William Hendricksen (1967), the reformed theologian, take the view that the 144,000 are a symbol of the true Israel, the church of Jesus Christ. This is the view this work embraces.

2.4.1 The Sealing of the 144,000

Revelation 7:1 And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

Four angels represent God's sentinels that have the power to release destructive forces on the earth.

The four winds are not literal, but symbolic of destructive forces that fall upon the inhabitants of the earth.

The “four corners of the earth” should not be taken literally but figuratively. Does the earth have four corners? Possibly! That the earth is round or flat must be the subject of another debate. The term “four corners” appears to be symbolic. The earth is portrayed as a great square and the four corners represent the four directions (N. S. E. W.).

Revelation 7:2-3 And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

The east: The east is the place of the rising Sun, but it is also the genesis of truth. All that we hold precious about the revelation of God comes from the east through the nation of Israel and its prophets. The angel from the east delays the four angels and their destructive forces until the servants of God are identified.

Hurt not: Revelation 1-3 warned the seven churches of an imminent political crisis coming on the region. In Revelation six we understand the destructive forces that will plague mankind and the leakage of eschatological wrath upon the anti-God forces within history. This question arises, “What will happen to God’s people during these periods of divine judgment?” Do they escape or will the storms of slaughter engulf them? This interlude informs the readers that God has provided for the protection of His people.

The seal: A seal is a tool for engraving or stamping. It represents ownership. When an observer sees a seal on an object, he knows immediately that it belongs to the one owning the mark. Those with the seal are spared from the coming judgments. Believers will suffer tribulation because they live in a fallen world, but they will never experience the wrath of God!

The purpose of the seal is for identification so that those so marked may be preserved during the destruction (Revelation 9:4). Wrath is reserved for the Christ-rejecter. The sealed are delivered from the wrath. God’s judgment has always been selective: Israel was delivered from the plagues planned for Pharaoh (Exodus 5-10). Israel was delivered from the hail storm in the time of Joshua (Joshua 10:11). The believing remnant was marked and preserved from the slaughter of idolaters during the days of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 9:4). Here, the servants of God are marked and protected. The sealing in this chapter is an assurance of preservation based on divine ownership.

This sealing is God’s way of informing us of the Pauline truth that all believers are known by God and exempt from punishment (Romans 8:15; Ephesians 1:13). John is seeking to insure his original readers that regardless of the trials they may face, God knows his own! The seal is God’s

assurance the elect are preserved from the wrath and judgment of God; it is not, however, a promise to be delivered from suffering of life or persecution by governments.

Revelation 7:4-8 And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. Of the tribe of Judah were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Nephthalim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

The sealed: Who are the “servants of God” that are now sealed? John hears the tally and he reports the calculation (144,000); that is, twelve thousand from each of the tribes of Israel.

Who are the 144,000 servants that are sealed? There is no lack of interpretations on this subject. Linear thinkers identify the 144,000 as Jews.

First, the 144,000 are not Jews saved during the tribulation period as proposed by classical dispensationalists. The 144,000 is a picture of whole family of God, the church, the true Israel of God composed of believing people from all the nations.

Pieters: “The first group (144,000) represents the true believers on earth while they are still subject to the storms of divine judgment that break over the world; while the second group (the great throng) symbolize believers who are already in heaven . . . the two groups, then, are respectively, The church Militant and The church Triumphant” (Quoted by Summers, 1951, p. 147).

Revelation is a book of symbols and must be interpreted symbolically. A literal hermeneutic in a book of full of symbols is a flawed hermeneutic. It is not surprising that God would use Israel as a symbol of all of God’s people since the church is the true messianic community composed of the spiritually responsive from Israel and the spiritually responsive among the Gentiles. The proof of this proposition is the fact that Christ calls the seven churches “candlesticks” (1:2).

John uses Hebrew symbols to convey spiritual truth. In chapter 14, the 144,000 are identified as “those redeemed among men,” “first fruits to God,” which is the church, “the first fruits among His creatures” (James 1:18). The 144,000 are an *ideal depiction* of God’s people during this present evil age. They are the “undefiled,” “pure,” “blameless,” ones who “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (14:4-5).

The 12,000 from each tribe are not literal calculations. The reason God uses round numbers is because the numbers are symbolic and not actual summations. The numbers 12,000 from each tribe and the total of 144,000 are ideal integers that expresses *fullness* and *completeness*. That is, God's harvest of believing souls during the Christian era will be full and complete. They are sealed "to protect them" while upon earth until their work is done.

This would encourage the 1st century Christians that their cause was victorious and that no matter what kind of trials they faced in the Roman Empire, **they would be untouched by judgment raining on the Christ-rejecters** (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

The mark: Having "his name" written on their foreheads is not a literal mark anymore than the "beast" places a literal mark on his followers. The "mark" is spiritual fact, which cannot be observed with the human eye, and the number is a spiritual fact, which cannot be counted by human observation. Since all Christians are sealed (Ephesians 1:13), ALL believers on earth are part of the 144,000. The marking of these servants encourage Christians going through trials and tribulations that they are protected by God; that is, the church militant will experience troubles during their pilgrimage on earth, but the wrath of God will never touch them nor will they ever experience the second death.

For more on the identity of the 144,000, see the **Appendices**: "Who are the 144,000?"

2.4.2 The Vision of the Great Multitude

Revelation 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

"**After this**" (meta tauta): John was given another vision of hope and encouragement. The 144,000 are living souls on earth. The innumerable multitude from every tribe and nation are in heaven, before the throne, and before the lamb. The fact that they are gloriously "clothed in robes" means that they are not naked and that God has provided all that they need for salvation.

"**Palms in their hands**" represent joy and celebration that has a relationship to the Feast of Tabernacles. This group is **not** sealed for protection because they *have safely arrived on the other side of the great sea in the presence of God*.

The "**great multitude**" is also a picture of the church, the true Israel of God. They relate to the 144,000 in that they are members of the same family. They differ from the 144,000 in that they are not on earth, but in heaven. "This group is not sealed for protection because it has passed beyond the need of protection. They have been victorious in trial" (Summers, 1951, p. 151).

Revelation 7:10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

Who are these people? These are people in heaven who have tasted the grace of God and the wonder of salvation. United, they sing to God and attribute their deliverance to God and to the Lamb.

Revelation 7:11-13 And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

We receive more confirmation that this heavenly host is in heaven because the angels and elders and four beasts agree with this song of salvation and fall on their faces and say, “Amen!”

Revelation 7:13-14 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

To make sure the identity of the multitude is understood, the angel queries John about this congregation. It is a question and answered in time for the Seer. John confesses ignorance but also expresses confidence that he will be enlightened. The question is asked, not because the angel did not know the answer, but because John and his readers needed to know the answer.

This multitude is identified as those who have come out of the great tribulation, who have washed their robes and been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb.

What is this tribulation? There is little unity among Bible interpreters as to the correct answer.

The futurists say this is “the great tribulation” which is yet future to our time. But, this view assigns a theological schematic to “the Great Tribulation” which is a product of modern times. Such a graphic is not what the angel had in mind.

Another view is that the “great tribulation” refers to the difficulties that all men face on earth or life itself. This view is determined by the context, the *hunger and thirst and heat* mentioned in verses 15-17. This view is correct.

We live in an “evil age” that is characterized by trials and tribulations (Galatians 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 1:5-6; 2 Timothy 3:1ff). Every period in history has its unique battles and struggles which test the faith and character of the redeemed. The great tribulation, then, is not some supposed future seven-year period of global suffering at the end of this age, **but the affliction and adversities of this life caused by one’s identification with the cause of Christ**; that is, the Christian-human experience. The death-experience of Christians is a fiery ordeal that tests the souls of all men. Death is an enemy and life’s most bitter experience—the great tribulation for all men. Whether it is a death by stroke, or heart attack, or cancer, or some strange

accident, death is never welcome and seldom easy. Therefore, the great tribulation must be viewed as the trials of this pilgrim journey we call “life,” and the trial of crossing “the River Jordan during the flood season” which is a metaphor for “death.”

The angel identifies God’s people: (a) They are clothed (justification); (b) they are washed (regeneration & sanctification); and (c) they survive the great tribulation by resurrection because of their faith, conviction, and obedience (preservation, resurrection, and glorification).

Revelation 7:15-17 Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

We have an interesting reversal in this passage. The redeeming Lamb on His glorious Throne as Executor of God’s Last Will and Testament is here portrayed as the caring, providing Shepherd. Christ’s flock in heaven is protected from every adversity. Every need is supplied. The feast is so great very sorrow is forgotten.

Look at the blessings of the redeemed:

Location: “before the throne.”

Occupation: “serve him night and day.”

Communion: He shall “dwell among them.”

Protection: no more hunger or thirst or exposure to the elements.

Provision: He “shall feed them.”

Salvation: They are led to the “living fountains of waters.”

Satisfaction: Every tear is wiped away.

In conclusion, before John discusses the great acts of judgment that come on nations during the church age, he assures his readers that God’s people, the church militant (those fighting for the gospel on earth) are known by God and protected by Him; that is, they are secure even in rip tides of God’s judgment. The church triumphant (those resting in heaven) have crossed the great divide and are now enjoying the presence and fullness of Christ. This glory has been made possible by the victory of the Lamb. No wonder the Great Multitude bursts into their forte, “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!”

2.5 The Seven Trumpets

2.5.1 Introduction to the Trumpets

Late preterists understand the seven trumpets to be metaphorical descriptions of the fall of the Roman Empire. The good thing about this view is that it has application to the original readers. If this be the case, it is obvious that the trumpet judgments are not literal, but a symbolic representation of God's courtroom activity in judgment. However, to limit these judgments to the first century may be too narrow and more restrictive than John intends for his readers.

The futurist believe the seals are still future. They also believe the seals, trumpets, and bowls are future, chronological judgments. The problem with this view is three fold:

- (a) The sixth seal, which appears to be the final judgment appears at the wrong place in John's vision; and,
- (b) what possible meaning could these visions have to the first century saints if they are two-millenniums removed into the future? And,
- (c) John's book is not chronological and arithmetic, but artistic, decorative, and dramatic. That is, John's metaphors do not appeal to the logical side of man's brain but to the creative side of man's mind. It is not a schematic for end-time engineers, lawyers, mathematicians, accountants, and statistical analysts. It is a giant, holy, image designed to stir the imagination; to excite hope; and, to enlighten men about the ways of God.

John's audience was about to face a collision of world views because of their Christian faith. The original readers would have understood the trumpet plagues as preliminary instruments of judgment upon the Roman Empire. But, in another sense the trumpet plagues represent God's creative powers at work against the enemies of the gospel until the end of this age. John wants his readers to know that God is serious about gospel proclamation and the need for men to repent. He is at work during every century challenging sinners with the truth of the gospel.

The trumpet plagues are similar to the Egyptian plagues in that they are designed to bring men to repentance. The LORD employed the plagues of Egypt to pressure Pharaoh into releasing Israel from bondage. The trumpet plagues are tailored to motivate the ungodly to release their idols and to repent of their sins (9:20). No opportunity to persuade men to repent is neglected. All tornadoes, hurricanes, pandemics, and natural disasters are legitimate occasions preachers should use to call men to release their idols and to repent.

The **REAL TRAGEDY** in the trumpet judgments is not the calamities of nature depicted, but the **CALAMITY of UNREPENTANT HEARTS!!** Here we understand the joy the Father must have when one sinner truly repents, and the sorrow He has over sinners that do not come to the

fountain of living waters to drink from the well of eternal life (Isaiah 55:1ff; Jeremiah 17:13; Luke 15:7).

The trumpet plagues are not a literal predictions of what is coming on the earth. John is not giving his readers a scientific, engineering, mathematical treatise on end-time events. They are preliminary judgments given to wicked men warning them of the ultimate judgment. They are a symbolic, apocalyptic presentation of the creative forces God uses to condemn the wicked and to steer the unregenerate unto repentance. John is in heaven, and he uses intense, earthly imagery to expose heavenly revelations.

The trumpet plagues are similar to the plague of bowls. Due to the fact that only one-third of the trees and waters are affected, the trumpet judgments represent grace and the limitations of judgments during this evil age.

| SEVEN TRUMPETS | SEVEN BOWLS |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. earth (8:7) | 1. earth (16:2) |
| 2. sea (8:8-9) | 2. sea (16:3) |
| 3. rivers and spring (8:10,11) | 3. rivers and springs (16:4-5) |
| 4. sun, moon, stars (8:12) | 4. sun (16:8) |
| 5. pit of the abyss (9:1) | 5. throne of the Beast (16:10) |
| 6. river Euphrates (9:13-14) | 6. river Euphrates (16:17, 21) |
| 7. lightning, hail (11:15) | 7. lightening, hail (16:17, 21) |

2.5.2 The Seventh Seal

Revelation 8:1 And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

Silence in Heaven: The sixth seal depicts the reaction of the wicked to the wrath of God. Chapter seven is an interlude that answers the question, “What will happen to God’s people

during the outpouring of divine wrath? If the sixth seal was dreadful, the opening of the seventh seal is even more terrifying. Silence reveals the gravity of the situation. It adds to the drama of the narrative. When the Lord is on His holy throne, prophets of old admonished their generation to shut their mouth and to sit in silence (Habakkuk 2:20). Silence is required when a judge announces his sentence.

Seven angels appear: The four angels and the scroll disappear. This is characteristic of apocalyptic language and points to its fluidity and surrealism of the imagery before us. It is artistic, not mathematical. An engineer looking for an arithmetic formula to map a diagrammatic for the end times may blow a fuse. John's imagery functions like a dream. It does not possess the character of a narrative presenting rational, logical, consistent imagery. It appeals to the right brain, not the left brain²⁴. The purpose of the imagery is to stir the emotions and the imaginations, not titillate the logical, analytical side of the corpus colosseum.

2.5.3 The Blasting of the Trumpets

Revelation 8:2 And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

Like rolling thunder before an electrical storm, the trumpets warn of impending danger. The Lord is on His Holy Throne. He has sent the Lord Jesus to save mankind, and He warns sinners of the terror coming upon those who reject His Son. The wicked receive ample warning in this life that God will judge lawbreakers.

Blasts of the trumpets alert us that God is at work in history. The blasts summon us to prepare for battle, to muster our resources for gospel proclamation. We must perceive the intense war in history for the minds and souls of men, and that the evil adversaries of the gospel will be defeated. Before us are scenes of mortal conflict and the dynamics of warfare on the side of good against the side of evil.

Revelation 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Who is this angel? He is not identified.

In chapter six, the martyrs under the brazen altar prayed for justice and revenge. The trumpet judgments are an answer to the prayers of the saints. Incense intensifies while stimulating the senses. The prayers of the saints are mixed with incense to enhance their success; that is, to cover

²⁴ A person who is "left-brained" is often said to be more logical, analytical and objective, while a person who is "right-brained" is said to be more intuitive, creative, and subjective.

their imperfection in order to make them acceptable to the thrice holy God. This verse along with the imprecatory psalms grants permission to the saints to pray for divine retribution on tyrants who seem to prevail in this life. Keep in mind that it was arrogant, government officials enforcing Roman imperialistic policy in the empire that caused the apostles death. The imperfect prayers of imperfect saints have reached the ears of a perfect Judge.

Revelation 8:4 And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.

This is like Manoah's offering where the Angel of the Lord ascended in the flame. Manoah's offering was weak, but his prayer was accepted because Christ added Himself to it. The praise of Christ is incense. Likewise, the prayers of the saints are flawed, but the addition of incense empowers intercession. The trumpet judgments are due in major part to the imprecatory prayers of the church militant. The fundamental truth is that God will hear the fervent but flawed prayers of his afflicted people and that He will judge their enemies. "Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord. "I will repay" (Hebrews 12:30).

The Scripture admonishes us to "draw near," "with full confidence," "to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need" (Hebrews 4:16). And, because it is a throne of grace, Christians have the assurance that our Great High Priest overlooks the defects of our prayers and the imperfections of our person when we seek His intervention.

Revelation 8:5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

God hears the imprecatory prayers of his imperfect people, and in response instructs the angel to take fire from off the golden altar and cast it to the earth. This is a fulfillment of Jesus' own word, "I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled" (Luke 12:49). Oh, that we were as serious about judging sin as He is.

Thunders and lightening are premonitory signs of judgment. The terrors of the fire storm reminds us of how God revealed Himself at Mt. Sinai. Judgment based on law strikes mankind.

Revelation 8:6 And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

2.5.4 First Trumpet

Revelation 8:7 The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

The angels are God's messengers that warn and announce the judgment. Something is wrong. Life is not the way it is supposed to be. A trumpet sounds and pleasures are interrupted. Mighty

trees snap. Green grass turns yellow. Fire erupts. All efforts at “fire suppression repair” fail. Mountains and valleys are scorched. Black stumps stand where the mighty oaks rested. Fertile soil becomes dry and brittle. Ecosystems are compromised. This severance of nature’s patterns and “status quo” is God’s way of calling men to let go of their idols and to surrender to His law order—the laws of nature and nature’s God.

The first four plagues represent judgment on nature. Hail and lightning discharge death on the environment. Huge fires rip through lush green forests leaving a black swath of burning coals and staggering stacks of smoke in its path. The earth and its mighty trees and its green grass feel the furious heat of this judgment.

This is a global warmest worst nightmare. Trees and plants are essential for man’s existence. Man is being called to forsake his idolatrous dependence on nature and to recognize His need for the Creator. God, not “Mother Nature,” controls the weather. He uses hail, and lightning, and tornados to drive men to reflect on His sovereignty. The fact that only a third of the trees and grass are burned reflect God’s restraint and mercy even in judgment (James 5:11).

2.5.5 Second Trumpet

Revelation 8:8-9 And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; And the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

The imagery here is of a great volcano spewing out columns of volcanic ash, candy red-fire, and burning lava before collapsing into the sea and destroying a third of all marine life. This scene is not to be construed as a literal event. An erupting volcano one-hundred times the size of any known volcanic eruption would not cause the death of one-third of sea life nor would it turn the ocean into actual, literal blood. This is apocalyptic imagery designed to enlarge man’s awareness of God’s judgments.

The sea transformed into blood reminds us of the plagues on the Egyptians during the time of Moses. Judgment fell on the River Nile before God’s people were freed from despotism. The trumpet judgment is greater than the plagues of Moses, but it is still limited in scope. This is not total destruction. God is giving men time to repent. He still calls Pharaoh-kings “to let my people go,” i.e., to free mankind from the tyranny of taxation and the military police State. It shows God disrupting man’s idolatrous dependence on the sea. The sea is a means of conveyance and a source of food for mankind. Shipwrecks, volcanic activity, storms, and the like disrupt man’s commercial interests and supply chains. God uses these catastrophes to call men to repent and to acknowledge their dependence on Him.

2.5.6 Third Trumpet

Revelation 8:10-11 And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; And the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

Clean water is essential for life. In this judgment, fresh waters are affected by this poison star. Possibly surface waters as well as subterranean reservoirs are contaminated. The star is from heaven or outer space. Before us is a giant iron asteroid, a fiery comet, a huge shooting star. The orbit asteroid is an unwelcome invader from outer space.

The name of the star is called “Wormwood.” Wormwood is a rare word. Wormwood mixed in water is not a deadly poison unless taken in great quantities. But, it is unpleasant and bitter tasting. This star is not literal. It is unlikely a meteor would poison a third of earth’s waters. Again, John stirs our imagination in order to help us recognize natural catastrophes as preliminary warnings of the Great Judgment upon Christ-rejecters.

Man is dependent on water for existence and happiness. When God judges men, He touches the essentials to life. Polluted water kills. Even pure water cannot quench the thirst of a dehydrated soul living in separation from God. This judgment on water is God’s way of causing man to look away from nature to Him as the hope of eternal life. God, not “Mother Nature,” is the One who nurtures life and preserves man in this age and the age to come. The fact that only a third of the waters are affected reflects God’s mercy in judgment.

2.5.7 The Fourth Trumpet

Revelation 8:12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

This judgment is similar to the ninth plague over Egypt where darkness prevailed. The imagery is that of a dust cloud so thick the sun’s rays are unable to penetrate the darkness. An eclipsed Sun and the resulting darkness terrify men and depress the hearts. The darkness is not complete as it affects only a third of heavenly bodies.

Mankind is dependent on the Sun. From the earliest days of civilization till the present, men have recognized the contribution of the Sun to life on Earth. Entire civilizations from Babel to the Aztecs have worshiped the Sun. In New Mexico, the icon on the State flag is a Pueblo Zia-Sun symbol. The third of the Sun being smitten is not a literal event, but a symbolic presentation of how God uses natural calamities to turn men from sin to Himself. This literary drama is God’s way of warning men not to put their trust in Earth’s nearest star. Through time, God disrupts nature. Calamities that touch man’s idolatrous connection to nature are ordered by Him. When

calamities strike, Christians know these events are God's way of causing men to repent of their rebellion and idolatrous connection to Earth. Man does not live in a garden. The Earth is under a curse. Something is wrong. Doctrines like Mother Nature, Mother Earth, and "Going Green" are vintages of ancient religions that deny God's creative acts. Why will men not search for the answer in Christ and take dominion of the earth in His Name? The answer is that man lives in rebellion against God's law order.

The 1st century readers would reflect on the natural calamities that defaced the Roman Empire such as the eruption of Mount Vesuvius (August, 79 AD.) which engulfed Herculaneum and Pompeii. Pliny informs us of the stunning earthquakes and the avalanches of fire and lava that flowed down the mountain into the sea. Sulfurous fumes that choked nearby villages and cities were seen by all Italians. These events were not unlike the eruption of Mount St. Helens that discharged ash from Oregon to Colorado. Fish died. Wildlife perished. Men suffocated. Rivers turned to mud. Trees toppled. Lakes disappeared. These deadly eruptions were probably in the consciousness of John's readers as historical reminders of God's awesome power. The fact that only a third of these heavenly lamps are blackened reflects God's mercy even in judgment.

Revelation 8:13 And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

The first four judgment plagues came upon nature. The next three plagues touch man directly. The angel's triple proclamation crushes all hope. Things will not get better, but worse. Terrible, terrible, terrible are the judgments of Almighty God.

The vulture, a carnivorous scavenger, appears as a bad omen . . . as does this angel. The "Woe, woe, woe" represent three more frightening judgments to fall on the earth.

2.5.8 Fifth Trumpet and First "Woe"

The first four trumpets are judgments against man's environment. The final three judgments are sent directly upon man. Things do not get better. They get worse -- not for God's purposes, but worse in the sense that greater intensity is applied to mankind to expose the wretchedness of man's unrepentant heart. In one sense, these plagues come from the earth or the hellish spirit working around the Mediterranean. Possibly, the following description is about the demonic forces that slithered through the Empire to corrupt, destroy, and wreak havoc on the godless Romans. Summers (1951) saw these last three plagues as internal rotteness that sucked the life out of Rome. Because Christians live a separated life to the Lord, they are not impacted by these terrifying judgments.

Revelation 9:1 And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit.

John sees a long light beaming its way from heaven to earth. The star is some angelic personage having a key to the bottomless pit. Who is this person? It is not Satan. Could it be the same angel in Revelation 20 which has the key to the bottomless pit? Could Revelation 20 take us back to the beginning of the Christians era? Does Revelation 9 take us to the end of the age where Satan is loosed from this pit?

Keys represent authority. The bottomless pit represents the underworld and the place of demonic activity. The background of this evil is Joel 2:4-10. In Joel, the locusts are literal; in Revelation the cicada are symbolic of demonic agents set loose to afflict mankind. These vampires are eager to bite and suck the life blood out of unrepentant souls.

Revelation 9:2 And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

Powerful forces are at work to cause men to repent and come to Christ for salvation. Smoke comes from burning objects, and black smoke comes from torching unnatural things at very high temperatures. The black skies remind us burning oil and asphalt. Darkness is the imagery of fear and uncertainty.

The imagery of the bottomless pit provokes mystery. Deep, dark shafts are spooky. The smoking shaft provokes images of being choked and asphyxiated. The cosmology for the bottomless pit is not established in Biblical literature. However, we do associate heaven with God, earth with people, and the underworld with demonic existence.

“Bottomless pit” is “abysses” (the/j avbu,ssou) from which we get the word *abyss*. There is no such physical place on earth. Though hell’s imagery is of fire, it is unlikely this bottomless pit is hell itself.

Paul refers to the abyss as the place of the dead (Romans 10:7). It is associated with the imprisonment of demons (Luke 8:31). It is the place from which the Beast ascends (11:7). It is the place where the Devil will be incarcerated (Revelation 20). And, it is the bottomless pit where God will cast Christ-rejecters. They will not escape.

Revelation 9:3 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

The locusts and scorpions are images of terror (Ezekiel 2:6). Black swarms of locust during mid-day were a farmer’s worst nightmare. Scorpions are known world over for their terrible sting. Scorpion stings are not usually deadly, but they hurt “like the Dickens’ (a surname for the Devil). These ghastly creatures have the mobility of a grasshopper and the sting of arachnids found in the deserts of the world.

If these are demons, it is unlikely they appear as literal locust. Since Satan is the Prince of the Power of the Air, the misery described refers to demonic afflictions of some kind. God has many weapons at his disposal in His arsenal of destruction. Mankind has yet to see all of God's Special Forces used to judge men and motivate them to repent.

Revelation 9:4 And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

The word "only" stands out in this section. The discrimination of these judgments remind us of the plagues of Egypt where the Israelites were protected from God's plagues upon the Nile Valley. God's judgments are selective and discriminating. This is a surgical strike with no collateral damage. Like the hailstones in Joshua's day, this plague targets unregenerate men — those that have not the seal of God in their foreheads; that is, those who have not believed in Christ and experienced regeneration by the Spirit (Titus 3:5).

The destruction of the demonic locust is limited, specific, and selective. The demonic hosts target only those without the seal of God on their foreheads. They are not literal, but figurative. Normally, locusts devour green foliage, but this is strictly forbidden. However, unbelieving man is the target of these destroyers. Satan is not in charge. God is Commander and Chief of this army of ruin. These instruments are totally under His sovereign control. The modern belief that God is too-loving to judge men is as flawed as smell-o-vision.

Christians are not the target of these punishments. Because Jesus was drenched in the flood of God's wrath at the cross, there is not one drop left for believers.

Revelation 9:5-6 And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

The dominance of the locusts are limited in time (5 months) and power (more to inflict pain and misery than death). They receive authority to torture men, but not to kill them! Once again we learn that these forces are under the sovereign control of God for the specific purpose of motivating carnal men to repent and to seek God. God does not desire to kill people, but he will afflict men in order to shock them into seeking Him. The question "Why God?" has launched many on a search for truth.

Men who are stung by a scorpion experience sharp, excruciating, piercing pain as toxins enter the body. Apparently, this demonic torment is similar to a scorpion's sting. Men will recoil in agony by their torment. Death is often an escape from physical suffering. However, in these judgments, death eludes mankind. Suicide is not in mind here. Mass suicide is rare. Death is not

an escape from judgment. The point of this instrument is not to kill, but to drive proud men to despair in hope that people will take their eyes off their idols and look to the living God for salvation.

Revelation 9:7-8 And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions.

The background of this description is found in Joel 2:4. The locusts are like horses: strong, relentless, determined, and unstoppable.

Crowns are not literal. Rather, the imagery suggests authority, success, or victory.

Faces of men: This description is not literal: rather, the imagery suggests these demonic monsters have man-like intelligence, discretion, and even savage cruelty possessed by thugs and paid assassins.

Hair of women: Some suggest the long hair represents the Parthians living to the east of the Roman Empire. These barbarians had long, unkempt locks and were ready for battle. Hair may speak of beauty, or mystery, freedom of movement, deceit, or barbarianism. Only the first century mind fully knows the intent of this imagery.

Teeth of lions: The imagery suggests strength, ferocity, and intensity—the ability to rip adversaries to shreds.

The description of these creatures is like a “holy cartoon” designed to stimulate man’s imagination as to the instruments God uses to bring men to a place of sorrow and repentance—to shock them out of their complacency in order that they might seek Him . . . and not government . . . or money . . . or another idol common to man.

Revelation 9:9 And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

Breastplates speak of invincibility. Iron suggests strength, hardness, unyielding determination, and the powerlessness of men to defeat these foes. The noise is analogous to Joel’s description of the locust plague—the terrifying buzz of millions of wings—a sound so loud it could wake the dead.

The creatures are unstoppable. All of man efforts to block the destruction of these pillagers miscarry. Modern man has tremendous confidence in government . . . but, kings and presidents are unable to prevent hurricanes, tornados, volcanic eruptions, and viral pandemics that appear in history. These armored locusts remind us not to put our trust in impotent politicians who don’t have the strength of jello to stop these iron destroyers.

Revelation 9:10 And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails: and their power was to hurt men five months.

Some interpreters have tried to identify these dreadful creatures as modern day tanks, armored personnel carriers, and Humvees. However, tanks kill and destroy. These demonic monsters only cause pain. These creatures are not literal. They are not a description of modern marvels. The imagery presents the fact that God has many creative methods to inflict pain upon men in order to motivate them to repent.

Revelation 9:11 And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.

The title “Abaddon” means “destruction” in Hebrew. In Greek, the word for *destruction* is *Apollyon*. In the Greek, it is spelled like a participle, *VApollu,wn*, meaning *destroyer*.

Locusts have no king (Proverbs 30:7), but these monsters do. Since they are from the bottomless pit, we expect Satan to be their ruler. He has power to destroy, but not to save. Even if Satan’s work is in view here, we must not forget that even this monster is under the sovereign command of the Lion-Lamb who holds the scroll in the palm of his pierced hand.

Revelation 9:12 One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

2.5.9 The Sixth Angel and Second “Woe.”

Revelation 9:13-15 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men.

This plague is worse than the last. This judgment inflicts death while the previous inflicted only pain.

The altar is the golden altar which represents the prayers of the saints--a reminder that justice comes to earth as an answer to imprecatory prayers.

The Euphrates is called “the Great River” which marks the northern most border of the Promised Land (Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7; Joshua 1:4). Invasion of ancient Israel always came from the north. *This Euphrates is not geographical, but logical.* John wants his readers to feel in this trumpet blast what Israel feared when northern armies crossed the River Euphrates. Revelation uses the imagery of military invasion and war to incite man’s imagination as to the

armament devices God uses to inflict damage or harm on living beings, structures, and systems when He judges wickedness on earth.

An hour, and a day: The reference to time here is John's way of saying that angels have a special purpose as instruments of divine justice. The time is determined. Nothing here is haphazard. Nothing is by accident. The times are under God's control. Christ is sovereign. The King orders his angels to the battlefield to kill and destroy. Their mission is not to annihilate the entire human race, but to warn survivors of impending doom. Even death can be used to bring the living to repentance. Every tragedy is a reminder that we are mortal and must be prepared to face God's judgment.

Revelation 9:16 And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them.

This army could represent Parthian invaders that plagued Rome. These barbarians were to the east of the Roman Empire and were feared for their horsemanship and military skills. This presentation could include the Parthian armies, but is not likely that John limits his vision to this regional conflict. Such specificity is unlikely. These four angels are different than previous angels and are so designated by their station and duty.

Two hundred thousand is twice ten thousand times ten. If this is literal, says Summers, this regiment would represent a cavalry one mile wide and 85 miles long. We must remember this is a pageant and not literal prophecy. The details add interest to the drama. We are not dealing with literal events but symbols of literal judgments. The Spirit appeals to our imagination, not to the logical part of the cerebrum. Heaven's Publication releases a holy, spiritual caricature of God's work on earth (Summers, p. 158-159)

The idea that this is a literal, Chinese Red Army crossing the literal Euphrates to invade the "Holy Land" is a prophetic scheme in a modern theological construct and not the hermeneutic substance of this text. Interpreting the Bible in light of modern day political structures is a flawed hermeneutic and as about as helpful as an inflatable dartboard.

This army is not literal language, but a figure of speech. It illustrates the fearsome resources that Almighty God uses to judge sinners and to call them to repentance.

In Gibbon's work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, he lists three causes of Rome's collapse: natural calamity, internal decay, and external military invasions on the Empire. Though Rome did not crumble for another four hundred years after the writing of Revelation, these forces were already leeching vitality out of mighty Rome.

Revelation 9:17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone.

Horses: This description of the horses with breastplates of fire is for dramatic effect. Three colors are mentioned that describe the cuirasses of the riders. Horses are harmless, but these mythological characters are sources of destruction. Horses with heads of lions demonstrate this section is symbolic, not literal; a fantasy presentation; not objective fact. Furthermore, horses are not deployed in modern armies in the theater of combat. These mythical *equus caballus* are symbols of terror that are swift and terrible, capable of devouring men and charring them to a crisp. Reading into this imagery a description of modern tanks is like trying to engineer an ejection seat for a helicopter. Peshier interpretation only complicates the reading of this passage.

No offensive weapon is described; only their defensive armor.

Revelation 9:18-19 **By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.**

The emphasis here is on the ferocity and destructiveness of these creatures. Evil has a purpose. It reminds us that we are no longer in the garden. Sin is real. Pain and suffering are genuine. These mythological creatures are the essence of doom and destruction. Like killer robots, these terminators discharge death before and behind, from the mouth to the tail. Thus, these fire breathing creatures are associated with the locusts. *They get ya comin' and a goin'!*

A third of mankind slain is serious judgment—a reminder that repentance needs to be authentic. Deep sins call for deep repentance. Christians are spared from this destruction. The measurement of one-third expresses grace. God judges! But, God also spares in order to bring some to the knowledge of the truth.

Revelation 9:20-21 **And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.**

The rest of men: Christians are not the target of these judgments. God aims his arrows of death only at Christ rejecters. Christians will not experience one ounce of God's rage—discipline yes, but wrath, "No!" If Christ bore God's judgment for our sins on Calvary's tree, there is not one drop of wrath left for you or me. Believe it and be at peace.

No repentance: How could a loving God send such ruin? The answer is in the text. The suffering is designed to bring men to repentance. Wake up, or die is the message of these thundering judgments. The great tragedy is not that God punishes evildoers, but that sinners will not repent. Notice the absolute corruption of humanity and their unwillingness to repent.

John could have told us, “Man’s heart is hard!” But, John shows, not tells. He shows us through apocalyptic imagery the real state of man’s heart. These visual images of suffering are catastrophic, but the spider’s silk²⁵ of man’s heart is more tragic. Murder, black magic, fornication, and theft litter the history of mankind. Consider how modern governments protect baby killers, religious cults, consensual sexual encounters, and constructive fraud by bankers. Changing laws is a herculean task. Changing a sinner into a saint takes a miracle of God.

We see God’s merciful purpose in these plagues. They are designed to persuade men to turn from their sin and to seek His solution in Christ. God uses fear to drive men to faith. As terrible as these plagues are, men persist in their rebellion. This is the real tragedy of the human experience: neither goodness nor wrath motivates men to seek God. Men refuse to repent, to humble themselves, and to seek Christ. The condition of these hearts is much like the people described by Paul in Romans 1:24ff wherein God gives men over to their own lusts. Paul appeals to the right side of the brain in his synthetic legal description of the condition of man’s heart. John appeals to the left side of the brain to stir our imagination about man’s true condition. Man’s heart is silicon carbide, sledgehammer hard.

One of the main lessons in the book is that no matter what methods God uses and no matter how severe his punishments or how powerful the facts of the gospel are presented, unbelieving men remains unrepentant unless “God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:25). Journalists, congressmen, Hollywood celebrities, and college professors continue their mockery of Christianity. Their flippant assaults and hatred of Christ staggers the mind. The problem is not the preacher’s preaching, but man’s Kevlar heart. Only grace can unlock the sealed vault in man’s inner being.

As I was making notes on this section of the book, the US military was cornering Al Queda insurgents in the Mountain of Tora Bora. I was amazed as the U.S. launched smart missiles, smoke bombs, and other tactical weapons against Bin Ladin’s forces. With all that smoke and thunder, the American military juggernaut could not compel the shrinking army to lay down arms. Like the U.S. army, God has an arsenal of powerful weapons to force men to repent. But, man’s heart is so hard he will not lay down his arms and bow the knee to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again, we see that John is appealing to the right side of brain, the emotional, creative side to stimulate man’s emotional nature—that is, to bring men to repentance. God has a thousand weapons to dislodge man from his material pursuits. Tragedy happens, not because God is cruel, but because men will not surrender to His duly installed King.

²⁵ Spider’s silk is the hardest substance known to man. It is ten times harder than Kevlar. One strand long enough to circle the earth would weigh less than 500 grams.

The tragedy of this chapter is not God's creative judicial forces, but that the hearts of men are unyielding; that mankind remains mule-headed in doing evil even while under the storm clouds of judgment. Though presented with many "infallible proofs" of the gospel, feminists and homosexuals and abortionists and pornographers and bankers and college professors and congressmen refuse to acknowledge the truth of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in history.

Luke 15:7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

2.6 The Second Interlude

2.6.1 Vision of the Angel on the Land and Sea

Revelation 10:1 And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire:

John presents another interlude before he introduces the seventh trumpet. The purpose of the interlude is to prepare the reader for the seventh trumpet and the final manifest judgment (10:7). It also prepares John as a divine instrument to announce that judgment. Likewise, it should prepare us to serve Christ in the midst of the intense opposition in our time.

The reader should note the role of angels in apocalyptic literature. "Another" distinguishes him from others before. Three times the term "mighty angel" is used.

From heaven: John was caught up to heaven in an ecstatic state. Now, the seer prophesizes as one who is on earth.

The angel: The angel is not Christ, though the symbols of a rainbow represent a type of glorification.

A cloud: Clouds are conceived of as vehicles by which heavenly messengers ascend and descend (Psalm 104:3; Daniel 7:13). It might also be a symbol of the divine presence.

Rainbow: The rainbow is a kind of headdress that represents divine faithfulness and mercy. This angel serves the covenant keeping God. The rainbow may be a reminder that God will never again totally destroy the earth, but will act in faithfulness to preserve life.

Face as the Sun: This brilliance and glory means the angel came from the presence of Jesus, and like Moses, radiates His glory. He comes with knowledge and perception.

Feet as pillars of fire: This is holiness, readiness to judge. Jesus' feet were like pillars of fire (1:15). It also reminds us of the pillar of fire which led Israel through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21) and the presence of God at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 24:10)). Thus, this angel is an instrument of judgement.

Revelation 10:2-3 And he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, And cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

A little book: This is a unique word. Before us is an open scroll in the left hand of the angel. Our eyes focus on the little book. What does it represent? Some place an emphasis on its smallness. Others see it as the Word of God. More specifically it could represent the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ which John must fully digest in order to be a witness to the nations. The gospel is little, but power-packed. It is little in the eyes of the world, but mighty in its influence.

The background to this theme may be Ezekiel's call where he was required to eat and digest his prophetic message (Ezekiel 2:9-3:3). Since John's terrible prophetic message of judgment has not yet reached its climax, devouring the little book is God's way of preparing John to deliver his fierce message.

The stance of the Herculean angel suggests he has a message of authority that encompasses the whole earth. He claims jurisdiction over land and sea. His message is global and applies to all men and all nations and all of man's institutions. The gospel is for all ethnic groups, tribes, and clans, not just the nation of Israel.

The voice of a lion is imagery for intensity, shock, and fear (Hosea 11:10; Jeremiah 25:30; Amos 1:2).

The seven thunders are undisclosed judgments—warnings of an impending judicial storm. Apparently, they are not written down. Not writing something down means they were not dispensed. Law must be written. If it is not written, it is not law. Likewise, judicial orders must be written. If they are not written, they do not come with the authority of the Court. God, in His mercy, knows that without grace, none would survive. If the LORD should mark iniquities, who would stand (Psalm 130:3)?

Revelation 10:4 And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

The voice is probably the voice of God.

To seal something is imagery designed to conceal the contents of the book. To not write something down is a symbol for withholding judgment. This informs us that even in wrath, God acts with restraint.

Revelation 10:5-6 **And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, And swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:**

Standing: This is a stance of allegiance. Standing upon land and sea symbolize the angel's authority (jurisdiction) over the whole earth. It may also speak of the nature of the message. The gospel must be proclaimed to all peoples.

Swearing: The angel takes an oath. Oaths are serious matters. God is serious about sin and repentance. Oaths bring glory to God for they confess that God is, sees, hears, and judges. The testimony is "time should be no more" or "there shall be no more delay." This is not a physical, chronological prediction about the end of the world, but an answer to the question, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"

The answer lies in the gospel. God will judge evil in this world, but God also uses the gospel to heal the nations. This gospel must be proclaimed to the whole world before the final judgment of mankind. God is serious about world evangelism. It is the duty of Christians to spread the gospel in every nation, city, and neighborhood. And, *if we are not fishing, we are not following.*

Revelation 10:7 **But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.**

But: The word "But" introduces a strong adversative. The end represents the fact that God's delay is finished. He has given men time to repent, and they have not yielded to His law-order. He will complete his judgment upon Christ-rejecting humanity.

In: Not "when" but "in" the day of the seventh angel the final scene will be unveiled. This verse may suggest that the testing period has been long and that the previous chapters have stretched over a lengthy period of time.

Mystery of God: A mystery is that which was hidden and then revealed to God's prophets. Maybe, John has in mind the book of Daniel 2:1ff. More likely, however, John has in mind the gospel of Christ. God's ultimate goal is to establish His kingdom on earth. Through the gospel, God is creating "sons of the kingdom" who will share in the dynamic reign of Christ. It is through the gospel that men are restored, healed, and made whole. However, the same Sun that melts the wax, hardens the clay. The gospel not only saves believers, it condemns non-believers

and exposes their ghastly fate (1 Peter 4:17). Some Christ-rejecters are judged in time; others await their appearance before the Throne.

Revelation 10:8 And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.

John is translated into an ecstatic state from earth and is ordered to take the scroll. The fact that the angel is gigantic is not of paramount importance as this is an apocalyptic scene. The point of the passage is that the message in this scroll is intended for John and the whole world. The terror of God's judgment is enough to knock the wind out of any man. John must receive additional strength to complete his prophetic mission.

Eating the Scroll

Revelation 10:9-10 And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

This scene represents John's reaffirmation to his prophetic ministry. Quite possibly, John was exhausted by the revelation of the judgments of God, and therefore, needed additional strength to complete his prophetic mission. He announced six of the trumpet plagues, but the seventh trumpet plague has yet to sound . . . and these judgments were only preliminary to the final act of judgment into history; i.e., they act as thunder and lightning before a crushing storm unleashes its fury.

Eating the scroll is imagery for completely digesting and comprehending the prophetic message. Ezekiel and Jeremiah received similar commissions (Ezekiel. 3:3; Jeremiah 15:16). The best preaching comes from seasoned preachers who have spent a lifetime digesting the Word of God. There is no substitute for briny preachers with knowledge, conviction, and character.

The sweetness and bitterness may **not** refer to the content of the revelation, that it was both bitter and sweet. Rather, it probably refers to the **prophet's reaction** to the message. It was a sweet thing to be close to God (Psalm 119:103), but bitter to be a prophet announcing the judgment of the Lord. The full counsel of God contains judgment as well as mercy. As John contemplated the judgment to come, the wrath of God gave him a kind of heartburn.

Those who proclaim the gospel must proclaim the complete will of God. Preachers do it with joy, for it is a privilege to minister His Word, but they must do it fearfully knowing that they too are subject to the high commands of the Creator. The gospel preacher announces the day of salvation for all who believe, but he also announces the day of wrath for all who disbelieve.

Unfortunately, it has become fashionable to preach only the love of God. Many churches have no stomach for holiness or sermons on hell. In fact, accurate Bible preaching is often bitter to those in the pew. Many prefer mango-peach, passion peck sermons to messages with greens and broccoli.

In the last 100 years, the whole idea of hell has been shunned, even vilified as a product of medieval mythology. Anglican Bishop J.D. Ryle said it this way:

A flood of false doctrine has lately broken in upon us. Men are beginning to tell us "that God is too merciful to punish souls for ever . . . that all mankind, however wicked and ungodly . . . will sooner or later be saved." We are to embrace what is called "kinder theology," and treat hell as a pagan fable . . . This question lies at the very foundation of the whole Gospel. The moral attributes of God, His justice, His holiness, His purity, are all involved in it. The Scripture has spoken plainly and fully on the subject of hell... If words mean anything, there is such a place as hell. If texts are to be interpreted fairly, there are those who will be cast into it . . . The same Bible which teaches that God in mercy and compassion sent Christ to die for sinners, does also teach that God hates sin, and must from His very nature punish all who cleave to sin or refuse the salvation He has provided. God knows that I never speak of hell without pain and sorrow. I would gladly offer the salvation of the Gospel to the very chief of sinners. I would willingly say to the vilest and most profligate of mankind on his deathbed, "Repent, and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be save." But God\ forbid that I should ever keep back from mortal man that scripture reveals a hell as well as heaven...that men may be lost as well as saved (Anglican Bishop J.D. Ryle, about 100 years ago, quoted in The Berean Call, April, 1993).

Revelation 10:11 And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.

After John digested the message, the Lord re-commissions John to his prophetic ministry. Strengthened by the Holy Scriptures, God clarifies his duty: "Prophesy again . . ." John's commission is also the church's commission.

How can the church possess the energy and vitality needed to proclaim salvation and judgment to many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings? Only by digesting the Word of God and accurately maturing in the gospel of Jesus Christ! The evangelist must not only know the gospel, but be completely motivated by it. He is not permitted to alter the message in order to be politically correct. He must preach the whole counsel of God, even that which is bitter to the tastes of modern man.

"The LORD trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright" (Psalm 11:5-7)

“God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready” (Psalm 7:11,12).

2.6.2 Measuring the Temple

There is probably no passage in Revelation that is more difficult to interpret than the one before us. The tension between the literal and the symbolic, between preterists and futurists, between dispensationalism and reformed theology are readily apparent as one peruses the literature on this chapter.

In a book full of symbols, the presumption is always in favor of the symbolic rather than forced literalism. Interpreting the symbol is the approach taken in this interpretation. Now, this is not to say the Bible is not to be taken literally or that this passage does not have a literal message. We must see apocalyptic language as a vehicle to communicate literal truth—but the symbol is not the reality. It is not “spiritualizing” the message when that message comes through the vehicle of symbols and icons. The narrative portions of Scripture should be interpreted literally. The figurative or apocalyptic portion of Scripture uses a different hermeneutic. Thus, it is the task of the Bible student to interpret the symbols before us in this chapter.

For a more detailed look at interpretive principles **see the Appendices: “Measuring the Temple and Interpretive Principles.”**

Revelation 11:1 And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.

John moves from being a spectator to becoming an actor in the pageant. John is called on to the stage and given a measuring stick like a rod (3 meters) and asked to measure the temple. Measuring a city in Biblical times was symbolic of the following:

- Symbolic of divine protection (Zechariah 2:1-5).
- Symbolic of divine appointment (Ezekiel 40-43).
- Symbolic of destruction (2 Kings 21:13; Isaiah 34:11). That which was unmeasured was subject to destruction

The temple must be interpreted. The Jewish temple was destroyed in 70 AD.. Knowing the exact date the Book of Revelation was written would solve many interpretive problems—especially in this chapter. John said the Jews were of the synagogue of Satan. By this time, a powerful distinction existed between the believing church and the unbelieving Jewish community. The former would be true Israel and the latter would represent those “who call themselves Jews but are not” (2:9; 3:9). **John would have little interest in preserving the physical temple and Jewish institutions.**

The Greek word translated “temple” is *naos* which without exception in Revelation refers to the present heavenly temple (7:15; 11:19; 14:15,17; 15:5-6,8; 16:1,17) or to the temple of God’s presence in the age to come (3:12; 7:15; 21:22). In a book packed full of symbols, it is only reasonable to interpret the **temple as a symbol of the true church**, and not a literal, physical temple administered by unbelieving, Levitical priests? Why would anyone be interested in a cultic Jewish temple in Israel seeing that Jesus is the true priest and sacrifice qualifying us to enter Heavenly Jerusalem?

The altar is probably the incense altar. Even though there is only one altar in God’s mind, and this altar represents the saints as having access to God through prayer and worship. The two altars of the earthly temple were separated in order to clarify and distinguish two aspects of truth. The measuring of worshippers is God’s way of asking John to discern between the true and the false; between genuine faith and pseudo faith; between the true Israel (Christians) and those not of Israel (Christ rejecters).

In John’s vision, the measuring of the temple is a symbol of protection and preservation. Since the trumpet plagues announced a judgment on mankind, **the question about the safety and condition of the church must be answered in this interlude before the 7th trumpet sounds**. This section performs the same function as the first interlude between the opening of the 6th and 7th seal (chapter 7).

The true church is sealed and secure even though many members face martyrdom. Interestingly, **no measurements are given**. John is being asked to discern the spiritual dimensions of the true ecclesia and to separate the holy temple (the community of true Christians) from the profane outer court, “those who call themselves Jews but are not” (2:9; 3:9). Likewise, all Christians are called to discern the true temple and to separate it from all that is called “church” or “religion.”

Revelation 11:2 But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.

The outer court was not measured. The contrast is between the holy and the profane. The term “Gentiles” is a term of contempt. It represents the unbelieving world and those who refuse to repent (9:20-21). “Gentiles” (*goi*) would include “unbelieving Jews” who are members of the synagogue of Satan. Believing Gentiles are *de jure* members of the family of God and children of Abraham (Galatians 3:1-14). In Paul’s allegory, the Jews are identified with Hagar and Mt. Sinai (Galatians 4:25). This is God’s way of telling us there is a difference between the true and false; between believers and unbelievers; between saints and sinners; between old Israel and the New Israel; between true Jews and false Jews. The first category of people is close to God and spiritually alive. The second category is separated from God and spiritually dead. One group has the seal of God on their foreheads, the other has the mark of the Beast on their foreheads—a symbolic representation of citizenship.

Interpreted symbolically, **the temple represents the church**. Just as John was given an interlude between the sixth and seventh seal to communicate the safety and preservation of the church, there is an interlude between the sixth and seventh trumpet which communicates the will of God for the church militant. Some members will survive the persecution. Other members will suffer martyrdom. The church will ache, but it will prevail and succeed despite the threat of Roman persecution. The church will be safe in its hidden spiritual reality while suffering persecution and martyrdom. This truth would inspire confidence for those about to be thrown into prison or to suffer martyrdom.

The “holy city” is symbolic of believers, the church (Psalm 48; Isaiah 48:2; Matthew 27:53; Revelation 3:12; 20:9; 21:2, 10; 22:19). Jerusalem lost its claim to be a holy city when it crucified Christ. There is almost nothing holy about modern day Jerusalem as it is the home of unbelieving Judaism, Islam, and other Christ-rejecting cults. It is no more holy than Chicago or New York even though both contain many believers.

The forty-two months relate to (a) the three and half years when Jerusalem was trampled on by Antiochus from June 167 BC. till December 164 BC.; and (b) possibly the time Jerusalem was trampled on by the Gentiles in 70 AD. (Luke 21:24). The Gentiles represent “unbelievers” that trample all that is good making no distinction between the holy and the profane.

Unbelievers will continue to stomp on that which is holy throughout this present evil age until the return of Christ (Galatians 1:4). **This destruction is limited, and the true church is protected.** Time is relative and not literal here. Any attempt to set chronological dates based on time references in Revelation is vain seeing that it is a book packed with symbols and function more like a dream pageant than a chronological blueprint of the end times. In one sense, though so much applies to the original readers, the book is timeless deriving its power from general principles.

2.6.3 The Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:3 And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.

Who are these two witnesses? Futurists see these two witnesses as literal Moses and Elijah or representative of two apocalyptic Jewish preachers having the powers of Moses and Elijah that will allegedly appear during a supposed tribulation period.

The symbolic view understands these witnesses to typify the church’s missionary program. In the words of G.R. Beasley-Murray, "They represent the churches fulfilling their vocation to bear witness to Christ in the final time of tribulation," (Beasley-Murray, 1978, p. 178). The New International Bible Commentary says, "The two witnesses symbolize the entire worshipping community which bears collective witness to God and to God’s Christ" (Wall, 1995, p. 150).

John creates a symbolic universe for the original readers whereby they can connect God's great acts in Jewish history to their own time through the church.

Revelation introduced the martyr Antipas of Pergamos (2:13). He was called a "faithful witness" and was a representative of the church as a whole who had remained true to Christ's name. Perhaps this is how we should understand the two witnesses. Witnesses went two by two in the New Testament (Luke 10:1). Clothed in sackcloth features the humility and simplicity of these martyrs. God's people have always conducted the ministry with few resources leaning upon the power of the message as their hope of success.

The twelve hundred and sixty days are to the Christian gospel what the forty-two months are to Gentile profanity. Just as Gentiles will continue to trample on truth throughout this present evil age, gospel proclamation by the church will continue throughout this present evil age seeking to win converts, not by power and force, but by humble persuasion. The church's power is founded on truth, integrity, and the power of the Holy Spirit. Unlike the government or Islam which uses the sword to obtain allegiance, the church's weapon is the Word of God, the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Revelation 11:4 These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.

Futurists say these witnesses are eschatological figures. But, this interpretation literalizes the symbols and ignores the symbolic import of John's revelation.

John identifies these witnesses. His symbols take us back to the writings of Zechariah. In Zechariah, the two candlesticks are Joshua (the priestly institution) and Zerubbabel (the civil institution). These two witnesses are called "olive trees" and "candlesticks." Two was the number needed to establish the truth of a matter in Hebrew law. They have power from God to testify of the truth of God and power to condemn falsehood. The two witnesses are not eschatological figures, **but representatives of the Christian church that act as a prophetic voice in the midst of antagonist by calling men to repentance.** They proclaim possibility of regeneration (Joshua) and the certainty of judgment (Zerubbabel). These two representatives typify the church of Jesus Christ acting as a "pillar and ground of truth" (1 Timothy 2:15). They represent the churches fulfilling their vocation to bear witness to Christ during this present evil age (Kistemaker, 2001; Beasley-Murray, 1978).

The first century Christians struggled with Jews over the question: *Who are the true people of God?* The Jews expected Moses and Elijah to appear before the kingdom arrived in history—and come to them (the Jews) because they were God's favored ethnic group. Because of this controversy it was necessary for John to say something about these two Old Testament giants in terms of their relationship to the church. They belong to the church, the true Israel of God, and not the synagogue of Satan (Jews).

John implies that these two personages are to be associated with the church and not with **Judaism.** The Gospels are keen to connect the prophets with Christ, not the Jewish authorities! God sends John a message: The legal precepts of the Mosaic Law and the prophetic voice of the prophets have been transferred to the church, not unbelieving Israel! Unbelieving Jews belong to the synagogue of Satan (2:9; 3:9). God's work continues, **not** through Judaism, **but through Christianity!** Christians, not Jews, are the chosen people of God.

But the question, "*Who are the true people of God?*" continued through the early decades of the church. John as the only living apostle settles the issue. **The true people of God are the followers of Christ!** And, the true followers of Christ are now stewards of the Old and New Testament, Hebrew symbols, and the Abrahamic promises. History bear out this truth: the Word of God has been in the custody of the church for two thousand years.

Revelation 11:5 And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed.

These prophets are invincible until their mission is complete. An affront on these men of God is to invite divine-destruction. Likewise, a curse is pronounced on any nation that seeks to injure these witnesses; that is, a nation is blessed by its reception of the gospel through the church, and a nation will be cursed by its rejection of the gospel and its ill treatment of the church.

The punitive powers of the two witnesses are typically Jewish. The two witnesses are portrayed as coming in the power of both Moses and Elijah, two of the greatest prophets in the Hebrew nation. In John's symbolic universe he makes a connection between God's works in Jewish history and His acts through the church.

In the Old Testament, God promised he would send a new Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18). When Jesus, the new Moses came, He did not bring plagues, but mercy.

So how are we to understand the fire in this passage? Possibly, the "fire" represents the intensity of their witness against sin and against the world in order to bring men to repentance. The "fire" does not come from heaven as in Elijah's day, but "out of their mouth." It is easier to understand "fire" as prophetic preaching in the church than to see this as literal fire. The metaphor was used of Jeremiah's preaching: "I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes" (5:14). "Devoureth" could mean their audience would be "stricken with conviction." Truth slays men!

Many dispensationalists demur saying these men reflect the old dispensational order rather than New Testament order of grace. But, our Lord had some hard things to say to His generation. Both "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Both Christ and John spoke with salt on their tongues and garlic on their breath. Both used the hammer of truth and yet both were ministers of the gospel of grace. The whole idea that Christians are to have more syrup than chocolate factory

and can't speak with vinegar and greens offends the balance God seeks in our lives. After all, Christ called the disciples to be the "salt of the earth" not "sugar puffs" from the candy store.

"If any man hurt them," is John's way of calling the world to ultimate accountability to the gospel of Jesus Christ as proclaimed through His church's missionary program.

Revelation 11:6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

Elijah had power to shut the heavens; Moses had power to turn water into blood. Moses was the head of the Law and Elijah the head of the prophets. These two witnesses are invested with the power and authority of Moses and Elijah. Together these personages represent the powers of an interceding church to bear witness for truth in the midst of hostile forces. The power of Moses and the power of Elijah reside in the church which not only preaches the gospel of grace, but the relevance of God's law toward sinners.

There is a place for imprecatory prayers, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (6:10) but a "curse causeless shall not come" (Proverbs 26:2).

Revelation 11:7 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

Futurists identify the Beast as none other than Daniel's "little horn" that makes war with the saints and speaks against the Most High. Like Antiochus Epiphanes, the Seleucid king, the Beast will try to turn true Jews away from worshipping God. But, this view is most unacceptable because it seeks to interpret this section from a modern perspective instead of interpreting the passage from the viewpoint of the original readers.

The casualness of the Beast's first mention is worth noting. In one sense, the Beast needed no introduction. John's readers were already familiar with Satan's agent. The Beast is identified in chapter thirteen and is mentioned here for the first time. The readers in John's day understood the Beast to be Rome whose character was cruel and Satanic. The Beast "was, is, and is to come." We must keep in mind the "Beast" morphs its way through the chronicles of history; that is, at various times in the pageant of mankind, nations take on the characteristics of the Beast wherein governments and their sycophant media outlets become hostile to the church and its message.

The Beast declares war on the two witnesses, overcomes them, and then kills them. This is John's way of describing hostile governments that try to control and squash Christianity through sheer force and power. Rome executed many of the apostles. John wanted his readers to know

that the church will suffer persecution and death as they seek to represent Christ to unregenerate men. John is not predicting a certain period of martyrdom as much as he is stating a truth that will mark the Christian era. This truth is that faithful ministers will face terrible opposition and that some will pay the ultimate price for their loyalty to Christ.

“When they finish their testimony” may refer to (a) the invincibility of the church, or (b) the persecution of the church at various times in history, or (c) reference an end time persecution that will face God’s people. I understand this to refer to the historical reality that the church’s missionaries, in their witness for the gospel, will suffer persecution, even death. With rare exceptions, history is marked by godless kings who oppose God’s law-order and the authority of King Jesus. Refusing to bow to Scriptural authority, governments oppose, control, and even squash gospel proclamation.

Revelation 11:8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

The dead bodies of the two witnesses will lie exposed for public consumption and detestation. This announces the world’s hostility to the gospel. The goal of “Jews that are not” and god-government is the death of Christ and his representatives. The dead bodies are symbolic of persecution and martyrdom for the cause of Christ. This is God’s permissive will and a fact of Christian history—at times and in various parts of the world, Christians suffer martyrdom.

But, where is this city? Futurists see this as literal Jerusalem of the future. But, in John’s day carnal Jerusalem was all over the Mediterranean. However, this city is **not** geographical and spatial; rather, it is a **spiritual** and **logical**. There are only two cities. There is a holy city and the profane city; the city of God and the city of man.

“This city” represents the world and its hostile Christian sentiments. The locus of martyrdom could be on any street in any city of the world; that is, wherever Christians are slain, that place is carnal “Jerusalem” spiritually speaking.

For more on Jerusalem as a carnal city, see the **Appendices**: “Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt.”

Revelation 11:9-10 And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

Futurists see this as something to be literally fulfilled in the future using the marvels of modern technology, T.V. to broadcast live events. The bodies will lie exposed to decay for three days, possibly for the sake of aggrandizing the death of the two witnesses and possibly for the sake of

civil order. The indignity bares punitive intent. Futurists teach this will be a political scenario in the last days.

But, we must ask, “What possible meaning could the futuristic view have for the original readers?”

The “people and kindred and tongues” represent the world that is hostile to Christianity. John is telling us that the world will gloat over the murder of Christians much like Moslem drool over the beheadings of anyone. This hostility will continue throughout the entire age which is represented by the three and one half years.

John’s readers would understand Rome as the symbol of the world in their day. Rome persecuted Christians and reveled over the death of martyrs. The fact that the people of the earth rejoice demonstrates cloaked hostility the world has for the gospel.

Revelation 11:11-12 And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

The futurist say “the Spirit of life” is John’s way of connecting this to Genesis 2:7 inferring that this is a literal coming back to life and a literal resurrection of the two eschatological prophets. Futurists see this as a media event in the last days.

The symbolic approach sees this coming back to life as pointing to the ultimate victory of the church in a hostile world. Yes, the church will be attacked, but it will also be triumphant. That as Christ was resisted and crucified, his evangelists will be resisted and persecuted; that as Christ was victorious over death, the church will be triumphant over the anti-God forces; that as fear gripped the hearts of Jesus’ malefactors, fear will grip the hearts of the antichrists at the resilience and power of the church in its proclamation of the gospel.

What happened to Christ must happen to the church. Jesus was rejected. The more perfectly Christians follow the Lord, the more intense will be the hostilities against them. As Christ triumphed over death, the church will bounce back from persecution. The gospel will not be defeated. It will succeed. It will never be placed into the graveyard of religions.

Like Enoch, like Elijah, and like Jesus these prophets ascended into heaven--a stunning shock to their opposition. This is God’s way of communicating to martyrs that they will be safe and secure in the event the governments of the world attack and kill them. Death is not the end. It is merely an escalator into the presence of God.

2.6.4 The Great Earthquake

Revelation 11:13 And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The resurrection of the two witnesses plus the earthquake appears to be the very event that brings in the sheaves.

According to dispensationalists, this is the conversion of Israel. The symbolic approach understands this figuratively.

The earthquake is not geographic but political and spiritual. It is a shaking of the political order. The truth of the gospel will triumph over its opposition. Most of the world will disbelieve and face God's judgment. A few will believe the gospel and give glory to God. The remnant represents the living on earth. Many will acknowledge God, but will not repent. A few will express genuine repentance. This is John's way of telling us that broad is the way that leads to destruction and narrow is the way which leads to life.

2.6.5 The Seventh Trumpet and Third Woe

Revelation 11:14 The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

John communicates the will of God for the church in symbolic form. The church is the prophetic witness of the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and session of Christ at the right hand of God. The church boldly declares his authority is greater than the domination of Roman Empire. Many will die for this cause, but His flock as a whole will not be defeated. Revealing this truth, John renews his narrative and returns from the interlude back to the trumpets.

The first woe was the fifth trumpet. The second woe was the sixth trumpet. The third woe is the seventh trumpet. The seventh trumpet introduces the end of the end.

Revelation 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

Just as the seventh seal contained the seven trumpets, the seventh trumpet contains the seven bowl judgments; just as there was assurance of preservation before the opening of the seventh seal, there is assurance given before the sounding of the seventh trumpet. The six trumpets call men to repent because the seventh trumpet announces the opening of the Holy of Holies wherein the guardians of holiness carry the final blows of judgment on mankind.

How will God's rule be manifest on earth? The voices in heaven announce the end, yet the end has not yet been described. The theme is announced: the kingdom of God will intersect society in power destroying the polity of man to establish the rule of Christ. Christ's kingdom was manifest on earth where he defeated the enemies of God's people to bring them under the blessings of His

reign. Through His death, burial, and resurrection, Christ triumphed over Satan, sin, and death. Lifted up to the right hand of God, he reigns now as Lord and Christ (Acts 2:32). The gospel of the triumphant Christ works through the church creating “sons of the kingdom” who acknowledge Him as the de jure King.

The seventh trumpet appears to announce the end of history and the final judgment. But, the next scene in chapter 12 takes us back to Eve, to Israel as a nation, and the birth of Christ. John’s vision functions more like a dream void of logical sequence. Any attempt to take these visions out of the context of the first century and place them into some kind of explicit, sequential, mathematical, engineered end-time scheme result in a flawed eschatology.

You redeemed me, my King of kings,
You lifted me up on eagles’ wings,
You saved my soul by grace alone,
The wonder of salvation you made known.
What is good for me is good for men,
Your generous forgiveness of my sin,
Demands of me a different way,
With Christ my King from day to day.

2.6.6 Response of the Twenty-four Elders

Revelation 11:16 And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God,

We saw the twenty-four elders in chapter five. They are either angels who serve God or they represent God’s two groups of people: Old Testament and New Testament Saints. Together these twenty-four elders comprise believing Christian Jews and Gentiles who form the new Israel, the complete family of God; that is, they mirror this reality. They fall upon their faces and worship because Christ is now recognized by men as the *King of the Nations*. They model what all grateful men are called to do.

Revelation 11:17 Saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

With the trauma that is happening on earth, one might think that things are out of control, and that the Kingdom of God is obscured. Demonic forces are loosed and mankind is afflicted.

Where is God in this crisis? John answers. He reigns! He is Sovereign, but His rule from heaven can only be seen with the eye of faith.

The verbs are important here: The verb “hast taken” (ei;lhfaj) is a perfect tense indicating something done in the past with a continuing impact in the present. The verb “hast reigned” is an aorist indicating completed action. The Lord God Almighty reigns in and through His Son. His kingdom arrived in history in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Our Lord triumphed over man’s enemies through His death, burial, and resurrection. In ascending to the right hand of God on High, the Son reigns; that is, the Messianic reign has been inaugurated. His reign is not something future, but something that is occurring now by virtue of His exaltation to the Father’s right hand (Acts 2:36).

Revelation 11:18 And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

Anger: The pageant continues. While the church rejoices in the reign of the Lord Christ, the nations are angry because of gospel proclamation and the announcement of another king, King Jesus (Acts 17:6-7). In the gospel, God condemns man’s lawlessness and immorality. He commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). People object to God’s claim over them and insist on choosing their own morality, religion, and lifestyle. Because God stakes a claim on mankind, anger arises in the hearts of men. The nations revolt (Psalm 2). Now God’s wrath is at work ready to judge all who rebel against His authority.

See Psalm 2, B. Stockton, [Towards Exegetical Theology](https://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/forums/forum/biblical-insights/eschatology/), NikeInsights, <https://nikeinsights.famguardian.org/forums/forum/biblical-insights/eschatology/>

The time of the dead may mean to avenge the dead; that is, to punish those responsible for the death of the martyrs.

“**The time**” is not a specific hour in history but a period of time—the New Testament era. Three results of gospel proclamation are evident during this period: (a) Judgment: The gospel condemns unbelievers because of their rejection of Christ (John 3:36); (b) Reward: The gospel vindicates the faith of the saints because it affirms righteousness and godliness; and (c) Destruction: the judgment that defeated Satan at the cross continues through this age and will culminate when Christ returns to Earth.

Described is the Old Testament view of the dual facts of the kingdom--the refiner’s fire for the rebel and salvation for the righteous. God’s people are called “servants,” “saints,” and “those that fear.”

“**Servants**” seems to refer to those who were faithful unto death.

“The prophets” refer to those ministers of Christ who preach the gospel with clarity and conviction.

“Fear thy name” refers to the followers of Christ.

There is no universal salvation in this verse. The hostility of the nations is epitomized by John’s generation, but is also reflected in our time. Judgment is announced. Each man needs to repent. The gospel not only announces salvation, it announces judgment. The God of love is also the God of justice.

Destroy the earth: Environmentalists can find a claim in this section for their work. One of the sins of mankind mentioned in this text is destroying “the earth”—a violation of the laws of nature: chem trails, pollution, careless waste management, and irresponsible capitalism come to mind. But, this may also refer to political matters. “To destroy the earth” may refer to man’s bloody wars, destruction of property, and the horrible human suffering that accompanies military occupation. The bombing of Dresden by the Allied Forces during WWII reflects this condemnation.

2.6.7 The Conflict of the Ages

Revelation 11:19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

This is the introduction to chapter 12.

The temple of God was opened: This symbolic language would be understood by every Jew. The ark represents the presence of God. It contained His Testament, the Law. Lightning and thunder are symbols of divine justice and power. With no blood on the mercy seat representing the unsaved, the only expectation is the fearful fact of judgment. But, John does not take us to the end of history. Rather, he exposes the awesome power of God displayed within history at Bethlehem.

This holy temple in heaven is the true temple and exists in contrast to the carnal temple in Jerusalem which was destroyed in 70 AD.

John again announces the end, but the end does not come. Instead, John tells a story in mythological tradition depicting the terrifying conflict of the ages. This vision describes the final climatic struggle between good and evil and how the rule of God will be realized on earth in and through the birth of His Son. After Satan failed to destroy the promised seed through corruption and assassination, Satan now turns his wrath against the rest of the woman’s offspring.

God’s reign was proclaimed in the previous chapter. The question is, “How will God’s rule be manifest on this planet?”

Lightening and thunder: This vision reveals how the kingdom of God assumes ascendancy on earth. The blinding electrical storm and crackling thunder and vibrating voices and rippling earthquake and bone-crushing hail proceeding from the temple of God is none other than the “arm of the LORD” (Isaiah 53:1), the tender shoot, the meek and holy Savior born in Bethlehem. **God’s Christmas Storm** emerges from the Holy of Holies with majestic holiness and tender mercy to confront sin and evil.

2.7 The Woman and the Dragon

Revelation 12:1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

The conjunctive “and” connects this vision to the intense storm brewing in the Holy of Holies (11:19). Christ coming into history was a cyclone--a massive, discharge of unyielding holiness and pure love swelling with divine energy like giant electric capacitors in the sky.

A woman: The vision is a mythological presentation of spiritual truth. We see a woman, the sun, the moon, stars, a child, and a huge, ugly red dragon in cosmic proportions. The woman is Eve and Israel and Mary and humanity combined into one.

“Clothed with the Sun” speaks of her royal splendor and honor. Israel was heaven’s beautiful princess who gave birth to God’s downpour of love in Christ. With the moon under her feet, Israel became the hope of humanity. Only she could bring forth the Champion that could defeat the powers of darkness.

The Sun appears to represent Joseph’s father, the moon is Joseph’s mother, and the stars Joseph’s brethren, the twelve tribes of Israel.

And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it his brethren, and said, Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance to me (Genesis 37:9)

Revelation 12:2 And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be deliverer.

The “she” is the nation of Israel.

What a scene! We hear blood-curdling cries shrieking from a woman in the final stages of labor. She is alone, doubled over in pain clutching her midsection ready to give birth. But, it is worse than this. This woman is on the run, bleeding, seized by labor pains, and searching for a safe place to deliver a child—alone! Could anyone be more vulnerable?

Revelation 12:3 And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

Red dragon: John looks up and sees a horrible sign that causes his legs to tremble. The lonely woman agonizing with powerful contractions is being stalked by an adversary—a gigantic, hungry, hideous red dragon—a monster that wants to eat her baby. Could anything be more terrifying?

The beautiful serpent in Genesis has become the repulsive, ugly dragon in Revelation. The massive monster is a grotesque Beast with seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

To John' audience the seven heads speak of nations under Satan's control which he used to terrify humanity. The dragon is the serpent, Satan, Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome rolled into one. The ten horns speak of smaller jurisdictions, and seven crowns speak of raw political authority and power. Rome comes to mind.

To us, the Beast is a symbol of the twisted instruments of sin and evil as exercised through powerful governments and their corrupt institutions to enslave men and to crush the truth of the gospel.

Revelation 12:4-5 And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. And she brought forth a man-child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.

Before us is the imagery of a mammoth, cosmic confrontation between good and evil. So destructive is this red behemoth that it destroys a third of the stars with one whip of his massive, thorny tail. With sticky saliva dripping from his grey bulging lips, the sniffing dragon stalks the pregnant woman eager to devour her wet, wrinkled newborn child while still connected to her body with the umbilical cord. He comes to "steal and destroy." The woman is Eve-Israel-Mary who gives birth to the Messiah, and the red dragon is Satan who seeks to devour Him.

Historically, Satan attempted to destroy the Messianic line. Cain, Pharaoh, Jezebel and others were Satan's instruments to annihilate the promised Seed. Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Persian, and Greece were savage military machines that ravaged the nation. The conquest of Israel by these alien powers made it difficult to maintain the nation's purpose, probity, and purity.

The birth of Jesus is viewed in universal, cosmic dimensions—the contest of the ages. The quiet, pastoral scene with sheep, goats, and cows on a peaceful night in a shepherds stable in Bethlehem is obscured by the hunter's chase behind the scenes. Before us is a deadly pursuit by a

dreadful monster—like a new born lamb in the pit of a python on a dark, cold night. In labor, the woman appears so alone. Helpless without assistance of another caring human being, the growling, sniffing monster prowls through the forest eager to rip the baby from the birth canal.

Despite the miserable conditions, the woman gives birth. The child born is the Ruler of the nations the political Enemy of this ugly dragon. The baby is God’s terrifying electrical Storm, His bone-crushing Hail, His crackling Message to humanity, His rippling Earthquake, and His deafening Thunderbolt from God’s sky to Earth. This baby is destined to rule the nations with a rod of iron and to smash them to pieces . . . and to kill the red monster (Psalm 2:1).

Like a dream, the story changes dramatically. Suddenly, the child is snatched from the clutches of the dragon and “caught up to God and to His throne.” This is John’s way of telling us that Jesus’ purity and obedience was rewarded by a promotion to sit at the right hand of God as Christ and Lord (Acts 2:36). Having defeated the trilogy of evil (Satan, sin, and death), the Lord Jesus is exalted in God’s presence as the Messianic King and Savior of His people.

He is the Ruler of the Nations by virtue of His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension to the throne of Almighty God. The rule was announced as a completed fact in chapter eleven, verse seventeen (note the perfect; and the aorist verbs). Now we see how that rule developed in history. The Babe of Bethlehem is the King of kings, and Lord of Lords.

2.7.1 The Woman’s Flight

Revelation 12:6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.

Again, like a dream, the plot in the drama suddenly shifts. The sniffing, hungry dragon arrives too late. The woman has disappeared in the fog fleeing into the desert. This scene reminds us of Israel escaping from Pharaoh to find safety in the wilderness. The lonely, uninhabited region of the desert is viewed as a place of rest from the pursuing red dragon. The desert, not the city, has always been the locus of God’s salvation.

2.7.2 Victory in Heaven

Revelation 12:7-9 And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Michael: The combatants are Michael’s angelic army on one side and the huge ugly red dragon and his troops on the other. The location of this war is in heaven. This war is not merely behind

the scenes of history, but history itself—the conflict between good and evil, the kingdom of light verses the kingdom of darkness, God v. Satan.

John identifies the dragon. He is the old serpent, the Devil, Satan, the Deceiver, the leader of hostile, rebel demonic forces who deceive humanity regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“**Cast out**” is John’s way of saying the battlefield has shifted from heaven to earth. Like a barroom brawl, the fight is taken outside into the street.

Revelation 12:10-11 **And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.**

A loud voice: amid this terrifying war, God delivers a message of hope to men. Like the roar of giant waterfall, John hears a thundering voice. There is a gospel message here for mankind:

Salvation has come to men by virtue of Christ’s death, burial and resurrection.

Strength: “strength” (dynamis) is the power God that was present in Christ defeating man’s enemies: Satan, sin, and death.

The kingdom of God has come; that is, the rule of God has been manifest on earth in and through the Son. Since Christ spoiled Satan, the kingdom arrived in history (Matthew 12:28).

Power: The term “power” (exousia) refers to authority. As the Son, Christ had authority over demons, disease, blindness, deformity, and over the grave. Before His death, our Lord claimed authority over all men (John 17:2). As the ascended Savior, all authority in heaven and earth is given to him (Matthew 28:18). He is the “king of King and Lord of lords,” the Prince of the kings of the earth (1:5). And, it was this message that turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6-7).

The kingdom of God is the rule of God. Christ is on the throne ruling the affairs of humanity with a view to defeating Satan in order to bring men under the blessings of his kingdom. The word “power” means authority. All authority, in heaven and earth, has been transferred to Christ. His rule is not something to be revealed during an alleged millennium, but active in history since His ascension into heaven.

Satan is called the “accuser of the brethren.” Visualize the Spoiler standing in a high court as a public prosecutor before the Judge seeking to persuade him to condemn, denounce, and sentence Christians to a life of misery: “Look at those people and what they do. They are lazy, errant, despicable sinners. They don’t deserve any of your love or favor. Punish them!” Due to our

Advocate, all charges by the Accuser of the brethren become claims upon which relief cannot be granted. Christ paid for our sins at Calvary (1 John 2:1-2).

Satan is cast down. The expulsion of Satan from heaven is the antithesis of the ascension of Christ to the throne. The former was rejected; the later gladly received! Satan's defeat began with Christ's first coming at the cross (John 12:31), not his second coming. No longer is Satan able to deceive the whole world. By virtue of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, Satan was cast out of heaven. Satan no longer works from a position of power (heaven), but is forced to an inferior position (earth) where he defends what is left of his kingdom. Satan no longer acts as a victor in heaven but a spoiler on earth.

Blood: The saints overcome Him by **the blood of the Lamb**. It is true that sins are real and offensive to a Holy God. Sinners are in need of redemption. They must be purchased and the debt must be paid. But, the "blood of the Lamb" declares victory. The sins of believers are paid for with blood – "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:19) -- the currency of the spirit world.

Believers have power to claim heaven's blessings of forgiveness and justification (Hebrews 10:19). The basis of salvation is blood on the altar. Sinners are dirty, but the blood cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7). Believers are declared righteous not because of any good they have done, but because of the good Christ has done. They are more than victors because their Representative obeyed the law for them. They are more than conquerors because their King engaged the trilogy of evil on behalf of His people and crushed their power. Christians are more than champions because their Representative died for their sins making it possible for transgressions to be stricken from the record in the High Court of Heaven. They do not stand on their own merits, but the merits of Him who received Heaven's "well done!"

"Loved not their lives unto death" means that these believers chose devotion to Christ over fame and fortune; allegiance to Christ over allegiance to the State; obedience to God's law over submission to man's codes, statutes, and executive orders. They did not make an idol out of life or bills passed by the Roman senate. Faithfulness to Him was more important than escaping from the corridor of condemnation before earthly judges.

Before us is an ideal. Every Christian should be willing to live for Him or die for Him. We love life, promote life, preserve life, but we must not fall into the humanistic error and idolize life. If we die, we have a home in heaven. Some things are more important than gold, more important than life itself—the faith and principles that guide a man's life (1 Peter 1:5-7).

It was this gospel that was established by Christ and proclaimed by the apostles in the 1st century. Though Satan lost the war legally against our Lord, he renews that war among God's children.

2.7.3 The War Renewed on Earth

Revelation 12:12 Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.

Rejoice: The voice now commands a response to the accomplishments of Christ. “Rejoice” is the soaring response required. Those who dwell in heaven by virtue of owning Christ as their Representative now have a reason to sing—their debt is discharged and their nakedness is covered with robes of righteousness. The proper response to the gospel is celebration! *Satan’s great work among men is to rob them of joy. Christ’s great work is to restore it.* We must probe ourselves and claim it by faith. Yes, Gentiles, “Rejoice with His people” that you are part of the commonwealth of Israel. But, rejoicing is hard. The Apostle Paul has to exhort himself to “rejoice” So important is this response, he repeats the command twice to Christians: “‘Rejoice’ in the Lord always:’ and again I say, ‘Rejoice’” (Romans 15:10; Philippians 1:18; 4:4).

The word “dwell” is in the present tense and is translated “tabernacle.” It refers to Christians whose domicile is in heaven, not on earth. There are two classes of people: citizens of heaven and citizens of earth; citizens of the kingdom of God or citizens of this earth.

Inhabiters of the earth: This term refers to those who love the frivolous, sensual, superficial, one-dimensional, cosmetic, silly, empty, trivial, shallow character of this age; that is, those who feel at home among idolaters, fornicators, queers, feminists, and blasphemers.

Woe: This is not a wish, but a fact. There is no joy for unbelievers. Woe comes those who love this earth and the idols of this age.

Earth: Again, the battle has moved from heaven to earth. Apparently, Satan’s principle dwelling is in heaven, but now his sphere of activity is transferred to Earth. Earth, not hell, is the antithesis of heaven. There is joy in heaven over this transfer. This joy is much like seeing the classroom bully transferred to another school. But there is a woe connected with it. Woe to the inhabitants of the Earth. The bully is on your playground.

Short time: Defeated and filled with anger, Satan resumes the battle. He knows his time is short. The “time” here is not chronological calculations of minutes, days, months, and years, but “short” in relation to dominion. Previous to the Christ event, Satan’s control went unchallenged. But now, his authority has been cropped and pruned insuring his eventual doom. Through gospel proclamation, Satan loses control of much of humanity. His influence in history is diminished through gospel preaching. At the end of the Christian era, Satan will apparently have a brief surge and will resume his deception. Then, at the end the era, Satan’s work will be totally destroyed (20:10).

Revelation 12:13-14 And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given

two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

Persecuted the woman: The woman is Israel, Eve, and Mary rolled into one. By virtue of Christ's doing and dying for sinners, the dragon suffered defeat in heaven. Unable to conquer Christ, Satan resumes the conflict to persecute the woman and her offspring. She represents humanity and Israel. The pageant exposes Satan's persecution of ancient Israel because Israel is the mother of Messiah.

Wings speak of flight and the wilderness speaks of uninhabitable regions of the earth, a place of safety. Satan's stalking provokes a fight or flight response; and, in this case flight. The imagery reminds us of Israel's departure into the desert after being pursued by Pharaoh's armies. The drama is one of escape, protection, and preservation. The symbol of evil changes from a dragon to a serpent. The hideous dragon is now identified as the colorful serpent of the Garden of Eden.

The time, times and half a time refer to 42 months or three and one-half years. During the time of King Ahab and Elijah, Elijah and the godly remnant were pursued and persecuted by Jezebel (religiously) and Ahab (civilly) so that only seven thousand followers were left in the northern kingdom. Thus, the 3 ½ years is a reference to a period of persecution of the church by Satan using Rome as its agent – not unlike the period of Ahab and Elijah (1 Kings 17; James 5:17; 1 Kings 18:10, 13).

Revelation 12:15-16 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

The imagery of disgorging is descriptive of stalking, tracking, and precise persecution. The whole idea is of entrapment; to overwhelm the victim. The first attempt at destroying the nation and its Messianic mission failed. Historically, the fact that Israel was scattered among the nations insured her protection. The fact that the earth helped the woman could refer to the geographical relocation of the scattered tribes making a complete holocaust impossible.

Revelation 12:17 And the dragon was wrath with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Remnant of her seed: Foiled at destroying ancient Israel and Israel's Messiah, Satan's anger is roused to new heights. More determined than ever, the dragon regroups and plots his destruction against the woman's children. Her children are identified as the "remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Christ."

Her seed is the remnant of Israel, Jews and Gentiles who have come to trust in Israel's Messianic Savior. We identify her seed as the church, spiritual Israel, the true Israel of God, or the followers of Christ. Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven to the church, not to unbelieving Jews. The church, not the "Jews," are the true people of God. Christians, not Jews, are now the target of Satan's blows. Christianity, not Judaism is the great enemy of Satan. Unbelieving Jews and Gentiles are now the Devil's agents for squashing gospel proclamation among the nations.

John helps his readers understand the nature of the conflict they were about to experience under Rome's strong hand. In this scene in the pageant, the original readers have now become part of the great conflict between heaven's Prince and hell's red dragon. Their suffering is due to their allegiance to Christ and their persecutors have become instruments of the Serpent to inflict pain and misery on their lives.

Likewise, we should not be surprised at the world's animosity toward Christians. Being a follower of Christ is not politically correct. Insisting that Jesus is the only way to the Father tastes like chalk to liberal men. This battle rages in government schools which have replaced "Merry Christmas" in favor of "Happy Holidays." Gone are the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. In its place is the Pledge of Allegiance and "Mary had a Little Lamb." The media seems dedicated to put Christians in the most negative light possible while referring to cultic Jews from a positive viewpoint. Consider the song lyrics by Deicide, a metal band, published in 2003:

"Kill The Christian / You are the one we despise / Day in day out your words
compromise lies / I will love watching you die / Kill the Christian / Kill the
Christian . . ." ²⁶

The lack of outrage by the media from such lyrics is deafening. In the public's mind, it is O.K. to kill Christians. The Earth will be better off without them. Thus, our modern day wars against Christmas and Easter are merely a continuation of the war announced in this chapter. Whether it be by the American media or Moslems or politicians, Christians are in the cross hairs of antichrists. Be encouraged, the Savior reigns and Satan will not prevail in this conflict.

In the next chapter we see the instrument Satan uses to crush Christianity and to multiply misery among men.

2.8 The Beast and His Followers

²⁶ Retrieved from <http://www.mp3lyrics.org/d/deicide/kill-the-christian/>

2.8.1 The First Beast

Revelation 13:1 And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy.

The sea: John was in heaven. Now, John is on the earth standing by the sea. Like a dream, his location suddenly shifts. The cosmic battle between the red dragon and the seed of the woman (chapter 12) has moved from heaven to earth (13:1). The dragon calls the Beast out of the sea.

A Beast: John saw (aorist) a Beast coming out of the sea. The sea is a symbol of the restless current of politics. Out of this surf and foam arises a grotesque monster. This political entity is presented in ancient mythological imagery. The monster has seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns. On his heads are blasphemous names. Birthed by the hideous dragon in chapter twelve, this behemoth stomps through history stalking the sons of God. The gigantic monster is Satan's instrument to enslave men and crush the gospel message. Taking the form of a serpent to tempt the first man and woman, Satan's baby snake has grown into huge, hideous red dragon who takes the form of a colossal Beast to control the rest of humanity. The difference between the dragon and the Beast is the difference between spirit and form. The dragon is Christ's archenemy, Satan. The Beast is the corpus of Satan; i.e., human institutions, particularly human government controlled by maniacs and psychopaths. To the original readers, the Beast was Rome.

Seven heads: John interprets the symbols for us. The seven heads are seven kingdoms. The ten horns are 10 kings (Chapter 17). Possibly, John's creature is related to the great kingdoms that dominated God's people in ancient Israel. Some see the seven heads as the adversarial kingdoms of Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Caird (1966) understands the seven heads as seven Caesars. Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Vespasian, and Titus were officially declared divine. Futurists see this creature as a Super-Antichrist. Certainly the Caesars took on blasphemous names such as *augustus*, *theo* (god), *kyrious* (Lord), and *soter* (Savior). There is little doubt that the manifestation of the Beast in John's day referred to Rome with its legionnaires and cohorts stationed around the Mediterranean.

My understanding is that the seven heads represent multiple manifestations of political opposition to the gospel. The Beast was before John's time, was present in John's time, and will be present until the end of this age (17:8). This monster represents political institutions that unleash the force and effect of law to squash the gospel. In Hezekiah's day, the Beast was Assyria. In John's day, it was Roman rulers opposed to Christians in Asia Minor.

In our day, the Beast represents those government institutions that oppose the gospel. Bolsheviks, communists, democracies, and Islamic governments in the Middle East are obvious instruments of the Devil which could be easily labeled as "the Beast." Even today, lusty politicians sit in positions of power in Congress, in the courts, and on the boards of education

ready to squash any representation of Christianity. When an entire nation culls Scripture reading in the class room, and replaces it with the doctrines of feminists, atheists, psychologists, and evolutionists, is not Satan working through the system?

Revelation 13:2 And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

Four Beasts: The imagery is similar to that of Daniel's vision (Daniel 2 & 7) where he saw four Beasts representing the political powers of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome. As Daniel's friends experienced persecution from the Babylonian State, the Christians in Asia Minor faced persecution from the Roman State.

Daniel's big message was that God's people will be subjected to the cruel powers of the anti-God forces until the kingdom of God arrives in history.

John wants his readers to know that the difficulties they were experiencing from civil rulers in the Roman Empire were due to Satan's grip on human institutions. Behind the punishing political policies of Rome perched a demonic spirit, the red dragon, Satan himself.

Dragon: Satan empowered the monster which John describes as the hideous the dragon. He appears to have absolute authority on earth. The Beast is an entity or an institution, a political system with tyrannical powers, and not a single political figure. To John there were many antichrists. Rome was just another form of the Beast. Whatever or whoever the Beast is, the imagery is set in direct contrast to the Holy Trinity. The inhabitants of heaven worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The inhabitants of Earth worship the unholy trinity: Satan, the first Beast, and the second Beast. The spirit is Satan; the form and substance of opposition comes from government institutions.

Because this image expresses a general principle of satanic opposition, we may expect multiple manifestations of satanically inspired political systems throughout history. The Beast, therefore, represents despot rulers that demand absolute allegiance by its citizenry. Before us grows a State that seeks the total subjugation of the total man to total government.

Revelation 13:3-4 And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?

Wounded: One of the strange aspects about this monster is the wound in his head that was healed. Is the death representative of physical death or political death? Interpreters disagree on what John means by this death-wound. The wound that was healed refers to some kind of power restored.

Preterists understand this phenomenon to be the Nero-revival myth. Nero committed suicide in 68 AD. A rumor arose that this infamous emperor survived, was alive, and hiding in the empire seeking the time and place to take revenge. Resilient Rome seemed to survive all threats.

Futurists take this wound literally and see a future Antichrist who will appear to rise from the dead. When President John Kennedy was assassinated, many futurists thought Kennedy was the Antichrist and that he was the one who was going to recover from a literal head wound. These kinds of contemporary speculations would have no application and provide no comfort to John's audience.

The Reformed camp tends to see the Beast as papal power that revitalized the Roman Empire for a thousand years.

Another view interprets "one of the heads" and its death-wound as a political death with a political recovery. Beastly nations seem to live and die, they appear and reappear in history. John may have a particular nation or Caesar in mind. Possibly, we do not have enough information to be dogmatic. Whatever is meant by the wound that was healed (evqrapeu,qh), this healing appears to be in juxtaposition to the resurrection of our Lord.

Wonder: The world responded with wonderment (evqaua,sqh). How could anyone worship such an ugly hideous monster? He not only terrorizes people into submission, his counterfeit healing attracts worshippers — possibly a political miracle.

By worship (proseku,nhsan), John means allegiance, loyalty, servitude. Every municipality wanted to contract with Rome. The political monster exercises political power and captures the loyalty of men and diverts them from devotion to Christ. The Beast rules with convincing authority. Few feel they can successfully resist his military muscle. Rome appeared invincible. When evil becomes institutionalized, what single individual has the power to confront and correct the abuse and overreach of government? This support of absolute government and use of force to create a utopian society is called "statism."

John may be referring to oriental emperor worship prevalent in the empire. Rome always struggled with factions. The emperor cult united the provinces. Early gladiators would say, "Hail Caesar, we who are about to die for thee . . ." But, to the early Christians, this was a clear warning: *to worship the emperor was to worship the dragon*. Loyalty to Caesar was treason to Christ. Likewise, those who put their trust in government will be crushed under a mudslide of disappointment (Psalm 118: 8, 9).

Have you noticed what a big part government plays in American life? It's as if the American media has made a god out of government? Politicians and media view the State as the solution for ALL man's problems. Big problems call for big government. Many have an idolatrous view

of government talking about it day and night. When all hope is in Washington D.C., idolatry reigns! Statism reigns! Satan reigns!

[Note: Statism exists where people believe in the necessity of a centralized government that creates its own laws to control society and commerce. Terms like “our government,” “my president,” “our leader,” “our military,” “leader of the free world,” “new world order,” “we are the government,” “it’s the law,” “everyone has to pay taxes,” “we need to make the world safe for democracy,” “our commander and chief,” “the good of society,” “for the children,” “paying taxes is a civic duty,” “diversity is a strength,” “let us say the Pledge of Allegiance,” “everyone needs to pay their fair share,” and “we owe it to ourselves” are propaganda phrases used by statisticians to recruit tithing worshippers for the State.]

Revelation 13:5 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

Speaking great things: One of the unique features of this Beast is its oratory skills and its ability to attract a following. Its policies are not anti-religious, but they are opposed to the gospel. “Blasphemes” refer to his hostility against the true God. Possibly, the apostle wants his readers to beware of State propaganda. John wanted his audience to know that Satan was now empowering his progeny—Rome. The masses in the empire appear to offer blind allegiance to the Beast, but not so with Christians.

Forty-two months equals 1260 days. Futurists see this as the 3 1/2 year reign of a future antichrist. Hendriksen sees this as the gospel age (p. 147). Another view understands the 42 months as representing a limited time. Every evil political system has an end. It is not the will of God that humanistic governments succeed. The State’s authority is limited. Satan’s ability to persecute the church is limited. Historically, Rome’s persecution of Christians was not universal. During Domitian reign (81-96), his persecutions lasted only a short time.

There can be no doubt that the Beast is Rome! But, the Beast morphs its way through history and governments of every age adopt certain characteristics of Rome; that is, when Christians find themselves under secular, humanistic regimes which promote evil and oppress the gospel, the lessons of this chapter must be applied to their particular political quagmire.

Revelation 13:6-7 And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

Blasphemy: The word “blaspheme” (blasfhmi,aj) refers to contemptible speech—lies, propaganda, disputation, and slander. St. John wanted his readers to know that Rome opposed God’s law order. The object of this hostility is God’s heavenly dwelling and God’s true people

on earth (Christians). Government has to compete for the affections of the people, and religion is often viewed as a fierce competitor with the State. State propaganda covert operations are an effective tool to destroy the people's trust in Deity. Slander Christ, His gospel, and Christians . . . and the simple minded gobble up the lies like sugar ants on honey.

In reference to the early Christians, Francis Schaffer said they were put to death not because they were Christians, but because they were deemed *atheists*. Because they would not worship Caesar, Christians were labeled infidels. Furthermore, because Christian churches would not incorporate and surrender to the jurisdiction of Caesar, Rome watched over Christians with an evil eye. The Beast demanded absolute allegiance. When Christians confessed another king, King Jesus, they were labeled as traitors and charged with treason (Acts 17:6-7). Imperialistic Rome had little tolerance for dissent.

This hostility can be seen in our day in countries where Moslems demand a pure Islamic State and a pure application of sharia law. Governments are run by clerics and mosques are funded by the State. Dissension is not allowed. Conformity is required. Preaching of the gospel is forbidden. Conversion is a crime. Churches are burned, and Christians are beheaded. Saudi Arabia is as hostile to Christians as Rome ever was. Even in America, there are humanistic, Zionistic elements in our society attempting to eradicate every reference to Christ in public life. All the government has to do is announce to the media that they are investigating a "radical, right wing, Christian anti-government" church, and every household immediately sympathizes with the State.

One pastor was ordered to take cultural sensitivity classes after he visited a nursing home and asked an atheist woman if she would mind if he prayed for her. In March 2009, the Missouri Independent Analysis Centered labeled Christians, homeschoolers, constitutionalists, and people who flew the American flag as "domestic terrorists." The State will not attack Christianity directly. If it wants to silence political opponents, slander is the government's weapon of choice. And, it works!

To the early Christians, Rome's war against "the atheists" meant that Christians had to choose between allegiance to Rome or allegiance to Christ. They could not be neutral. To submit was to fail. The choice was between loyalty to Christ and risk offending the State, or pledging allegiance to the State and risk offending the Lord.

Even today in some parts of the world, believers have to make this same choice as beastly governments wage war against kingdom proclamation.

Revelation 13:8 And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

To “ **dwell upon the earth**” refers to worldly men who see the earth as their home or legal domicile. They are earthly minded, not heavenly minded. Possessing ambitions that are here and now, they lack any God-consciousness.

“**Worship**” refers to the “earth dweller’s” devotion to the State. The Beast is popular. He has a following. People trust the Beast. Democracy triumphs. The inhabitants of the earth, those who do not know God, pledge allegiance to this system. Worship here refers to contracts with Rome wherein municipalities exchanged rights for benefits. Their total focus involved the affairs of the State. If people do not know God, their only hope resides in kings and princes of this world. To many, a “better” government is the hope of mankind.

We would do well to remember that the majority of men saw nothing wrong with the Beast. He had the support of the majority. But, the majority are seldom correct.

^{NAS} Exodus 23:2 "You shall not follow a multitude in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice;

Wrong does not cease to be wrong because the majority support it.

When the majority act insanely, the sane appear insane.

The Book of Life is a metaphor for salvation. The main message of Christ was the kingdom of God wherein he encouraged men to strive to enter into it. John wants his readers to know there is only one citizenship that counts — to be a citizen of heaven and to have one’s name registered in the book of life (Luke 13:24; Philippians 3:20; Revelation 3:5, 17:8, 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19).

There are two trees, the poisonous tree and the tree of life. Likewise, there are only two cities, the city man and the City of God. One cannot be a citizen of both. There are only two kingdoms, the Kingdom of Light or the kingdom of darkness. One cannot be a member of both. There are only two kings, Kurios Jesus or kurious Caesar. No man can serve two masters.

The phrase “from the foundation of the world” could modify either “written” or “slain.” Both are true. The names of God’s people are penned in God’s book from the foundation of the world. Christ suffered for our sins at the cross before time began.

Here, John draws his first application. When one knows that his name is written in heaven, he can endure opposition on earth. True Christians are loyal to the Lord Jesus Christ. Do we know for sure our name is written in heaven? If not, how can we confront civil rulers and risk offending authorities? If our name is not on some government hate list, is our Christian life being sprinkled with salt (Matthew 5:13)?

Revelation 13:9-10 If any man have an ear, let him hear. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity: he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

Hear: The phrase, “If any man have an ear” is John’s way of saying, “Beloved, I want you to stand up and make an application to your life.” You have one mouth and two ears. Use them.

Many will be harassed. Some will suffer banishment. Others will be charged, tried, and martyred. John himself was exiled to the Isle of Patmos. This was a time for Christians to stand firm; to dig in their heels and to be faithful. But, there is no such thing as an army of one. To resist the State can be suicide. One Christian with a sword is no match for a Roman legion. Randy Weaver at Ruby Ridge and the survivors of the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas can testify to man’s vulnerability against the thundering power of the State’s military forces.

Killed: If there is any encouragement here, it is in the phrase, “must be killed.” This is either a reference to the breakup of the Roman Empire (Clarke’s Commentary) or John’s way of telling the saints there was nothing they could do but endure the trauma; that political forces were beyond their control; that there was nothing they could do to stop the madness of their adversaries (Ellicott’s Commentary).

The word “patient” (h` u`pomoh) means to “to remain under.” When we go through difficult trials, we look for a quick exit. But, there is no exit from tyrannical regimes. This is John’s way of informing his people they must remain under the pressures from the State as they follow Christ.

The word “faith” (h` pi,sti) could refer to one’s personal faith or the need to be faithful. I understand this to refer to the need for each saint to fortify his personal beliefs. Severe persecution tests one’s fundamental convictions. There is very little one can do to stop an elephant stampede. Likewise, there is little one Christian can do to halt the progress of evil metastasized to a political system. To openly resist the tyrannical State is a death warrant. If government is a god in the minds of people, and you are not a fawning member of the ruling party, you can expect to be treated like Typhoid Mary X. Nevertheless, we are called to stand our ground. This is the patience of the saints. Believe! Be faithful! Stand where you can.

2.8.2 The Second Beast

Revelation 13:11 And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.

A second Beast appears from the earth. He is sometimes referred to as “the prophet.” This monster is camouflaged in wool. He has horns like a lamb and looks harmless, but the fact he speaks like a dragon exposes his true character. He is an agent of Satan.

Preterists see this Beast as the smaller confederate powers within Rome that exchanged allegiance to the Empire for political favors. Futurists see this as a future prophet who will attract followers to the alleged Antichrist. The Reformed camp sees this as the papacy.

Possibly, the second Beast refers to the dual role that Augustus filled as civil ruler and as Pontifex Maximus (high priest).

Maybe the second Beast refers to the government's propaganda machine which appears to be harmless but is joined at the hip with the first Beast. States have a huge interest in controlling the media and spinning the news. No doubt Rome had its promoters that discharged information, disinformation, and misinformation through its reporters. A free press is a God-given right, but even these mechanisms are controlled by cloaked powers with a political agenda. And, the democratic masses are easily manipulated by the tyrannical powers behind the media.

Revelation 13:12 And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed

The second Beast acts like a false prophet directing humanity to follow the first Beast. He is a propagandist skilled in the art of social conditioning. We might call this “brainwashing,” “indoctrination,” or “ballyhoo.” In one sense, he is a false Holy Spirit, a representative of the government that gives political speeches to expand the party base and promote public policy.

Seeing the papacy united with kings in the Middle Ages makes sense here. But, this would have little relevance to the original readers of the Apocalypse.

In the first century, the propagandists were priests for the imperial cult, a council of distinguished city representatives who promoted loyalty to Rome in exchange for political favors. In Asia Minor, citizens were required to place of pinch of incense on an altar before they entered the market place to do business. Refusing to honor Caesar in this manner could result in something as simple as rejection from the market place or something as serious as capital punishment.

Circa 30 AD., promoters of Rome circulated this publication: “Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved.”²⁷ When Peter preached that Jesus is Lord, he declared war on Rome (Acts 4:12). Rome executed all the apostles who taught there was “another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7). And, modern States will not tolerate Christians who do not pledge allegiance to the regime. Shortly after Vicky Weaver addressed the U.S. Attorney General for Idaho as “Servant of the Queen of Babylon,”

²⁷ CA Farmer 241:5 (Oct. 5, 1974), p. 28.

she was executed by a government assassin along with her son and her dog (Ruby Ridge, August 1992).

Revelation 13:13 And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men,

The word “wonders” (shmei/a) refers to “signs” or “miracles.” Making fire come down from heaven reminds us of Elijah the prophet. Whether this is literal or figurative has been a matter of dispute. Since this section of literature is a mythological allegory, the presumption should favor the figurative.

Fire from heaven: Apparently, this propagandist was a powerful political agent who wielded thumaturgical power to produce solidarity in the empire. It is not clear whether John is referring to counterfeit miracles that he regarded as fraudulent, or that he is referring to the tricks of a magicians and sorcerers in the service of a false religion, or that he is referring to a genuine manifestation of demonic power, or that he is referring to boasts of government about their accomplishments. Like our politicians, the Caesars took credit for all the good in the Empire and accepted little responsibility for the blunders of their administration. The weakness of democracy is that the weak can hide behind the majority, where no one has to accept responsibility for the failure of a political program.

One must ask, “What is the attraction of false systems like Mormonism, Islam, secularism and communism?” All have powerful leaders with a state propaganda machine that rewards solidarity and punishes dissent. Modern Iran is an illustration where civil-religious leaders may execute anyone who does not adhere to Islamic Fundamentalism. Zionists are famous for their solidarity. Indoctrination and mind control are functions of the State. Monarchs play on public fears to advance their political agenda. Every politician employs the art of sophistry to win adherents and defeat enemies.

Revelation 13:14 And deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live.

The word “deceiveth” (plana/) is a present active indicative verb which means “to lead astray” by the practice of deception. And, the wretched fact about deception is the deceived do not know they are being deceived.

The phrase “them that dwell on the earth” are the objects of dupery. They are set in direct contrast to God’s heavenly people who are not deceived. The propagandist is effective. His pragmatic methods work. Possibly, John is referring to methods used by the imperial cult to trick and deceive superstitious people. Sorcery and ventriloquism is attested in Acts (13:6; 16:16;

19:13). Perhaps, this applies to the propaganda machines that are associated with governmental powers; that is, sophistry, “spin,” and “fake news” used in the media outlets of a nation.

Futurists, however, foresee an apocalyptic ambassador who will be empowered by Satan to counterfeit the miracles of Christ. But, this would be of little interest to the original readers. They were facing Roman propaganda, imprisonment, and execution in their time. Likewise, there are historicists that read into this text the events of the 16th century, but this would have little relevance to the original readers.

Wounded by a sword: We learn that the Beast was wounded by a sword. Possibly, this refers to some type of military defeat . . . or assassination familiar to Romans. Julius Caesar was the first to gather all power unto himself. Though assassinated, the Caesars following him adopted his imperialistic ambitions.

Revelation 13:15 And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

This is a difficult passage. Some futurists understand this to be a future Antichrist that will be placed into a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. But, such a phenomenal event would have little relevance to the churches of Asia Minor.

The historical background to the phrase he had “power to give life unto the image” is ventriloquism and the use of a Roman statue by a ventriloquist to create an illusion of a talking statuary. The language John employs made sense to the original readers. In Asia Minor, citizens were required to wear amulets and jewelry that signified loyalty to Rome or be subject to the charge of “treason.” Emperor worship was not only common in Egypt and China, but in Rome. Failure to offer a pinch of incense to Caesar was a capital offence. Regardless of the details here, John paints a picture of a system that is resolute in demanding consummate devotion to the system. Failure to comply meant prosecution -- even death.

2.8.3 The Mark of the Beast

Revelation 13:16-17 And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count²⁸ the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

²⁸ The verb “count” (yhfisa,tw) is an aorist active imperative. If the original readers were to obey this instruction, the name Nero Caesar would be 666. What relevance would calculating this number have if it applied to someone 2000

The mark: What is this mark (a,ragma)? Dozens of interpretations abound. Prophecy teachers advance all kinds of interesting theories. Futurists relate the mark to a super Antichrist. Modern students identify the mark (a,ragma) with anything from a social security numbers and computer chips to literal tattoos on the forehead like MS-13 gang members and bar codes on commercial packages. Mainstream Bible teachers relate this number to one of the Caesars in the Roman Empire.

The practice of assigning numerical values to letters is called Gematria. By assigning Hebrew, Greek, and English letters a number, various calculations have been submitted to identify the Antichrist.

In the Roman world, a mark or “charagma” was a technical term for the imperial stamp used on commercial documents and coins. Either of these usages would explain the mark on the hand or forehead. This mark may or may not be literal. The LORD sent an angel to place a mark (tav)²⁹ on the foreheads of the faithful in apostate Jerusalem prior to the Babylonian siege in order to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked. Imperceptible to the human eye, only angels could see the T on the forehead of the faithful. God has marked his saints, but not with a literal physical symbol. Without a pledge of allegiance to Rome, Christians living in Asia Minor could not do business in Caesar’s market place.

The number 666: I understand that there are at least sixty interpretations to the number 666. Many have tried to identify this with a particular person in modern times. Nero, the pope, Napoleon, Hitler, Henry Kissinger, Mikhail Gorbachev, Barack Obama, and President Donald Trump have been candidates for this infamous label. Endless possibilities abound. Such speculation is a waste of time. In a highly symbolic passage that primarily relates to the Christians of Asia Minor, any consideration of modern interpretations is speculative and presumptive.

We must ask, “What did the number 666 mean to the original readers?”

years future to the original readers? This is powerful evidence the book was written before 70 AD. and that it had immediate relevance. The fact that the Syrian version reads, “John the Evangelist in the Isle of Patmos, where he was thrown by Nero Caesar” must be considered when interpreting this passage.

²⁹ A tav is a Hebrew letter that looks like a T or X which many believe is the OT. sign of the cross.

In Hebrew³⁰, the name or number for Nero Caesar tallies to 666. In some manuscripts the number reads 616, the Latin equivalent to Nero Caesar³¹. Nero Caesar (54-68 AD.) is the strongest candidate for the symbol 666.

Like many numbers in Revelation are symbolic, the number 666 is symbolic. The number seven is the number of perfection and often symbolizes God's perfection.³² The number 666 is the number of man that symbolizes man's imperfection.

The point of the passage is that this economic system is controlled by autocrats in a pagan institution that demands absolute allegiance to the Roman State. It punished non-conformists.

All systems fail to achieve perfection (777). The Roman Empire, Romanism, Communism, Islam, and Democracy fail to produce a just political system (Isaiah 59: 14-15). For this reason, Christians pray, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done;" i.e., that men may recognize God's rule now and surrender to it.

Hand and head: Why the hand? Why the forehead? Again, there are over 60 interpretations to the question. Assigning numbers to men like you would inanimate objects signifies the dehumanization of man. Governments tend to automate and robotize man. When the state regards people as "numbers" on a spread sheet they devalue individual human beings. Like numbers, tyrants can also decide to erase people.

The forehead is chosen because that is the origin of man's thought life. This system seeks to control the thinking of mankind through deception, intimidation, and coercion.

The hand is chosen because the hand represents human labor. This system seeks to control labor and to extract wealth from the common citizen in the form of taxation to perpetuate the system. Every modern government monopolized by the IMF has a system in place to control the minds of people through legalize and propaganda as well as an unconstitutional graduated system of taxation to fleece the sheeple. Identifying marks imply control, ownership, and servitude.

³⁰ Each letter has a numerical value: Aleph is 1, Beth is 2, and so on until 10, then count by tens till 100, then by hundreds till we run out of letters. Nero Caesar in Hebrew is NeRON QeiSaR; adding up the letters we get "the number of the man", 666.

³¹ Some MSS known to Tischendorf read the number of the beast as 616 (Latin number for Nero Caesar: wrn rsq) instead of the Hebrew 666 (Nero Caesar in Hebrew characters: rsq lwrn).

³² When Isaiah saw the Lord in Isaiah 6, he heard the seraphim say, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD God Almighty!" If the seraphim had spoken symbolically, they could have said, "Seven, seven, seven is the LORD God Almighty" referring, of course, to the perfection of God.

This passage has an application for our time! An interpretation that consigns this passage to a future dispensation *hinders Christians from discerning how their own government behaves like the Beast of Rome.*

The Beast morphs its way through history. At various times, governments take on the characteristics of Rome by demanding absolute allegiance to state policy and by controlling commerce. Every government that controls its citizens by indexing and assigning them numbers takes on the characteristics of a tyrant. When tracking, surveillance, and registration happens by a government in any age, Christians are called to resist. “Resistance to tyranny is service to God” - Thomas Jefferson.

As we consider our own technological age with birth certificates, social security numbers, credit cards, microchips, and driver’s license numbers, it is not difficult to imagine a legislative ID system that assigns a number for the purpose of tracking people and controlling the economy. During pandemics governments express tremendous interest in tracking people – infected people as well as healthy people. The Real ID Act comes to mind. Since the fall of the World Trade Center in (September 11, 2001), Americans have demanded greater security. All kinds of governmental tracking systems have been embraced. RFIDs (Radio Frequency Identification Devices) can read driver’s licenses, credit cards, and passports. Telephone calls are recorded. Emails are collected in some government cyber data base. Cell phones are used to identify one’s location and pass on government announcements. In the name of health and safety, government gobbles up personal rights. The right of privacy appears to be a relic of the past hopes.

And, considering our own economy, how can anyone doubt that the Federal Reserve with its toxic currency owns everything and everyone? Since, the gold confiscation of April 5, 1933 we have been forced by color of law to use Federal Reserve Notes. The Social Security Number already acts like the Mark of the Beast. Ever try getting a job or bank account without one? The latest push is to have every one implanted with an RFID chip. The Beast of Babylon reigns unchallenged. In the midst of things we cannot control, God still calls us to be loyal to Christ during all seasons of history.

2.9 The Lamb and His Followers

Revelation 14:1 And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Zion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

This passage contrast the followers of Christ with the followers of the Beast. Like the statist in chapter 13 are marked by the Beast, God knows His own.

In chapter 12, John portrays the ancient battle between Satan and God's people in mythological imagery. Those who follow Satan working through the Beast are marked with a number. The beauty of the 144,000 is directly contrasted with those who prostitute themselves to the Beast. The 144,000 are God's people, men and women, devoted to Christ. All true believers are among the 144,000. They are sealed. They are known by God. They belong to Him.

The Lamb is the symbol of the Son. The last time we saw the Son, He was standing before the throne. Now He is standing on Mt. Zion. Mt. Zion is the hill on which the temple was erected in Jerusalem. Here, it is a symbol of the city of God where the Lamb reigns. It is not literal carnal Jerusalem, but heavenly, spiritual Jerusalem.

The "Father's name" is their private mark. It is not a literal mark. This mark is in contrast to the mark of the Beast. John is telling us that just as the followers of the Beast can be identified by their character and devotion to the State, the followers of the Lamb can be identified by their character and devotion to the Lamb. The "Father's name" on the forehead of God's people are their "confession made unto salvation." Their confession is true, sincere, public, and consistent.

The vision was designed to encourage the believers. The monster in Chapter 13 had many followers and appears to be invincible. But, God's people can take heart because they are known in heaven and their names are recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life. Consequently, they are eternally secure in Christ—not because of what they have done, but because of what He has accomplished for them at Calvary.

Revelation 14:2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

Like the sounds of Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe, the voice from heaven was clear, powerful, and unmistakable! Harps, a common musical instrument in Biblical times, speak of harmony, rest, and happiness. The ones singing are the 144,000 or the church militant. Like a dream, the 144,000 appear to be present on Mt. Zion in heaven next to the Lamb. The followers of the Beast do not sing, but the 144,000 not only sing, they are the only ones who bring glory to God on earth. The Beast brought death and tyranny to mankind; the 144,000 bring joy, life, and freedom.

Revelation 14:3 And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

The new song is a song of redemption. It implies relationship. Only those who know God can sing something so intimate and endearing. Followers of the beast remain perplexed by the joy Christians have in the Savior.

The fact that "no man could learn the song" implies that redemption is a prerequisite for learning the song. The 144,000 is a symbol of all God's people who have tasted salvation and

demonstrated loyalty to the Lamb. They are completely devoted to Christ in contrast to those who are loyal to the Beast / State / government.

They are redeemed “from the earth.” This suggests other-worldliness, the pursuit of God, the separation from pagan lusts and pleasures.

Revelation 14:4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.

“**They are not defiled with women**” should not be taken literally. Half of these people are women themselves. The act of defiling is reference to the Greco-Roman practice where men and women visited pagan temples to engage in religious sexual rites. The negative implies this class of people are virgins; i.e., the church militant is wholly devoted to Christ and free from earthly affections and defilements. It is God’s ideal for His people and is highly symbolic of the character of the righteous. It’s as if God is blind to the defects of His people on earth. He appears here to see His people in Christ totally devoted to Him. “Amazing grace that saved a wretch like me.”

The 144,000 (parthenos) are spiritual virgins who do not engage in pagan fertility practices. Virginity is an attribute communicating to us these believers have not compromised the faith for sake of political or financial gain. The reason for this interpretation is the context. The context is one of allegiance. Nowhere are marital sexual relations a negative thing in Scripture. Celibacy is not a virtue. Human sexuality as it exist in marriage is holy and undefiled (Hebrews 13:5). What is in view here is the believer’s pure and holy devotion to His Lord and Master—a spiritual relationship is in view here. Contracts are a form of intercourse between two parties. The 144,000 do not fornicate with the Beast; that is, they do contract with the Beast nor do they receive benefits and privileges from the State. This is God’s ideal for every Christian – to be purely, totally, continually, humbly, intensely, single-mindedly, deeply, genuinely, wholeheartedly, profoundly, and dutifully devoted to the Lord Jesus Christ.

First fruits is barley season. Christ is called the *first fruits* (1 Corinthians 15:20). These 144,000 are the first fruits of the Age to Come. Having surrendered to the authority of the Kingdom of God, they have tasted eschatological salvation and the blessing of the Eschaton. They are regenerated beings destined to share the benefits of resurrection on a renewed earth. The 144,000 are God’s ideal and model for all God’s people. John wants his readers to strive to be loyal to Christ and to achieve a level of pure devotion to Him as they live out their faith in a messy, corrupted, hostile environment.

Revelation 14:5 And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

No guile is a metaphor for authenticity and lack of duplicity. Having “No lie” is the ideal picture of the redeemed (Zephaniah 3:13). The only One who has never lied is Jesus. John is challenging his readers to strive by faith to avoid the chicanery of the period and to be true to their Lord and Savior. The 144,000 are not public followers of the Beast and private followers of Christ. They do not pledge allegiance to both the Beast and the Lamb. They do not pledge allegiance to God and government. No man can serve two masters. They profess Christ privately and publicly. They seek to match their walk with their talk. They live in the world, but they are not of the world. They are loved by Christ, but hated by the Beast.

“They are blameless.” This is John’s way of describing how God views His people. God’s people are justified, that is, they are declared righteous and treated as such. They are a forgiven people; that is, their debt to God has been discharged and settled at the cross because of the death of the Lamb. Because they are blameless standing before the throne, they should seek to live a blameless life in their standing before men on earth.

John’s presentation of the 144,000 is that of an idyllic relationship between Christ and His church. In reality, Christians on earth are far from “blameless.” This passage motivated the original readers to see themselves in Christ and to be like the 144,000; to serve Him without fear of Rome. Likewise, this section of Scripture should motivate us to claim our holy standing and to love the Lord Jesus so much that we take on the virtues of the 144,000. Duplicity and divided affections have no place in the church of Jesus Christ.

2.9.1 The Three Angels

Revelation 14:6 And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

2.9.1.1 First Angel

Why an angel? Why not men? Angels communicate the seriousness of a matter. They were involved in mediating the law as the law was a quintessential moment in revelatory history. Furthermore, Biblical people saw an increase in activity of angels before a final judgment (Genesis 18). Seeing the flying angel with the everlasting gospel signaled a call to repentance.

The phrase “the everlasting gospel” only appears here in Revelation. It is the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which commands men to “Fear God” and to “Give him glory” (14:7). It is the good news that Christ came into the world to save sinners; that is, the gospel is wrapped up in the history of Christ and His redemptive accomplishments (Romans 15:1-4).

The grand message is that grace comes before judgment. God’s mercy is extended throughout every age providing people of every language and tongue a way of escape from the judgment to

come through the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is John's way of telling his readers that the gospel they embraced is for the whole world and that they should not be ashamed of the Lord.

Revelation 14:7 Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

The everlasting gospel is built on the basics, the foundation of Old Testament creation theology: "Him that made heaven and earth . . ." (14:7).

The angel's voice thunders out a booming command. He calls all men to repent; to fear God and honor Him. The gospel appeals to man's universal need to be saved from sin. The verb "fear" is an aorist imperative ordering men to initiate an immediate response to the command. His fundamental message to fear God and give him glory is addressed to impenitents. While men fear nature, disease, and the State, "Fearing God" is the great need of mankind. All that is wrong with humanity can be traced to a deficient supply of the fear of God.

By "giving glory," the angel is ordering men to 'fess up' and tell the truth about themselves and about God; that is, to give up their humanistic hopes and speculations; to embrace His revelation in history; to repent of their beliefs in evolutionary theories and to acknowledge God's creative acts.

The reason for this thunderous order is that judgment has come (aorist). Sometimes we think of judgment as something future, but judgment has already come in the person and work of Christ. God judged sin eschatologically at the cross, and then raised Jesus from the dead because of his virtuous life. He is risen and ascended to the right hand of God. He reigns now and holds men accountable to this truth. This is John's pictorial way of showing us a truth that he has already presented, "but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John 3:18).

Revelation 14:8 And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

2.9.1.2 A Second Angel

Babylon is Fallen: The second message is the announcement of the fall of Babylon. The announcement is stated as a fact (aorist). This is *the first use* of the word *Babylon* in Revelation, but it was not an unfamiliar rubric to John's readers.

John has already warned believers not to love *the world* with its lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life in his first epistle (1 John 2:15). Use of the term "*Babylon*" is a literary device, a metaphor or allusion or allegorical term meaning the same thing as John's use of the word "*world*." John leaves it up to the reader to make the connection.

Babylon was the great capital city of the Babylonian kingdom, the powerful enemy that stunned Israel and carried the remnant into exile. Babylon is the symbolic opposite of Mount Zion, the city of God, and the domicile of the 144,000. *Babylon signifies the city into which the Beast and the dragon seduce men, the capital city of those who oppose Christ and the everlasting gospel.*

To John's audience Babylon was the city of Rome with its patricians, consuls, commercial interests, and imperial cult. She was a great city—over a million people in population. The same Nimrodian spirit that was at work during the building of the tower of Babel, and that resurfaced in history again and again to seduce people, was at work in John's day through Rome.

The spirit of Babylon morphs its way through history. In John's day, it was Rome. In the early 1920s, Berlin was called the Red Whore of Babylon. In our time, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Seattle, San Francisco, New Orleans, Washington D.C., Paris, and London have taken on the characteristics of mystery Babylon.

“Fallen” is repeated twice. The dual pronouncement is a statement of certainty. The gospel assures us that the powers of Babylon have met their match in Jesus Christ. His death, burial, and resurrection announce the victory of the Savior and the doom of the anti-God forces in history.

“She made . . .” conveys the idea of coercion and force. This economic system compels men to compromise principle for the sake of commercial gain. The State has a way of forcing its will on the people and withholding benefits to dissenters. Babylon offered franchises to those loyal to her. It rewarded the compliant and persecuted non-conformists.

“Wine” is known for its powers of intoxication and is used here as a symbol of deception.

The concept of **“wrath”** implies the intensity of humanism and its hostility against God and the freedoms of man.

“Fornication” refers to spiritual compromise for the sake of commercial gain and the sensuous nature of paganism that undermines Biblical morality.

Most likely, St. John has mercantile contracts in mind – a form of commercial intercourse. People fornicated with Babylon when they signed a contract with the State; that is, Babylon offered franchises to those incorporated with her. And, all State contracts come with strings attached.

But, this city is “fallen.” The gospel announces its doom and challenges its core values before Babylon is fully exposed and unmasked in John's Book. Likewise, a proper preaching of the gospel will announce God's judgment on all humanistic institutions that reject Christ and compel men through force and intimidation to conform to their policies. It is not God's will that any humanistic political system succeed, Marxist or democratic. All will fail.

Take the U.S. Government for example. In order to do business, one must incorporate with the State, obtain a license, and pay upfront taxes before opening the doors to one's business. When one incorporates with the State, the "business" becomes an artificial entity subject to the public policies of the government. A "business" in the "United States" can't discriminate against sex which means it has to do business with homosexuals, Sodomites, and queers. Corporations must provide for women's "reproductive rights" which promotes abortion and radical feminism through an oppressive taxation system. Those that do not incorporate with the State are harassed, insulted, screened and even banned from commerce. If you do not have a UN Real ID, you can't fly, obtain a credit card, or open a bank account. People who remain "invisible" are irrelevant and marked for extermination. Make a stand on a Biblical principle and you will be put down, shut down, cut down, locked down, and chopped down.

Revelation 14:9-10 And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:

2.9.1.3 A Third Angel

The angel announces the fate of those who worship the Beast; that is, those who pledge allegiance to the principles of the Babylonian system that places commerce and job security above devotion to Christ. This message is addressed to those who live in Babylon and who have aligned themselves with the anti-God forces. Allegiance to the Beast is no minor issue. Contracts with the Beast involve a serious compromise of truth — a contract that places public policy above Christian morality. To worship the Beast is to contract with the Beast; and, in so doing, one must ignore the gospel mandate, and pledge allegiance to the State.³³ Those intoxicated by with this world's charms will drown in the wine of God's wrath. It is no test to turn down the worst Babylon has to offer, but it tests one's spiritual fiber to turn down the best Babylon has to offer.

Christ partook of the cup and the fury of God's wrath on behalf of sinners. If men reject God's remedy for sin and remain in the community of those who "do not fear God or give glory to

³³ By way of application consider what happens when a Christian teachers signs a contract to teach in public schools. He or she cannot teach the Bible, pray in the classroom, teach creationism, or that Christ is the only way to salvation. The teacher must promote evolution, humanism, relativism, and devotion to the United States, Inc. The teacher must say the "Pledge of Allegiance" every day, but cannot say the "Lord's Prayer." The teacher can't teach the Ten Commandments, denounce cursing or fornication or adultery or Sodomy or murder (abortion) or feminism or our unconstitutional tax system. How can a thinking Christian participate in such an idolatrous system? If normal is secularism, modern Christians are quite normal.

him,” then they will choke on the smoke of God’s burning wrath. This is John’s pictorial way of describing the fate of sinners (John 3:36).

Tormented with fire and brimstone is not annihilation but consciousness of suffering.

This passage had a direct application to Rome. Allegiance to Rome was rewarded with commercial benefits. Imagine going to the coliseum and hearing the oath, “Hail Caesar, we who are about to die salute you.” Here in this passage, loyalty to Christ is contrasted with loyalty to the State. Christians should be warned about “pledging allegiance” to any government or system. We owe our allegiance to the Lord Jesus Christ and to our families and not to the capricious, temperamental, volatile, surrogate, fickle, godless administrations of some political order.

Mark Twain said it best, *“Patriotism is loyalty to the county always. Loyalty to the government when it deserves it.”* Why would any Christian pledge allegiance to a regime controlled by far left, pagan, pandering, unprincipled, unpredictable, promiscuous politicians who are antichrist? Why would any Christian pledge allegiance to a government that protects abortionists, adulterers, Sodomites, and lesbians? Why would a Christian pledge allegiance to a State that promotes feminism, Islam, evolution, homosexuality, world government, and suppresses its people through heavy taxation and marshal law?

Revelation 14:11 And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

The “**smoke**” that rises forever suggests the eternity of this wrath. “Torment” is in the genitive. The imagery is unmistakable. The origin of the smoke is from the continual burning and destruction of gospel-rejecters. Jesus also warned of eternal torment (Matthew 25:46; Mark 9:48). Remember, St. John paints a picture. This is his sensual description of the wrath of God . . . and maybe of hell itself.

“He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36).

Revelation 14:12 Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

Verse eleven is a warning not to compromise. John now applies the vision to his readers and identifies the nature of the true people of God: (a) the saints endure in suffering, and (b) they keep the faith.

John is telling the people that they must perceive their affliction in light of the gospel. No single man could bring about the fall and decline of the Roman Empire. Likewise, one man can do little to change history, political movements, or end tyranny and immorality in any democratic system.

Patience: Simply put, Christians need to be patient and endure political hostilities that arise in history, be faithful to Christ, and to live a holy life. Patience, however, does not mean that a believer cannot be involved in the political activities. In modern democracies, Christians can unite for a political purpose. Proactive Christianity as well as non-violent resistance is an appropriate response to an overreaching government. The gospel is powerful and when a man resists the culture and confronts pagan ideology, he is at his salty best (Matthew 5:8-10).

The term “faith of Jesus” is an objective genitive, and refers to the content of the faith as taught by Christ.

The “faith of Jesus” may also suggest faithfulness to the content of the gospel; that is, to remain true to the faith delivered to us by the Lord Jesus Christ. The admonition is necessary. The Christians in Asia Minor were trouble, afraid, and disturbed by Rome’s harassment. This waiting period demanded patience. In a pluralistic society that promotes every “ism” known to man, faithfulness to the gospel once delivered to the saints is like becoming a steel hammer in a pillow factory. God does not expect Christians to be religious, but He does expect them to be loyal to truth of the gospel . . . to grow some backbone . . . to build some grit . . . and, to show some teeth as God’s attack lambs.

Revelation 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.

The angel announces a blessing upon God’s people because some were going to die for the faith. The Spirit informs us of the privilege it is to die because of one’s loyalty to Christ and one’s defection from Babylon (Rome). What looked like a calamity to the Christians was really a rest, a blessing, an eternal reward. God knows the hearts and deeds of his saints. Death does not separate them from Him. He knows their deeds, and they will be rewarded for their devotion to the Lord!

2.9.2 The Twin Harvests

St. John raises his brush to the canvas like an artistic craftsman. The two harvests represent the two sides of the gospel. The gospel not only draws believers near to God to justify them; it also exposes the unbelief of Christ-rejecters and condemns them. As the gospel is preached, men enter the kingdom of God and possess eternal life. Likewise, those who reject the gospel are judged and punished. The vision of the twin harvest is a panoramic sketch of all human history after the inauguration of the kingdom in Jesus’ ministry.

Revelation 14:14 And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.

Clouds: John describes seeing Jesus in the clouds. The clouds represent his seat of authority. It is from heaven that He applies the scepter. This is the risen, ascended, enthroned apocalyptic “Son of Man” ruling all history.

The crown represents his regal authority and exalted position.

The sickle is the tool used by a harvester. The gospel kingdom which began as a “seed” is now ready for the harvest (Matthew 13). Jesus is in heaven working in this world to harvest “sons of the kingdom” and to deliver them from the power of Satan, sin, and death.

2.9.2.1 The First Harvest

Revelation 14:15 **And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe.**

The temple is “in the clouds” or in heaven. From the spirit world comes an angel granting permission from the Father for the Son of Man to reap a harvest on the earth.

The reaping here is not the end of the world, but the gospel harvest taking place during the entire Christian age. By virtue of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, Jesus reaps souls through gospel proclamation. As the gospel of Christ is proclaimed, men are converted and brought into the kingdom. Since Jesus’ resurrection, the earth is ripe for a harvest. The gospel is giving hope to men and women on every continent and in all the nations. And, such imagery would encourage the first century saints to proclaim the redemptive history of Christ to their generation.

Revelation 14:16 **And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.**

Jesus acts from his highly exalted position at the right hand of the Father to aid gospel preachers to proclaim the gospel. The gospel will win souls and preachers must arm themselves with a thorough understanding of Christ, His triumphant history, and its benefits to men.

2.9.2.2 The Second Harvest

Revelation 14:17-19 **And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully rip And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.**

The altar: Another angel comes from the temple, the true tabernacle of God. He came from the altar. The altar could be either the brazen altar or the golden altar. The brazen altar represents

judgment which would fit the scene here. The golden altar represents the reigning life of Christ interceding for his people which would also fit this drama. In heaven, however, there is only one altar which is typified by Israel's two altars in the tabernacle.

Why two judgments? John is declaring the certainty of the thing.

Grapes: The imagery presented by John is that of a harvest of grapes: the “winepress of the wrath of God.” This is the other side of the gospel. The gospel that saves believers also condemns unbelievers. Everyday throughout the age, men believe and are accepted by God. Everyday Christ-rejecters die and face the eternal, terrifying judgment of God. Christians must have a sense of urgency as they conduct their ministry.

Revelation 14:20 And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

How do you describe the shock and terrors of hell to a friend? John utilizes the imagery of blood soaked battlefield littered with decapitated heads, pierced torsos, and severed arms. Dante employs the imagery of sinners drinking a putrid mixture of blood and pus flowing from their eyes while being slowly devoured by loathsome maggots. Above Dante's entrance to hell, he posts a sign: “Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.”

Blood: Typical of a dream, the imagery changes from crushing grapes and producing wine to a battlefield with infantry lying in blood as they are crushed by horses ridden by Roman trossuli slaughtering advancing troops with death-lances. John is not giving information. Like a master story teller, he stirs the imagination. John wants his readers to be shocked by the scene. Under the inspiration of the Spirit, John seeks to shake his readers up emotionally so that the faithful may realize the seriousness of their mission . . . that the saints may boldly proclaim the gospel to their lost friends and neighbors.

The city is Mt. Zion, the Heavenly Jerusalem. Those outside the gospel are excluded from this city and face being crushed by the millstone of God's justice.

Blood splattering unto “horse bridles” is apocalyptic imagery conveying messages of sudden death and the bloody slaughter of Christ-rejecters.

A stadium refers to the Roman Coliseum which was over 600 feet long. Sixteen hundred stadia is about 184 miles. This is also the length of the nation of Israel from Dan to Beersheba. The river of blood is not literal. It is apocalyptic imagery designed to impress the imagination with the horror of judgment and the ghastly fate of unbelieving souls.

John is appealing to the compassion in his readers. If we have any love for our fellow man, we will do all we can to share the gospel with them so they can be saved from the grinding stone of

God’s wrath. In the gospel, we have the cure for sin’s bitter sting. What kind of Christians are we if we do not rescue the perishing? If we really believe in the judgment of God, we will act with greater desperation to reach our friends and neighbors. It does not matter what people think of us, just share the good news. “If we are not fishing, we are not following” (Marion Michaux).

2.10 The Seven Bowls of Wrath

2.10.1 The Outpouring of Wrath

Revelation 16:1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.

“Go your way” is a means of letting the reader know that the bowls of terror are sanctioned by God. These bowls contain judgments reserved for the anti-God forces (unbelieving man). This the Spirit’s way of letting us know that these destructive forces are ordained of God.

These bowls are very similar to the trumpets. The bowls are poured out upon the same subjects as the trumpet judgments, but with climatic velocity and consummate intensity. They are more deep, destructive, and deadly than the trumpet judgments.

| SEVEN TRUMPETS | SEVEN BOWLS |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. earth (8:7) | 1. earth (16:2) |
| 2. sea (8:8-9) | 2. sea (16:3) |
| 3. rivers and springs (8:10,11) | 3. rivers and springs (16:4-5) |
| 4. sun, moon, stars (8:12) | 4. sun (16:8) |
| 5. pit of the abyss (9:1) | 5. throne of the Beast (16:10) |
| 6. river Euphrates (9:13-14) | 6. river Euphrates (16:17, 21) |
| 7. lightning, hail (11:15) | 7. lightening, hail (16:17, 21) |

2.10.2 First Bowl

Revelation 16:2 And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

The vision of the seven bowls is not tangible, but figurative. The visions in Revelation utilize a literary device, an apocalyptic image, designed to stir the imagination about the many instruments God uses to punish antichrists for their rebellion against Him. While the visions of bowls of wrath are not literal or spatial, neither are they legendary or whimsical. The pottage of deadly hemlock poured on mankind, depicted by the bowl images are authentic and substantial. God has judged and will judge the wicked with stunning severity.

The first bowl is selective and falls upon those devoted to the Beast. Christians are not in view here. The urn of misery reserved for the party of statist that supported the Beast (chapter 16) informs believers that the Roman State that weaponizes its power for nefarious purposes has become an enemy of God. In chapter nineteen, we see the Beast receiving his just desserts. Finally, in chapter 20, John exposes us to the judgment of the evil spirit behind the Beast (Satan).

The earth: The first bowl of wrath is poured out upon the earth and immediately affects the bodies of men. The puss-filled blisters remind us of the plagues of Egypt. Because these followers *received the mark of the Beast*, a symbol of proud allegiance to the State, and refused to worship the King of kings and Lord of lords with their bodies (Romans 12:1), the bodies of the followers of the Beast are targets of divine wrath.

The lesson is clear: Terrible suffering awaits the Christ-rejecter. Those who seek to please men, displease God. The bodies which men love and nourish will not escape the blistering punishment of the Almighty. Some diseases are not the result of bad nutrition or an unhealthy lifestyle, but an act of judgment upon statist who's hope centers around government power. What a terrible thing it must be for rebels to meet their Maker!

2.10.3 Second Bowl

Revelation 16:3 And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea; and it became as the blood of a dead man; and every living soul died in the sea.

Sea: This burgundy pollution of the sea reminds us of the River Nile turning to blood during the days of Moses.

The images before us are not a literal description of events to come but symbols of calamity and terror that are and will be. The blood is not literal blood, but a symbol of spoliation. Red poisoning of the sea did not happen in history to Rome nor is it likely to happen literally sometime in the future—except on the final day—the day that the heavens and earth melt (2

Peter 3:12). Like a breeze that shakes the leaves on a tree, the Spirit stirs our imagination about the consummate fate of the wicked through symbols of terror. Rivers polluted with domestic sewage from tanneries, pulp mills, and smelting plants that leaves tons of rotting fish on sandy beaches come to mind.

The sea is and was a place of mystery. It has provided a source of food for mankind and it has been a means of conveyance and escape to invading navies. Forty percent (40%) of the world's population live near the ocean. All hope connected with the sea will perish when judgment comes on Christ-rejecters. From this invasion, there will be no way to escape for the oceans will be a polluted sea filled with red algae, oily carbon emissions, and dead shell fish.

The dispensational belief that all sea life will be utterly destroyed at the end of an alleged seven year tribulation, then totally renewed again in a Jewish millennium, and then utterly destroyed again at the end of that time is "double vision" typical of the binocular system. All marine life will indeed be destroyed, but not until the very end of history, and in a way the human mind cannot fathom.

2.10.4 Third Bowl

Revelation 16:4 And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters; and they became blood.

Rivers: The third trumpet also brought a plague on the waters, but this bowl is completely contaminating. Water is a necessity for life. Man can only live three days without water. Blood is a symbol of death and pollution. As lead and iron in corroded pipes poison the water supply in modern times, this judgment informs us of the horrible suffering coming upon the wicked. The comfort man receives from sky-blue waters during the heat of the day will fail when God's hemlock judgment is revealed at the consummation of history.

If this were literal, how long could a civilization survive: three days, a week, a month? The events in this chapter are rapid and catastrophic, but appear to last longer than days and weeks. The vision amplifies the message graphically so man's weak mind can grasp the terror of facing God's judgment without Christ.

Revelation 16:5 And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus.

In case the reader may doubt the fairness of God's judgment or think that God is being unfair and cruel, an angel declares that God is doing the right thing by striking the waters. Only a fickle man thinks God is good when the Sun shines, and evil when the sky is pitch black; that the God of the OT is angry with man, and the God of the NT is sweet and loving toward man. There is no bifurcation between the God of the OT and the God of the NT. Such thoughts are wranglings of an unsettled hearts. The LORD is immutable (Malachi 3:6).

In this text, worship is offered to the righteousness of God. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind when one contemplates the subject of Divinity. Even judgment provides a reason to adore Him. (Psalm 75:1-3).

There is a warning here for modern man who believes that God is too loving to judge men; that He is some kind of heavenly Santa Clause that is obligated to pass out candy to the naughty and the nice. That God is somehow obligated to serve spoonfuls of heart-to-heart, mango, peach Passion Pecks to recalcitrant sinners is a modern day perversion of theology. Such beliefs sprout in the soil of doubting hearts and willful ignorance of the Holy Scriptures.

Revelation 16:6 For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink; for they are worthy.

The blood of the saints: The reason for the judgment is now explained. His wrath is a repayment for the evil done to His people by rulers and magistrates working for the Beast. Rome killed the apostles with callous indifference and barbarous intensity. The Judge's sentence is perfectly chosen. The punishment fits the crime. The followers of the Beast executed righteous men, crucified them, and beheaded them with perverted delight. Because they shed blood . . . now they must drink blood until they vomit. "He that lives by the sword, shall die by the sword."

Revelation 16:7 And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

In case some might think that God loves ugly or question how a loving God could dispense such terror, a second witness testifies to the righteousness of God's judgment.

Altar: This is the only place where the altar is said to speak. In case the reader is still in doubt about the fairness of God's judgments, the altar of incense vindicates God's justice. This is John's way of exhorting every heart to identify with the justice of God. The Lord is not only loving, He is holy and just. Believers are more prone to praise the Almighty for His grace than they are to worship Him for His holiness; more prone to talk about His love than to talk about His wrath; more prone to tolerate sin than to separate from it. "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Genesis 18:25).

2.10.5 Fourth Bowl

Revelation 16:8-9 And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

The plagues: The blistering sores are not physical nor are they literal. The scalding imagery points to an ultimate spiritual reality. The Sun is essential for life. So important is the Sun the

ancients worshiped the star. The hope connected with this oven of light now becomes a curse. This is the environmentalist's worst nightmare – global warming because of maximum heat transfer in the troposphere.

What is the response of fickle man to this judgment? It isn't worship or humility or even prayer. The English word "blaspheme" comes from the French term "blasmer" which means "to blame." Filled with contempt, these idolaters blaspheme God who is sovereign over creation; that is, they blame Him for their deprivations and afflictions.

Repented not: Men recognize the source of the affliction, but like Pharaoh, they refuse to repent. Unfortunately, there is a lot of Pharaoh in all who refuse to obey God: "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?" This is the great tragedy revealed in Revelation. No matter what God does to turn men from sin to Himself, the human heart remains stubborn and recalcitrant. Self-made man with his hope in science will not surrender even under the intensity of divine judgment. No wonder Jesus declared there is joy in heaven when one sinner repents (Luke 15). Real repentance is as rare as sunshine in a bat cave.

2.10.6 Fifth Bowl

Revelation 16:10-11 And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

Seat of the Beast: The first four plagues are poured out on the environment to punish the followers of the Beast. The fifth bowl contains *a political plague*. God's wrath launches a direct ordinance at the corridors of power; i.e., the seat of the government of the anti-god forces. Public figures are struck with blindness. Propaganda fails. Confusion reigns. Trust erodes. Anger erupts. Curses multiply.

Deprived of their power and unable to pass a stimulus package to provide relief from their pain, statolaters go into epileptic seizures, gnaw their tongues, and curse God with fauxfanity.

Blasphemy: Like Pharaoh's magicians, these cabinet officials are unable to restrain God's wrath. They too share in the judgment of God. These statist recognize that this plague is from God, and like Pharaoh, they harden their hearts, refuse to repent, and escalated their blasphemy towards the God of Heaven. Can it be that man's heart is really this wicked? Apparently so!

2.10.7 Sixth Bowl

Revelation 16:12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

Kings of the East: Ancient Euphrates was the northern most boundary in the Levant. When armies crossed this river, Israel prepared for war. The kings of Assyria, Babylon, Persia were

ancient foes that crossed the Euphrates to kill and plunder backsliding Israel. The phrase “kings of the east” and the invasion by alien powers into ancient Israel was a trauma understood by first century Christians. These “kings” beyond the “Euphrates” are not a literal Chinese army that will invade the Middle East according to literal theories. Rather, this is a spiritual invasion by God’s forces upon global Christ-rejecters likened unto the historical corollary understood by Bible students.

This Euphrates in this text is **not** a spatial, earthly place **nor** does it have a geographical location. **It is a logical reality!** Because God is holy, He must bring his armies to judge Christ-rejecters. It is not God’s will that rebels succeed. Every champion of statism has his Waterloo.

What the crossing of the Euphrates by eastern enemies signified to ancient Israel, this plague should mean to the followers of the Beast. The fear that griped ancient Israel when eastern soldiers forded the Euphrates, will grip the hearts of men during the outpouring of God’s wrath upon rebels of God’s law-order. The conditions that prevented the full display of God’s wrath are now removed; that is, there is a spiritual Euphrates in the life of unbelievers. In judgment, the obstacles are eliminated. Defenses of the ungodly regime are penetrated. Statists are spoiled and plundered.

The Euphrates has now become the Red Sea. When God’s people crossed the Red Sea they were safe. When Pharaoh tried to cross the Red Sea, his armies drowned under salt water and silt. When armies crossed the Euphrates, Israel knew they were in peril. What God did to rebellious Israel, he will do to the anti-God forces. He will dry up the sea of the anti-god forces so that God’s soldiers of wrath can reach and punish Christ-rejecters. All the Beast’s defenses to prevent the judgment of God fail. It is payback time and all resistance to God’s judgment is futile.

Revelation 16:13-14 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

Frogs and unclean spirits: Again, we are not dealing with literal images. Frogs were considered unclean. Thus, they represent demonic forces. In Egypt, the magicians were able to mimic the plague of frogs through Satanic power and deception. Apparently, the anti-God forces develop a coalition in an unholy alliance in an attempt to outflank God’s armies. When it comes to resisting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, divided nations seem very capable of laying side their differences in order to unite against gospel proclamation.

Devils and miracles represents false religious systems which bond together to assault the truth of the gospel through sorcery and deceit. Decaying societies cater to the occult, to unclean causes, and to the spectacular. Secular humanism, secret societies like the illuminati, and the occult unite to resist the gospel. The plans of Wall Street and the international banking cartel

with all their fake news propaganda and “stimulus” packages will not survive the judgment of a holy God.

This unity, however, is based on lies, deception, and compromise. Men have a great capacity to unite around false promises and false hopes, but stumble when it comes to organizing around truth. Political history is one where the State opposes true religion; where men place their hopes in false messiahs, corrupt politicians, and political myths. Episodes regarding the holocaust of Christians abound. As a society deteriorates, decadence prevails. Lies multiply. Deception prevails. Bedroom bimbos, abortionists, and Sodomites gain social acceptance by legislative acts. Modern history shows that citizens are more prone to rally around humanistic government programs which forbid prayer and reading of God’s Word than they are to organize around the law of the LORD God and the doctrines of Christianity.

2.10.8 Pastoral Warning

Revelation 16:15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

The Lord speaks. He announces a coming. This coming is not the second coming of our Lord but a coming in history to wage war against a rebellious political system.

The imagery of a thief highlights the sudden shift and unexpectedness of this judgment.

Keeping garments represents devotion and sanctification among the redeemed.

Nakedness is a symbol of spiritual poverty (3:17ff) and of unexpected exposure of hidden sins. Shame is the result of ungodly conduct. Both are to be avoided.

Watch and keep his garments: “Wake up and be clean,” commands the Lord. “Don’t be caught with your pants down!” Be holy.

This is a pastoral warning against laxity and indolence in the time of spiritual warfare. Christians are present during this period. Believers are to be alert, awake, and ready to wage war against sin and compromise at all times.

"I believe there are more instances of abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments of those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations..." James Madison.

When God’s white sheep become dirty grey, the black sheep feel more comfortable- Vance Havner

At this point in the book, in light of a futurist’s interpretation, this phrase seems almost superfluous. The Lord could come at any time: before, during, or after the display of divine

wrath. If this is the end of the world and Christians have been raptured, why do we have the exhortation to watch and keep one's garments clean?

Revelation 16:16 And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.

Armageddon ("har megiddon") refers to the mountains of Megiddo south of Nazareth and east of modern day Haifa. Barak, Saul, and Josiah fought battles in this famous valley. It has been considered by some a perfect place for a war. And, many a war has been fought on these farm lands.

This battle, however, is **not** spatial or geographical. It is spiritual and logical. It does not occur on earth's landscape, but in the realm of the Spirit. God judges sinners!

This is John's way of telling us that there is a day of reckoning. This battle by the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ stands between the forces of evil and forces of good. Satan will rally the nations to resist the gospel at various times in history. But, evil will not prevail. The gospel will be preached and the elect will be saved.

Satan will use the powers of the State to crush truth, but Christians armed with the Word of God and integrity will ultimately prevail. Satan can use it and abuse it; bend it and twist it, but he cannot destroy and demolish it. The gospel will be victorious in this age. In fact, the gospel seems to prosper in times of persecution. Hardened men who seem impossible to reach will be won to Christ. A parcel of wickedness will experience defeat through gospel proclamation. Proud politicians have an Armageddon. They will fall and collapse in God's time (Psalm 75:2).

2.10.9 Seventh Bowl

Revelation 16:17-21 And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done. And there were voices, and thunder, and lightning; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great. And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath. And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

This is the climax of the revelation. Like a dream with sudden shifts wrath is poured into the air then quickly focuses on an earthquake. We have here a drama designed to teach a truth about God's roaring rampage of revenge. Voices, thunders, lightening, cities falling, cup of wine, sinking islands, and giant hail stones is phenomenal, apocalyptic language adding to the drama of

this scene. This is the dark reality of God's judgment. It is fierce and vigorous, dark and deadly, crushing and bruising, unavoidable and inescapable. This is everyman's Waterloo.

Babylon represents the worldly political systems, the anti-God forces united against God. To John, Babylon would be Rome. To us, Babylon represents the systems of evil that works through democratic State to frustrate the gospel. It could be Berlin, London, or Paris. Closer to home, Babylon is the United States' Government and the International New World order with all its commerce, moral compromise, and social equality programs.

Fierceness of wrath: God's people are often bewildered by the might and power of anti-God regimes and have felt helpless against political monopolies. John wants his audience to know that though these forces may be inspired by the trinity of evil and united to resist God, they will be demolished with cosmic asteroid forces when God orders their destruction. They will not prevail. The bloody system will be beaten, scattered, and pulverized by the wrath of Almighty God.

"In the continuing conflict between good and evil, truth is the weapon that wins the war." George Washington

"The more a Truth is told, the more it is believed."

What an encouragement to John's readers! The true Israel will prevail! Rome will be defeated! Believers will be safe and secure in the presence of God. God's wrath will not sleep forever. Evil politicians face a day of pulverizing punished. The enemies of the gospel and their institutions have an appointment with destruction. Liberals will be stripped of their pride and boasting. Rebels will be crushed under the wheels of justice. Righteousness will be rewarded.

Stand for Christ and fight the good fight for you are on the winning side! This is John's message.

Interpretive note: In apocalyptic literature, God uses symbols as a vehicle of truth. The symbolic imagery is not to be taken literally, but **the symbols do convey a literal truth!** These physical, earthly, climatic images represent the inevitability of God's cup of wrath poured out upon Christ-rejecters, but "waters turning to blood" and "collapsing cities" are not literal events. However, they do teach that God literally judges what man esteems; that the hopes of the unbelieving will crash like a freeway pile-up in an ice storm when God's red wine of wrath is poured out upon the unbelieving. He has many iron tools in his arsenal of judgment including but not limited to environmental catastrophes, earthquakes, natural disasters, and political reversals.

There is a difference between *the end of a political system* and *the catastrophic dismantling of the universe*. In view of Peter's words, "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2 Peter 3:12). The Lord will come and the world as we know it will have its

terminus ad quim. After all, we look for a new heaven and new earth renewed by the creative powers of our Lord and Savior.

However, this chapter is not describing the end of the world. Rather, the Lord comes many times in history to crush political systems opposed to the good of humanity. Nero, Caligula, Pope John XII (954-964), Louie the 14th of France, Benito Mussolini, Italy (1883-1945), Mao Zedong of China (1893-1976) , Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania (1918-1989) come to mind.

While we look for our Savior to come in the *Parousia*, we also look to the Lord to come in history in answer to prayer to quash anti-god forces that resist truth and moral law. Such political collapses are often inexplicable and must be the result of the prayers of the saints.³⁴ For example, Berlin, Paris, and London had their Armageddon in WWII. Europe's "spiritual" Euphrates was crossed by the Allied Forces. Is there any doubt the wrath of God was poured out on Europe during WWII? Germany met a bloody end along with so many other nations in the European theater.

This passage in Holy Scripture should be a warning to every political leader that has imperialistic ambitions; that seeks to build an empire on lust and greed. In His time, God will crush regimes that build their society on the whims and wishes of men instead of God's law-order.

³⁴ Consider the sudden political collapse of leaders in our time: Lenin, Stalin, Khrushchev, Richard Nixon, Hillary Clinton, Rep. Bobby Scott, Rep. Trent Franks, Rep. Reuben Kihuen, Rep. Blake Farenthold, Rep. Blake Farenthold, Sen. Al Franken, and Harvey Weinstein et al.

3 THE THIRD VISION

3.1 Mystery Babylon

3.1.1 The Great Harlot

Revelation 17:1 And there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will show unto thee the judgment of the great whore³⁵ that sitteth upon many waters:

Come: John's apocalyptic message is centered on four visions. This is the third vision. "Come," signals a new revelation.

Because the angel is the one who carried a bowl, there is continuity between the two dreams. In arriving at an interpretation of this section, we must ask ourselves: "How would the original readers (the seven churches of Asia Minor) have interpreted this passage?" To read into chapter 17 & 18 the collapse of the World Trade Center on 9/11 or a coming stock market crash is peshet interpretation.³⁶ To say that this woman is the Roman Catholic Church or the Brussels new world order violates the law of reason and the plain meaning of the text. How would such an interpretation bring any understanding, comfort, or joy to the first century readers? While this passage has a lesson for Christians today, we must first examine it in light of the times in which John penned the passage.

Judgment: The angel announces to John that he is going to show him the judgment of the great whore that sits on many waters. Getting a glimpse of this luring seductress would stir the curiosity of both men and women. Who would not want to climb into a tree to get a good look this self-employed working girl?

The Great Whore: This is one nasty woman! History has shown us that bad women are particularly skilled at using their charms to seduce and to deceive. Men do not have a monopoly on sin. When the Bible wants to depict evil, it shows us a woman! Think of these bad girls: Eve seduced Adam into sinning against God, Potiphar's lying wife falsely accused Joseph of sexual

³⁵ Futurists see this woman as restored Babylon, the final spiritual-economic system of the last days controlled by the supposed antichrist. The continuous-historical groups see this as the apostolic Roman Catholic church. One must ask, "What possible meaning would the judgment of a system 1600 years removed from the seven churches have for the original readers?" While the beast may have a future manifestation, the common sense approach sees the woman as the city of Rome controlling the Roman Empire.

³⁶ Peshet Interpretation originated with the Qumran Community, but the term is used here to refer to a type of interpretation that relies upon current political events to interpret the Bible.

misconduct, Delilah destroyed Samson, and Jezebel introduced Baalism into Israel, and Athaliah order the murder of all the babies in the king's nursery. So powerful are these vixens, Solomon warned his princely sons about the danger of being trapped in the web of the seductress (Proverbs 7). Further, the apostle Paul under the inspiration of the Spirit forbid women to teach churchmen because of the sinful stain of deception which marks the sex (1 Timothy 2:14). It is the feminist movement that introduced the modern world to the cruel, filthy illogical conclusions of abortion, Planned Parenthood, lesbianism, same-sex unions, gender-bender ideologies, radical communist equality, and pernicious patriarchy.

However, the great whore is not an alluring woman, but a "great city" (17:18). What is this city?

God told John the whore is the great city that ruled over the kings of the earth. This can be none other than the City of Rome. We don't think of Rome being very powerful today, but in John's day this city-state ruled the Mediterranean. Rome was successful in subduing all its neighbors in central Italy, and then built up an extended alliance system throughout the Italian peninsula through force. In spite of major revolts by allies and the invasion of Carthaginian forces under Hannibal, this military, political alliance continued to power Roman expansion into Sicily, Sardinia, Spain, Gaul, North Africa, Greece, and Palestine.

When we try to place America into this passage interpreters fail to think about the fact that we are a nation, not a city. In every place in this passage the text speaks of a city, not a nation. Though the United States based in Washington D.C. has imperialistic characteristics similar to Rome, it does not rule over the kings of the earth. The U.S.A. has a lot of influence and power, but Washington D.C. does not rule the world.³⁷

The ancient City of Rome is called a whore. The imagery of a prostitute was chosen because there is a sense of mystery and intrigue, repugnance and contempt, commerce and dirty money connected with prostitution. This whore is the opposite of the bride in chapter 19, the opposite of the woman in chapter 12, and the opposite of the city of God in chapter 21-22.

Nineveh (Nahum 3:4), Tyre (Isaiah 23:17), and Jerusalem (Ezekiel 16:28) were also accused of being harlots. During the early part of 20th century, Berlin was called "The Whore of Babylon." These nations sold out morality and truth for money, enslaved neighboring people for filthy

³⁷ "Some have argued that Rome was a city-nation because it ruled as a nation. Babylon was the same way. So, why couldn't the U.S.A. be a city-nation? The answer is simply this. A city-nation is named after the city that rules it. For example the Roman Empire was called Rome the same way with Babylon whose empire was called Babylon. The city that rules us is called Washington D.C.. Is our Nation called Washington D.C.? No it isn't. The Grecian empire for example was called Greece but was not called by the name of a particular city, therefore it was not a city-nation. It was eventually ruled from Alexandria, but was not called Alexandria. The Grecian Empire or the medo-Persian Empire neither one were city-nations. Mystery Babylon was and is a city." (http://www.geocities.com/christian_crusade/mysterybabylon.html, retrieved 1.18.08).

lucre, and abused human rights in order to obtain wealth and power. The incurable defects of these city-states was not only *spiritual unfaithfulness to YHHW, but the prostitution of everything for the sake of commercial gain*. Thus, the whoredom of Rome represents spiritual fornication or commercial³⁸ intercourse among the nations. As with all offers, benefits come with “strings attached;” that is, Rome offered franchise benefits in exchange for rights. Thus, nations fornicating with Rome “sold their birthright (freedom) for a mess of porridge (commercial benefits).”

This prostitute (Rome) sits on many waters. Ancient Babylon was known as a city of many waters because of her elaborate irrigation aqueduct system (Jeremiah 51:13). John interprets the “many peoples” and “many waters” for us. “The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” enslaved by the commercial charms of the Rome (v. 17).

Waters refer to the vastness and universality of Rome’s influence. This is a vision in the form of a dream and the imagery switches rapidly without warning. This whore not only sits on many waters but she also sits on “the Beast” and “the seven hills.” The city-state became a “god” demanding strict obedience from her worshippers. Controlling nations through contracts, Rome ruled the Mediterranean from the Rhine River to the Sahara Desert and from the Pyrenees in Spain to the Caucasus Mountains in Armenia.

Revelation 17:2 With whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

The kings of the earth refer to vast collection of states who allied themselves with Rome: Ancient Spain, Egypt, Greece, Asia Minor, and Palestine.

Fornication: The term “fornication” refers to commercial contracts. In fact, Black’s Law Dictionary defines commerce as “intercourse” for the sake of trade. This “intercourse” involved provinces eager to exchange liberty for franchises offered by Rome. These nations lost their virginity (sovereignty) by entering into commercial compacts offered by the Roman State (Black’s Law Dictionary, 6th Edition).

Rome offered commercial benefits to those who entered into political alliances with her. These contracts were at the price of liberty. These sovereigns could not copulate with Rome without compromising freedom, civil rights, and morals.

³⁸ Commerce: Black’s Law Dictionary, 2nd Edition: “What is COMMERCE? **Intercourse by way of trade and traffic between different peoples or states and the citizens or inhabitants thereof**, including not only the purchase, sale, and exchange of commodities, but also the instrumentalities and agencies by which it is promoted and the means and appliances by which it is carried on, and the transportation of persons as well as of goods, both by land and by sea.

Why would rulers compromise their sovereignty to be allied with a tyrant that believed in the total subjugation of the total man to total government? The motive appears to be the lure of wealth. The bait on the hook was the glitter of gold and economic expansion. Possibly, they thought that Rome would protect them from foreign looters. When nations allied themselves with Rome for prosperity and protection, they ceded their right to rule themselves.³⁹ Did they not know that incorporating with the capital city would cost them their precious all? Like the South learned in the Civil War, secession was not an option. Submit to despotism or die! The South chose death.

Kings eager for wealth (wine) compromised their sovereignty for political favors. Eventually, they ended up enslaved to Rome hating her dominion over them (17:18). When the nations traded obedience for protection, they lost control over their own welfare. We understand this as citizens in America. Whenever States or local governments fornicate with the United States, Inc. and its entitlement programs, freedoms are lost. All have to adhere to the existence of the omnipotence of the Washington D.C., the omnipresence of its military, and America's fickleness in foreign policy.

The cost of fornicating with Rome was taxation. Taxes became tithes from those who worshiped the State. There is always a loss of freedom when a State . . . or church incorporates with the government. This is what happened to those nations who obtained franchises from Rome. They had to support public policy or risk military rule. Unable to resist the tyranny of Rome without severe political consequences, provinces languished under the burden of taxation. When Rome was eventually invaded by Germanic invaders (406 AD.), the people of the empire saw the raiders as liberators from excessive taxation by the Caesars. Only when Rome collapsed were people free to keep their money and to carry out their own business in their own way.

Revelation 17:3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Carried into the wilderness: You have heard it said, "You can't see the forest for the trees;" that is, when you are heavily engaged in daily business affairs, it is difficult to see corruption within a governmental system. So, with John the divine! The angel carried him away into the desert. It was not until he was separated from this commercial arcade, could he understand the depth of evil and corruption in the Roman Empire. He had to leave the fellowship of man so he could clearly see the evil in the democratic State. Sometimes one has to leave a job, or church, or country to gain perspective.

³⁹ The reader would do well to distinguish between the meaning of the term "Citizen" in the U.S. Constitution Article I (a sovereign) and the term "citizen" in the 14th Amendment which refers to a vassal of Congress.

The wilderness is not geographical and spatial but logical and spiritual. Flying away into the desert under the illumination of the Sun is John's way of telling his readers how he managed to gain perspective. Only when John escaped the choking fog of the city and haggling in the market place could John see the true nature of this city-state.

The woman sits upon the Beast with seven heads and ten horns that arises out of the turbulent sea of politics. The great harlot sits on top of this scarlet monster for she is moved by and supported by this hideous world-power. By this description John intends the reader to associate the Great whore with the Beast mentioned in chapter 13. Rome is the Beast. The city of Rome controlled the political affairs of the entire Roman Empire (See 17:18).

“Scarlet” is often associated immorality, particularly prostitution and adultery. Scarlet Red represents the dominate sins of men (Isaiah 1:18). Under the desert Sun and away from the sounds of the city, John saw Rome's crimson crimes. Sometimes we are so close to a situation or in such a rut, we fail to recognize the objectionable nature of what is happening all around us. Repeat a lie long enough and everyone will believe it. The way to detect counterfeit money is to handle real money. Only when John retreated from a counterfeit society to commune with the true God could he perceive the corrupt nature of the Roman State with all its blasphemies.

“Blasphemy” means to “speak against.” The blasphemous names refer to the profane and obscene character of decadent Rome; that is, to her sacrilege regarding true religion and her violations of the law of the LORD God. Every abomination known to man is etched on her forehead: idolatry, murder, crucifixion, lusts, violence, tyranny, corruption, adultery, fornication, Sodomy, lesbianism, fraud, deception, cruelty, injustice, and arrogance. This is the Spirit's way of describing the entrenched corruption of the system. As the beautiful little serpent in Genesis 3 grew into a hideous Dragon and Revelation 12, the sin of Adam has now infected an entire governmental institution. As a thousand demons departed from the Gerasene man dwelling among the tombs on the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee to enter a herd of pigs, legions of impure spirits controlled the apparatus of the Roman government. Blasphemous Rome became the antithesis of goodness and holiness of God. She loved what God hated, and hated what God loved.

Revelation 17:4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

“Purple” is the color of kings and it represents the extravagant wealth of Rome.

The use of “Scarlet” in literature is a metaphorical tool used to show the reader the obvious, unmistakable vigor and intensity of a thing. In this case, the cherry-red clothing represents the single-minded pursuit of wealth and power regardless of the loss of rights among men. Scarlet informs us their sins reached to the heavens. Hawthorne organized his masterpiece, “The Scarlet

Letter,” around the crimson themes of adultery, guilt, and shame. Rome, however, was not only the sensual playground of the Mediterranean; she created wealth by taxing contracting parties into poverty and dependence on government.

The harlot’s jewelry of gold, precious stones and pearls emphasize her prosperity. Patron provinces exhausted their treasuries to fornicate with her. Like a swine ornamented with a gold necklace, Rome glittered with wealth. Her opulence was the envy of the nations, but her life in a pig’s sty made her odorous to the provinces under her command.

The golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication addresses Rome’s deficiency in *virtus* and fanatical devotion to everything obscene and decadent.

Abominations: The word “abomination” refers to things that are vile, shameful, and disgusting. There was something deceptive about Rome’s wealth. She wore queen’s clothing, but was a whore. She was pretty on the outside, but ugly on the inside. Her ornaments of “gilded” gold camouflaged her ugly crimes . . . like pretty on an ape or lipstick on a pig. She planned a feast for her guests, but the fruits were plucked from the Poisonous Tree. She had a stunning mesmerizing appearance, but she drank sewage flowing from the Lucifer’s latrine. She gave political favors for human rights, but her kiss of death poisoned the nations. Like prostitutes spread STD, Rome’s fornications infected the shores of the Mediterranean with cruel force which no politician could cure.

Ambassador Henry Grunwald, quoted by Richard Lamm in his lecture, "The Rise and Fall of the American Civilization," said:

"For freedom to be workable as a political system, there has to be strong inner controls; there has to be a powerful moral compass and sense of values."

Rome lacked all of these.

In contrast to the commercial interests of Rome, the original vision for America was established on the Puritan ethic, not commerce. The venerable John Higginson, of Salem, in his Election Sermon of 1663, stated,

"It concerneth New England always to remember that they are originally a plantation religious, not a plantation of trade.... Let merchants ... remember this: that worldly gain was not the end and design of the people of New England, but (the practice of the Christian) religion..."

We, greatly commending, and graciously accepting of, their Desires for the Furtherance of so noble a Work, which may, by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of his divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian Religion to such People, as yet live in Darkness and miserable Ignorance of the

true Knowledge and Worship of God, and may in time bring the Infidels and Savages, living in those parts, to human Civility, and to a settled and quiet Government {First Charter of Virginia, 1606}”

But, America changed: In January 1925 President **Calvin Coolidge** announced, “The chief business of the American people is business.” Really? What happened to the “City Upon a Hill?”

Revelation 17:5 And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

This is the **third mention of Babylon** (14:8; 16:19).

Mystery: The seductress is Rome, but she has the name “Mystery” on her forehead. The tattoo exposes her idolatrous commitment to commerce. The fact this title was on her forehead shows us she was not ashamed of her wickedness. Prostitutes do not blush.

Babylon was the capital city of Nimrod, the first tyrant to develop a centralized government. His regime sought to build the Tower of Babel in order to challenge the authority of the LORD God (Genesis 11). In English it is easy enough to make the connection between “Babel” and “Babylon,” but in Hebrew it is the same word. Many empires were headquartered in this region: Assyria, Babylon, and Media-Persia. Associating ancient Babylon with Rome informed John’s flock that the evil and defiance of that vulture city-state now nested in Rome (See 1 Peter 5:13; Revelation 17:5).

A mystery is something not yet revealed, or something revealed in the New Testament that was not found in the Old Testament. The word *musterion* is in the accusative while the word *Babylon* is in the genitive (origin). By mystery, John informs us that Rome was the present manifestation of Israel’s arch enemy, Babylon. John does not want his readers to be deceived. ***Mighty Rome was controlled by the same spirit that controlled ancient Babylon who enslaved and deported God’s people back to ancient city.*** This was a warning to the believers not to be deceived by Rome’s charms and powers.

The title “mother of harlots” means that Babylon was the mother whore who littered the ancient world with bastard offspring. No father is mentioned. Rome was simply one of Babylon’s illegitimate children. This political religious system began with Nimrod & Semiramis, the mother-child religious system that sought to control men through the use of force. Nimrod, the rebel panther, set up a pseudo religious system opposed to the command of God in order to unite and control people around the imperial State. He formed the first tyrannical government and made men slaves to his political agenda. He enslaved men through a system of taxation and enrolled them to support his political ambitions. Citizens tithed their labor and person to this ruler. Government workers got richer and the people got poorer. His imperialism subjugated the patriarchal order and divine institutions to the will of the State. The Arab record says that

Nimrod was the first king over men. The Targum (p. 389) says that Nimrod was the mightiest rebel⁴⁰ before the Lord that ever was in the earth. He launched the rebellion mentioned in Psalm two which Rome, London, Washington D.C., Berlin, and Brussels have joined.

To John, Rome was another Babylon in a series of Babylons and Babylons to come. Kingdoms rise and fall, but the spirit of Babylon is trans-generational. Because of the danger of “no-knock warrants” and early morning raids by the *cohorts urbanae*⁴¹, John coded the name to protect those in possession of his book. To say that God was going to destroy Rome could be interpreted as treason in the eyes of Rome’s undercover agents.

Rome was a police-state corporation with a system of beliefs and praxis that united men into an undivided people for commercial purposes. Populations were linked by an economic scheme that forced individuals and nations to yield their sovereignty in the new world order of John’s day. Like Babel, Rome tolerated all kinds of religious beliefs except those that challenged Rome’s authority or interfered with commerce, order, and peace. Pluralism and multiculturalism surfaced in public policy. Rome declared war on rivals to power.

Truth is always the first casualty of war (see notes on the White Horse). Truth was dutifully sacrificed for the sake of economic prosperity. Rome practiced toleration of every vice and creed except that which challenged the authority of the State to rule the world.⁴²

But, this is not the only interpretation. Others have attempted to identify this woman as one of the following:

- A revived Rome empire, the final civilization.
- The Roman Catholic Church of the 16th century (Barnes and others).
- The apostate church, pseudo religion (Seiss, p. 386).
- The commercial system of civilization.
- The literal city of Babylon (Henry Morris).

Rome was controlling, much like George Orwell’s classic novel, “1984”, wherein it described the propaganda of a totalitarian society in which the government, referred to as the *Party*, exercised total control over the peasant people. The supreme ruler of the Party was *Big Brother*. Posters announced that “Big Brother is Watching You.” Telescreens spew out brainwashing

⁴⁰ The term “rebel” in the Bible is only used in reference to men opposing the rule of God over men. It is improper to use the term “rebel” to identify a freedom-fighter opposing a tyrannical regime. Rebellion in the Bible always refers to acts opposing God’s law-order.

⁴¹ Augustus’s local, urban police force under the command of the prefect of the city.

⁴² Christianity challenged the authority of Rome teaching another king besides Caesar, “King Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7). Any business that can’t operate under Christian law is wrong for America.

propaganda about how wondrous government programs were going to take care of the people. Coins, stamps, books, films, and banners proclaimed the three slogans of the Party: *War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength*. The Democratic political mantra of 2010 “leading from behind” is of this ilk.

Mystery Babylon takes on many forms. Rome was certainly the Babylon of John’s day. In one sense, the spirit of Nimrod still lives. Globalists eager to unite the world plot day and night to manufacture ways to control all mankind. Every crisis real or manufactured becomes an opportunity to cease more power. Babylon will continue until the end of time. In the ebb and flow of history, powerful men arise having the same vision as Nimrod: to build a city without God, a “Disneyland” without a church on Main Street, a Utopian City that focuses on equality:

According to Lyman Tower Sargent,

there are socialist, capitalist, monarchical, democratic, anarchist, ecological, feminist, patriarchal, egalitarian, hierarchical, racist, left-wing, right-wing, reformist, Naturism / Nude Christians, free love, nuclear family, extended family, gay, lesbian and many more utopias [...] Utopianism, some argue, is essential for the improvement of the human condition. But if used wrongly, it becomes dangerous. Utopia has an inherent contradictory nature here (Sargent, Lyman Tower (2010). *Utopianism: A very short introduction*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. p. 21)

Revelation 17:6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus: and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

The woman is Rome.⁴³ John brought two moral indictments against the capital city: political enslavement of a free people (17:1-5) and persecution of God’s people (17:6).

Drunk with the blood of the saints: He now addresses **the second criminal charge** against Rome. Rome was drunk with the “blood of the saints.” The imagery of drunkenness is a symbol of the hostility and persecution of God’s people. Rome not only killed Christians, it killed them with insult by crucifying them, burning them, and throwing them to the lions. Even though they injured no man or damaged no property, Jesus, James, Peter, Paul, and many other disciples were sentenced to death by the Caesars and their confederates for crimes against the State.

Wonder: So stunning was this woman, John was spellbound. His eyes glossed over as he stared at the contradictions of the seductress. His response deserves an interpretation.

⁴³ This city is Rome, not America. Rome killed Christians by the thousands without conscience. While America is cracked and flawed in many ways, America has never condoned the whole sale killing of Christians, or blacks, or Catholics, or Moslems or any race or creed of people.

Martyrs: Christians were not put to death because they were “Christians,” but because they opposed Rome’s god-like rulers. With Jesus as Lord, early Christians refused to participate in emperor worship; that is, they dared to resist the might and power of the god-State. Refusing to incorporate and register their churches, they became enemies of the State. Unlike Christians in modern times who have a twisted devotion to government, the early Christians believed that devotion to the State was treason to Jesus.

What is treason? Is treason unfaithfulness to the State or is treason unfaithfulness to our Lord? If we answer the “State,” we empower government to persecute Christians. For example, Nero executed Christians not because they believed in Christ, but because they refused to pledge allegiance to him; that is, they refused to acknowledge Rome as the ultimate authority on earth. Rome did not care what god you worshipped as long as you would say once a year that, “Caesar is Lord.” Rome executed Christians, not because they were religious but because they would not accept Caesar as their sovereign. When the Scripture says, “You shall not have any gods before me” it means men should not put State before their devotion to God. To “always” obey the government is treason to Christ!

3.1.2 The Mystery of the Woman

Revelation 17:7 And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

Why marvel? John stared at the gold-clad prostitute with astonishment. Rome, the capital of the ancient world with her one consul, the praetor, the emperor, the senators and her plebs was a political juggernaut. How could something so beautiful, be so ugly and complex? How could something so flawed, be so powerful? There was a fly in the buttermilk.

Rome was like pretty like a coral snake and to embrace her was the kiss of death. Rome turned into a republican oligarchic fascist dictatorship that ruled the world with a whip of scorpion tails. Her outward image was quintessential beauty, but the inner core of this whore fomented with lusts for wealth and power. Her senate maintained control because it used violence as military State to force people to comply with her policies. Rome was a democracy only in the sense that each senator had a vote. Her leaders pulverized dissent by crucifying factious rebels while entertaining herself on the blood and gore in the Coliseum.

Likewise, governments today hide behind the color of law while they carry out the most heinous crimes against humanity. The defamation, propaganda machine of the modern State (media) can always be counted on to demonize and vilify those who resist its power.

"The natural progress of things is for liberty to yield and government to gain ground" (Thomas Jefferson).

“all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed” (Declaration of Independence).

The angel now proceeds to give the interpretation of this woman and the Beast. He spends more time helping us understand the Beast than he does the woman.

Revelation 17:8 The beast that thou sawest (aorist) was (imperfect), and is (present) not; and shall ascend (present infinitive) out of the bottomless pit, and go (present) into perdition: and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

This is a visionary riddle and it is one of the most difficult passages to interpret in the Book of Revelation.

The Beast: First, the angel identifies the Beast: (a) by using the language “was, and is not; and shall ascend” John indicates the Beast has a past manifestation, a present form with a continuing historical construct.

Bottomless pit: The fact that John uses the present tense in chapter 11 verse 7, “the monster that arises from the abyss,” gives us the impression that the monster rising from the pit is a permanent attribute of the Beast’s character rather than a single event in history⁴⁴; and second, (b) the Beast originates in hell, “the bottomless pit,” and its end is destruction.

The second feature of the Beast is that it is a bastard child from a womb in hell; that is, in the “bottomless pit.” Under the plan of God, secular States that enshrine humanist religion as guiding principles are always headed towards perdition (destruction). States grounded in the morality of utopian humanism always end up in the graveyard of nations.

Wonder: Earth dwellers, a symbol for the polytheistic pagan world, *wonder at the Beast*. “Wonder” refers to the infatuation and allegiance of men to those with political power. Before us is religious statism – the belief that government based on science and pragmatism can solve all man’s problems. All will give allegiance to Beast except the elect. The Beast has become an idol. The sprawling power of totalitarian government bureaucracies slither through society capturing men, plundering wealth, and squashing freedom.

⁴⁴ John wants his readers to understand that Satan was working in and through Rome against the Christians. In one sense, the beast reappears again and again in history in various forms. Christians need to discern evil at work through political leaders and the systems they control. Nazi Germany, Stalin’s Russia, Communist China, and Islamic states have been and still are instruments used by Satan to resist the truth and ethics of Christianity.

This imagery serves as a warning to Christians. They should not put their hope in any political system or party (Psalm 118:8). It is God's will that all nations pitting themselves against His kingdom while refusing to acknowledge the authority of the Lamb should perish.

The key question is. "What if the enemy of the Christian is not his neighbor down the street, but the State turned traitor against the Law of God and its own constitution?"

The answer is that every government that fails to acknowledge Christ as Lord will experience the same fate as Rome.

Revelation 17:9 And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth.

Seven heads, seven mountains: The concept of seven hills⁴⁵ would be unmistakably identified as Rome by the seven churches. Identifying the seven hills as the city of Rome was a substantial fact known to all in the first century.

The detail sounded a note of authenticity to John's readers. They knew from firsthand experience the cruelty of Rome. Rome was the center of world trade. She was rich in merchandise. Everything you can imagine was bought, sold, or traded in the marketplace. At the hub of the chariot wheel, Rome joined Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. From Rome came legislation, law enforcement, and commercial inspiration. The armies in the empire took their marching orders from Rome. Rome's politics was the subject at every tavern and grill in the Mediterranean. Her mountains were known to the world: *Aventine, Caelian, Captoline, Esquiline, Palatine, Quirinal, and Viminal Hill.*

However, *the concept of mountains as representing powers or kingdoms also has merit* (Psalm 30:7; Jeremiah 51:25; and Daniel 2:35). It is easy to understand the seven hills could represent seven empires and the kings who ruled them. Possibly, John is referring to the great empires that threatened God's people in Biblical times before the arrival of Rome on the map of history: Egypt, Syria, Assyria, Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, Rome.

Every attempt to identify the woman or the seven mountains *as papal Rome* with all its corruption has intrigue, but fails under hermeneutic scrutiny. What possible comfort could the seven churches receive by identifying the seven hills as the corrupt Roman Catholic Church in Luther's day 1500 hundred years removed from John's time?

⁴⁵ Wiki: "In modern **Rome**, five of the **seven hills** - the Aventine, Caelian, Esquiline, Quirinal, and Viminal **Hills** - are now the sites of monuments, buildings, and parks. The Capitoline **Hill** is the location of **Rome's** city hall, and the Palatine **Hill** is part of the main archaeological area."

Revelation 17:10 And there are seven kings⁴⁶: five are fallen⁴⁷, and one is⁴⁸, and the other is not yet come⁴⁹; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.

Seven kings: This is another difficult verse to interpret. One interpretation is that the five kingdoms that are fallen are the kingdoms of Egypt, Assyrian, Babylon, Persia, Greece (Antiochus) that Rome ruled. The other kingdom had not yet come. The seventh kingdom will only be around a little while. All of these kingdoms were persecutors of true Israel and a part of the Satanic Empire in history. The *one that is to come* will have the same characteristic as the one that precedes it. The word “fallen” better fits a kingdom—a political era rather than a king.

Another interpretation is that the seven kings are Roman emperors beginning with Julius Caesar (Augustus Caesar). But, even this has difficulty. This is where we wish we knew the exact date of John’s writing---but, this verse could be a critical key to the date of Revelation. “Fallen” could be a reference to the dead Caesars. If Nero is the sixth king/Caesar and he is that one that “is,” then Revelation was written during his reign somewhere between 65 and June 8th, 68 AD. See the list below⁵⁰:

| | |
|----------|---|
| Julius | 49-44BC. *Julius Caesar is the best candidate for the first Caesar. |
| Augustus | 31BC.-14AD. *Christ was born during his reign |
| Tiberius | 14-37 *Christ died during his reign and world mission was born. |
| Caligula | 37-41 |
| Claudius | 41-54 *Paul took his first and second missionary journey. |
| Nero | 54-68 * Nero’s cruelty best fits the character of “the Beast” |

⁴⁶ McDowell (1951, p 169) identified the seven kings as Tiberius (14-37 AD.), Caligula (37-41 AD.), Nero (54 AD.), Vespasian (69-79 AD.), Titus (79-81 AD.), and Domitian (81-96 AD.). The three men omitted from the list are Galba, Otho, and Vitellius who were briefly in power after Nero. Summers (1951) saw the seven kings as Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian and Titus. Others identify the kings as (1) Julius, (2) Augustus, (3) Tiberius, (4) Caligula, (5) Claudius, (6) Nero, and (7) Vespasian.

⁴⁷ McDowell (1951, p. 169) identified the five kings as Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Vespasian, and Titus. Nero is omitted because in this riddle, he is regarded as “coming alive” and therefore not fallen.

⁴⁸ “The one is” is identified by McDowell (1951, p. 170) as Domitian, the emperor succeeding Titus.

⁴⁹ McDowell identifies “the other yet to come” as Nero come alive to reincarnate himself to reign as emperor of Rome.

⁵⁰ The difficulty with seeing these Caesars as fallen rulers is that short-lived kings should not be counted. If they do count, they interfere with arriving at Vespasian. (69-79). You can see the difficulty of being absolute by studying the list of Caesars below. However, the passage clearly identifies the sixth king as living when John composed his work. If the sixth king is Nero, then the book was written toward the later years of Nero’s reign.

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Galba | 68-69 |
| Ortho | 69 |
| Vitellius | 69 |
| Vespasian Vitellius. | 69-79 *Vespasian counts as the 7 th if we discard Galba, Ortho, and Vitellius. |
| Titus | 79-81 |
| Domitian | 81-96 *Domitian has been identified as one of the kings by late preterists. |

The problem with the list from a historical perspective is arriving at the seventh ruler. This can be done only if we eliminate the short reigning Caesars. If “Nero” is the “one is,” then Vespasian is the logical choice for the seventh emperor. While Vespasian was not bitterly insane like Nero, Vespasian did order the destruction of Jerusalem. The hostility in Palestine erupted against Jews and Christians in the rest of empire following the war. Again, we may not have enough information to be dogmatic, but Vespasian is my choice for the seventh Caesar.

Revelation 17:11 And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth⁵¹, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

The Beast that was and is not: John said the Beast did not exist in the present. Twice he says the Beast will exist in the future. He was, but is not, and he will be again. He has seven heads. One head was wounded unto death and was then healed. Now he adds a new fact: He will be an eighth that belongs to the seventh. Possibly, the link between the 7th and the 8th king is a father-son relationship such as Vespasian and Titus.

For an analysis of the Eight see the **Appendices** on Revelation 17:11: “The Beast that Was and Is Not”

Revelation 17:12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings⁵², which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast.

The ten horns are ten kings. They rule with the Beast Empire for a short time. Apparently, they are confederate states (*socii* or *foederati*) — possibly the 10 provinces of Rome that included

⁵¹ Summers (1951) saw the eight king as a Roman Caesar who would act like Nero, a sort of reincarnation of the evil emperor. He identified the 8th king as Domitian.

⁵² Futurist see this passage as the European Common Market, a ten nation confederation rising out of Europe in the last days. There is a future aspect to this vision, but speculation about a ten nation confederation arising out of Europe future to our time does not help solve the interpretive problem in this passage. It only muddles the interpretation of this chapter even more.

over 150 tribes and city-states. The problem comes in the phrase, “which have received no kingdom as yet.” This implies they are not yet kings. Possibly John is saying that at the time of his vision, the confederate states had not yet initiated pogroms against believers, but that a time was coming when they would take part in Christian persecutions hoping to gain political favors from Domitian or one of the other Caesars.

They receive the authority of kings for one hour. Possibly, this refers to powerful political favors granted by Rome to those provinces who demonstrated great loyalty to the empire. John is saying that Rome would delegate absolute power to its states to punish political dissidents and that this conveyance of power to the provinces would eventually effect the Christians in Asia Minor and the cause of the gospel in a negative way.

Revelation 17:13 These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

“**These**” (*socii* or *foederati*) refer to the provinces that yielded their sovereignty to the Roman Empire. They are allies with the Beast and identify with his purposes. United with this city-state, the long arm of Rome’s hostility towards Christians would be extended through provincial authorities.

We must keep in mind that statist governments are supported by blind and ignorant peasants. Historically, the ruling elite call them *sycophants*, the *ignorant masses*, or the *mindless angry*.

The stupidity of the ignorant masses has been proven thousands of times in the history! Each time they follow the wrong leader and in the end fall in the cesspool!” (Mehmet Murat Ildan, Turkish playwright)

Moreover, powerful regimes are difficult to resist. Do not think that today’s church has escaped the clutches of political power. Hitler called the church in Germany during WWII as “submissive as dogs.” churches in America surrendered their sovereignty to the State by becoming non-profit (non-prophet) organizations.

Likewise, every Christian pursuing the truth on any subject will one day find himself in conflict with government and its public policy. Because the government does not obey its own laws, the “Government is not your friend.” (Judge Andrew P. Napolitano, Constitutional Chaos).

Revelation 17:14 These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

War: There is a Rider on the White Horse that declares war on the gospel (Revelation 6). The ten kings and the Beast are united in their opposition to Christianity. The only way to attack the Lamb is through his people. These powers will attack our Lord, His doctrine, His teaching, His

people, and His purpose, but they shall not prevail in abolishing Christianity. True Israel will NEVER FAIL. What an encouragement to the people of that day!

But, there will be war with the Lamb. A pluralistic society will tolerate any religion as long as it does not claim to be the true religion.

It doesn't matter how you pray. Just pray. All religions are beautiful and they all have one common belief. There's something bigger and greater than us that can give us and take from us life. It is better than the here and now. (Mattie Stepanek, Teenage Poet expressing the liberal idealism of her age)

Once a religion claims to be the truth, antichrists crawl out of every rat hole to nibble on its claims and dissect its proclamations. When a society changes gods, it changes laws. When it changes religions, it will not tolerate the “way, the truth, and the life.” Christians who call rulers to submit to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ will find themselves the target of slander and defamation.

The Lamb will overcome them: The history of the gospel is the history of the dethronement of evil within human civilization. The gospel will be resisted, but it will not be defeated. **This is the “blessing” of the book.** The gospel will succeed in history in a limited way by winning souls and thereby defeating the forces of darkness. Sheep and wolves will live together; but the wolves will not devour the flock; and, darkness will not overcome the light.

Revelation 17:15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.

Waters is a reference to the jurisdiction of the State and its control of the people. Waters represent Mediterranean peoples and nations that give their allegiance and devotion to the Roman government.

The whore sitteth: The dream changes again. Here the whore does not sit on the Beast, the seven hills, or the seven kings, but upon “waters.” It does not matter what she sits on, the symbolism is the same. Roman naval forces expanded the empire’s power around the Mediterranean. The whore-government controlled mankind. So far, John has spent more time describing the Beast than he has the great harlot.

Revelation 17:16 And the ten horns⁵³ which thou sawest upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.

The ten horns represent political institutions, and, or the political subdivisions of Rome.

The whore represents Rome and her controlling policies that dominated subsidiary provinces. John informs his readers that ten kings that confederate with the Beast will eventually come to hate imperialistic Rome – not unlike many American states despise the federal government. We are not told why they hate the whore, but we can speculate that they hated being controlled and manipulated by a federal system. In the beginning they seemed to support the woman, but after Rome destroyed civil rights internal strife breaks out. There is dissention and rumors of civil war. Eventually, the States revolt against Rome and refuse to cooperate with her tyranny.

John informs his readers that even unregenerate peasants will come to despise the evil that controls them.

Desolate and naked: Desolation, nakedness, devouring, and burning refer to Rome's loss of power.

A political comparison between Rome and Washington D.C. helps us to understand the tensions in the Roman Theater during the first century. In America there is growing opposition to the control of congress over the States. Legislative devotion to international bankers over and against the interest of the American people grates on informed citizens. Several conventions have taken place and a number of States have reasserted their 9th and 10th Amendment rights. Only time will tell if they are successful.

Revelation 17:17 For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.

God, not Satan, is in control of world affairs. Our God reigns (Psalm 33:1; Psalm 96:10; Psalm 97:1). Good and evil are not at war here. In the beginning, the nations that were intoxicated by wine from Rome's vineyard surrendered their sovereignty to Rome; but, as they sobered up, they realized that Rome had robbed them of their wealth and liberty. Because of this insurrection and strange turn of events, John informs us the source of this division. God turns their hearts to hate the whore-State and to diminish her power by resisting her ultra vires control. Eventually, the Roman Empire was divided into three weak regions. People were so burdened down with taxation and bureaucratic restrictions, they revolted against centralized power.

⁵³ Futurists see the antichrist here. Daniel says (Daniel 7:25) "And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times and laws: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time." One will be able to buy or sell without the mark of the beast.

The “Need of the Hour” said Dawson Trotman, Founder of the Navigators, is not more staff, more equipment, more books, better health, or even more money, but faith to believe that our God reigns (Psalm 99:1). Amen!

Revelation 17:18 And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

In case the reader is in doubt about the identity of the whore, **John identifies the woman as the City of Rome**—the first century, sensual, seductive metropolis that ruled the nations of the Mediterranean in John’s day. Rome was called “great” in part because she was the first city in the west to produce and house over a million people in population.

The readers of the first century understood this passage applied to Rome. But, we can learn a lesson from history. Babylons will come and go and *it is the Christian’s duty to recognize when a government takes on the character of the whoring-State and to resist power-grabbing, statist’s legislation* that diminishes human rights and arrogates to itself divine powers. We are living in such an age when democratic governments seek to be the nanny States that provides *everything* for its citizens. Modern governments promote immigration, pluralism, and it punishes men who dare to resist its legislation and power structures.

For an application of this passage to the United States, see the **Appendices**: “The Beast and the United States.”

3.2 The Dirge of Babylon

This chapter is a funeral dirge: Oh, how the early Christians must have marveled at the wailing in this section of Revelation.

Rome governed the world with hammer and nails. Her charms delighted the international traders and her military might crushed dissension by crucifixion. Positively, Rome’s iron strength created the miracle of the Pax Romana which created peace by squashing revolts and stabilizing trade. She seemed indomitable. Negatively, every parasite known to man bore into the gut of Rome to suck the lifeblood out of the empire: cruelty, violence, luxury, incest, pedophilia, matricide, fratricide, assassination, and depravity to mention a few. Consequently, the angel takes John into the future where he attends Babylon’s funeral. Mourners sit in pews weeping and crying as Roman orators show off their oratory skills with an epideictic (praise) by acclaiming the importance of the city of Rome. The city is praised only to condemn it.

What enlightenment! What joy it brought to NT saints to know that the Caesars they feared and the city they hated would be broken to pieces by the iron rod of God’s justice.

Though this chapter is about the funeral of Rome, it portrays the fate of all godless governments.

When fickle commercial systems collapse, merchants and small businesses are the first to feel the pain.

See the **Appendices** on “Additional Notes on the Dirge of Babylon.”

Revelation 18:1-2 And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

“**Babylon**” is another name for Rome. Rome took on the character of ancient Babylon. Josephus describes the government of Nimrod which could also describe Rome: “He also gradually changed the government into tyranny, seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence on his power.”

*The more people who are **dependent on government** handouts, the more votes the left can depend on for an ever-expanding welfare **state** (Thomas Sowell, American economist).*

I saw another angel: It is believed that Peter wrote a letter from this city (1 Peter 5:13). John’s perspective is as if he was on earth. The arrival of this angel with great power and authority is a messenger of good news that illuminates the whole world. The gospel announced the victory of our ascended Lord. His ascension to the right hand of God assured the original readers that Rome will crumble like a house of sand. The announcement of the fall of Babylon was a proleptic gift from God. The powers of evil that wormed their way into the structures of that Babylonian civilization are announced as having been defeated by virtue of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Fallen: The angel praises the city only to condemn it. The angel mentions “fallen” twice for assurance. The evil menace to God’s people is defeated. The aorist tense is used because Rome’s fall is spoken of as a fact of history. Any commercial system that idolatrizes money and power above the service and knowledge of God will crash.

Revelation 18:3 For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication⁵⁴, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

⁵⁴ The word “fornication” refers to illicit sex, but here it correlates to the prostitution of commerce. The word “commerce” is defined as “. . . **intercourse** by way of trade and traffic between different people or s” (Black’s Law

The “**wine of the wrath of her fornication**” declares a romance of hate and deception. It is reported that many prostitutes offer their services to men, not out of love, but out of hatred. Prostitution is not about love or sex, it is about money. Many prostitutes would rather spend the night with Jack Daniels than with a man. Contracts with whores lead to pain, disease, and abandonment.

“**Fornication**” is the biblical word for illicit sex. Here it refers to commercial contracts and the intercourse that takes place for the purpose of trade. Merchants, at the expense of principle, contracted with Rome to increase their wealth.

3.2.1 The Response from God

Revelation 18:4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

We have here the first command.

John hears a voice from heaven that declares the will of God for His people through a symbolic imperative, “Come out . . .” This is John’s way of telling Christians “to take the first train” out of Dodge; that is, get out of Babylon and forsake her sins. This is John’s way of exhorting believers to separate from this world’s system.

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (1 Corinthians 6:17).

First, this does not refer to some kind of physical migration, but spiritual separation and political dissociation.

Secondly, God orders Christians to get out of Babylon legally; that is, to disenfranchise with Rome; to de-incorporate from her institutions; to live independent of Rome’s franchises and benefits; to live simple and free; to amputate themselves from the corrupt system; and, to arrange themselves under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

See the **Appendices** on “Additional Notes on the Dirge of Babylon.”

Dictionary, 6th Edition). There was something vile and illicit with incorporating with Rome. It was about money, not love; commerce, not protection.

Revelation 18:5 For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities.

John now answers the question, “Why get out of Babylon?”

Sins into heaven: Like the Babel of old that built a tower into heaven, spiritual Babylon piles up sins as high as the stars: theft, deception, fraud, propaganda, lies, sorcery, murder, moral compromise and tolerance of all kinds of deviant acts. Babylon broke all Ten Commandments.

Rome’s rulers were often madmen. Suetonius wrote about Caligula (12-41 AD): "He lived in the habit of incest with all his sisters; and at table, when much company was present, he placed each of them in turns below him, whilst his wife reclined above him. He also consecrated himself to his own service and appointed his horse a fellow-priest; and dainty and expensive birds were sacrificed to him daily. " Anthony Barrett, Professor of classica and author of *Lives of the Caesar*, says “Caligula was probably no worse or better than 99% of Romans.”

John’s message is escape the matrix. Stop depending on government. Don’t envy the luxury of Romans. Untangle yourself from her sins.

Remembered: That God “has remembered her iniquities” and will not forget sins (Isaiah 51:9) is the Spirit’s way of telling the readers that divine justice will prevail.

Revelation 18:6 Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double

This is **the second command** in this passage.

Here we see the provocation of the godly. Not only are Christians called to leave Babylon, they were to insist on her destruction.

“**To reward Babylon as she has rewarded you**” is the angel’s way of telling Christians to crucify the world (Rome); that is, resist her demand to monopolize the souls of men—and your soul (Galatians 6:14; 1 John 2:15, 16).

Resistance to tyranny is service to God – Founding Fathers.

“**Double unto her double**” is the angel’s way of telling believers to be serious about holiness and to be courageous in resisting franchises offered by the government commercial system. We are social beings and the tendency of man is to acquiesce to power. The opposite of courage is not cowardice but compliance. Therefore, the angel is telling the readers to break away from Rome, to forsake the lusts of the traders. Resist! Protest! Fight temptation. Be holy. Show some grit. Display backbone. Show some teeth. Say “No!” more often. Be God’s attack lamb. Don’t incorporate with the government. Fast. Pray. Smash your idols. Stop envying the luxury of Rome and zealously obey the Word of God.

Revelation 18:7 How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her: for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow.

Glorified herself: Babylon is described as a self-glorifying, self-aggrandizing, opulent, proud, invulnerable, indestructible prostitute decked with jewels playing the beggar. To her, the only thing better than silver and gold was the luxury it purchased. Such duplicity makes even the Devil blush. She seduced the nations into thinking they can live without God, but that they cannot live without her; that they can live without God, but not without government; that they can live without God, but not without gold.

Welfare dependency is the state in which a person or household is reliant on government welfare benefits for their income for a prolonged period of time, and without which they would not be able to meet the expenses of daily living.

The great and calamitous fiscal trends of our time—dependence on government by an increasing portion of the American population, and soaring debt that threatens the financial integrity of the economy—worsened yet again in 2010 and 2011. The United States has long reached the point at which it must reverse the direction of both trends or face economic and social collapse (The 2012 index of dependence on government)

He that is of the opinion money will do everything may well be suspected of doing everything for money. (Benjamin Franklin)

“**Sorrow give her**” is an aorist imperative. This is the **third command** in this dirge.

Again, the angelic commander orders believers to marshal their forces to combat the harlot’s advances, and to launch their red canon fire of gospel proclamation against her arrogance. This is God’s way of telling Christians to vigorously resist this federal union of States that expand government under the pretense of helping the poor – to exercise “the right of the people *to peaceably* assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” (First Amendment).

Are you a source of irritation to corrupt politicians and magistrates? The unjust judge complained about the widow seeking justice, “this widow keeps bothering me” (Luke 18:1-8). Christians ought to be a pain in the neck to overreaching officials that violate their oath of office . . . use their office for financial gain . . . commit acts under color of law. If we are not on some government hit list, we aren’t living for Christ.

Revelation 18:8 Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

The final decree is not the might of Babylon, but the might and power of the Lord God. The strength of the church is in her conviction that “the LORD reigns” (Psalm 97:1; Acts 4:12; 17:6-7).

“**One day**” appears to be symbol for a short period of time. Like Babylon of old that fell in one day, this Babylon will be dismantled so quickly the nations will shutter with eye popping wonderment. John understood that Mystery Babylon was not going away without an act of God. This text announce a day when the Roman system was going to up in flames and smoke – a joy to the original readers.

3.2.2 The Response from Kings

Revelation 18:9-10 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning, Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

The angel shows us the reaction of Babylon’s friends. Kings, merchants, and sea captains wail her fall because her destruction impacts them economically.

The greatness of the system is acknowledged. But what amazes the onlookers is how fast this city burned to the ground figuratively speaking. Instead of falling in a day, Babylon fell in one hour as if hit by the blast of a giant asteroid.⁵⁵

3.2.3 The Response from Merchants

Revelation 18:11 And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more:

Merchants join the kings in a lament, but their grief is selfish. Trade ceased.

Gone is the economic system that caused merchants to thrive. Babylon’s destruction meant economic ruin, bread lines, foreclosures on debt, and starvation.

Revelation 18:12 The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, And cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil,

⁵⁵ Live Science: “There are millions of asteroids orbiting the sun, some 750,000 of which are found in the asteroid belt, a vast ring of asteroids located between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. Asteroids can be as large as hundreds of kilometers wide: The asteroid Ceres, sometimes referred to as a dwarf planet, is 940 km (584 miles) wide.”

and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.

Gold and silver: We have here a catalogue of luxuries: precious stones, clothing, decorative products, fragrances, foods, livestock, items of transportation, slaves . . . and the souls of men.

The “souls of men” were considered commodities for barter and trade alongside sheep and horses. Babylon always dehumanizes men by turning them into commodities. Where mystery Babylon is at work, she turns men into tax slaves, debt slaves, and indentured servants.

Revelation 18:14-15 And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing,

This lament focuses in on the funeral and those who stand at a distance outside the formal ring of mourners. Those smaller business men impacted by the collapse of the system tremble in fear like wet poodles trapped in a snow storm. Fortunes lost, merchants mourn with the stricken relatives over Babylon’s open casket. With handkerchiefs soaked in tears, the mourners languish with grief.

Historically, the “dark ages” followed the collapse of Rome.

3.2.4 The Response from Seamen

Revelation 18:16-18 And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!

The great city is Rome. The revelatory voice gives John a glimpse into the merchant’s tragic future. The Spirit records the wail of tradesmen in the shipping industry. Like pallbearers sitting on a mourner’s bench, the merchants reflect on Rome’s former luxury and wealth. The internationalists are impressed with the swiftness of her ruin. How could the city that terrorized the world fall so quickly?

Shipmasters, captains, crewmen stand aghast at the sight. Tears roll down the faces of Babylon’s lovers as they lament the former grandeur and marvel at the magnificence of the system.

Revelation 18:19 And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas, that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

What a scene! The mourners cry like hyenas, sob like babies, and throw dust in the air like angry elephants. The traders acknowledge that Babylon is the source of the wealth for those linked to her hip. Rome's beautiful hands were stone cold and pale white. The gold ornaments and the diamond rings were quietly removed from the corpse and given to another. Again, everyone marvels at the speed of her destruction.

Revelation 18:20 Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

This is the **fourth command** in this chapter. In contrast to the bitter mourning of the merchants is the bold joy of the **holy** apostles. For **holy** men, the collapse of Babylon's economy is a cause for great joy. The Spirit calls the church triumphant to celebrate. The Spirit summons the church militant to join the heavenly chorus to rejoice over the collapse of this system which opposes their faith.

First, heaven is exhorted to rejoice.

Second, the Spirit summons **holy** men on earth to join in the celebration. Nominal Christians have no capacity to appreciate judgment. The call to rejoice is to holy people. Wherever you find the doctrines of Christianity taught and practiced, you will find happiness. Mature Christians rejoice not only in love, but in all expression of holiness. Judgment as well as salvation is a cause for celebration. When tread-mill totalitarian systems collapse, there is an occasion for rejoicing. While the Bible does not condemn wealth honestly gained, it condemns business ventures driven by deceit and fraud, and it denounces sloth and moocher. Real wealth and happiness is in Christ and not in corporate globalization and international trade.

3.2.5 The Response from a Mighty Angel

Revelation 18:21 And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

Babylon's fall was announced twice; now it is announced **a third time** with a dramatic metaphor of destruction. Like a millstone plunges to the bottom of the sea, Babylon sinks, and rises no more. Stones don't float. Her demise is permanent.

Revelation 18:22 And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee;

A stunning silence follows Rome's collapse. Before us is the complete destruction of Mystery Babylon: no musicians, no bands, no festivals, no craftsmen, no sounds of the shop keepers hammers, no clanging of pans, no grinding from the blacksmith's shop, no snickers and giggles,

no children running and playing in the streets. Like a ghost town in the Old West, the city slouches down alone, silent, desolate. Reptiles scurry through the wind swept ruins and vultures soar above the slaughter seeking carcasses. The sound of laughter is dead-dog silent.

The voice from heaven announces to the seven churches the collapse of Mystery Babylon as if it were a past event. Rome stumbled and commercial system took a mighty blow during fourth and fifth centuries, but the system never saw the grave. It lives on and morphed into the present globalist system ruled by internationalists. One day the whole system will implode by an act of God. Until then, God calls us to live separate from the system, to sidestep her sins, and to rejoice in her final destruction.

Revelation 18:23-24 And the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee: for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

The daily habit of lighting candles and the joy of weddings disappear. Pursuits of everyday life are terminated. The city is a ghost town – dead and silent.

We are forced to ask the question, “Why?”

The angel tells us that the city died because it was built on commercial deception (sorcery) and murder (the blood of the saints).

The reason for the destruction is the persecution of the saints. She was allied with the Beast in persecuting the early Christians. Her sin was not merely the love of luxury, but an idolatrous fixation on wealth that caused here to compromise principle, even exalting herself above God at the expense of His people. Rome crucified the saints who would not bow the knee to Caesar.

Let us remember that statism, the belief that the centralized governments are the ultimate authority on earth, is an enemy of Christ.

3.2.6 The Response from Heavenly Hosts

Revelation 19:1 And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God:

We have in the Dirge of Babylon the unveiling of the “salvation, and glory, and honor, and power” that belongs to God.

The harlot city being destroyed, and the blood of the martyred saints being avenged, there is a universal joy among the redeemed of the Lord. So impressed is this ensemble, the heavenly choir breaks into song (19:1 through 19:3).

The canticle is not named. The vocalists sound like angelic hosts, but the choir could be the church triumphant. Their song begins with praise to God. This is the only place in the New Testament the word “Alleluia” is cited. “Alleluia” or “Praise the Lord” is found four times in this passage (19:1, 3, 4, 6). This is the **first “alleluia.”**

Their lyrics concern the honor and power of Lord God Almighty. The song is for our instruction. The first concern of our lives should be the glory and honor of God: “Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name.”

Salvation: The salvation mentioned here is more than triumph over the Beast or that of the redemption of the saints. It includes the whole salvic plan of God which includes the “the baptism” of the righteous unto salvation and the baptism of the wicked with “unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:11-12).

Glory: The choir saw in this dispensation of judgment a manifestation of the glory of God. The glory of God is the sum total of His attributes. His anger and wrath are as much a virtue as His love and grace. Let us rejoice in His justice as well as His mercy.

Honor: Man has mocked and blasphemed God’s delayed judgment. Now that it arrives, the judgment honors the Lord. On earth our Lord experienced the shame of the cross as a condemned criminal. In heaven our Lord receives honor from the cross as the Savior of the world.

Power: World leaders have proved again and again that they are unable to handle power. Power corrupts because power attracts the corruptible. Because only God is good and wise, power belongs in His hands. Only our Lord is able to handle power and use it for good.

Revelation 19:2 For true and righteous *are* his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

Normally, there is grief over the collapse of a great city. But, not here! Some political systems are not worth saving, and this is one of them. The judgment upon the Prostitute spawned praise to God. Just as men rejoice in God’s salvation, just men are to learn a lesson here and rejoice in God’s judgments.

Two sins are mentioned: corruption of the whole earth via Rome’s political policies, and persecution of the saints. The Great whore controlling the Beast enacted policies that demoralized the nations. She also waged war on the saints seeking to crush the gospel message that apposed the pride of rulers. The prayers of the souls of those under the altar were heard. The saints rejoice that at last, He answered their prayers and judged their executioners (6:9-10).

Revelation 19:3 And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

The city is reduced to ashes in front of John's eyes. We see plumes of black smoke billowing like towers into the sky signaling her destruction.

A **second "alleluia"** erupts from the inspired choir. What an encouragement for the saints to know that all enemies of the rule and reign of Christ will be crushed under the mighty hand God. Every city built on the statutes of man will become eternal fuel for God's lava hot fire. The phrase "smoke rose up for ever and ever" inform us the destruction of this evil system is permanent.

3.2.7 The Response from the Twenty-Four Elders

Revelation 19:4 And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia.

This is the **third "alleluia."** Included in the chorus are the 24 elders and the four beasts. Representative of true Israel, the ambassadors of heaven join the heavenly choir with shouts of allegiance to Him who reigns for ever and ever. "So be it!" "Alleluia!"

Revelation 19:5 And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

This voice invites, in fact commands (present imperative), all his servants to join in the celebration and exaltation of the rule of God and to identify with His judgment upon the great whore. The voice could be God's voice or it could be the voice of one of the beasts nearest the throne. It is common to hear Christians say that *we are required to hate sin but love the sinner*. But, you can't love pretty unless you hate ugly. Here the reader is called to praise God that hates sin and judges it.

3.2.8 Another Response from Heavenly Hosts

Revelation 19:6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

This is the **fourth alleluia**. John moves from the celebration of the fall of Babylon to the consummate truth of the Christian history, the reign of the Lord Christ, the defeat of the Beast, and the defeat of the Spirit behind the Beast. The chorus thunders with alleluias. The theme of this roaring water fall of praise is the Rule of God. The triumph of God's Kingdom has already been announced (11:15). He is able to do anything that is consistent with His character. Thus, this is the Spirit's way of urging the Christians to adopt the theology that "the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

Many Christians salute the sovereignty of God, but bow to the authority of the State.

Why is it that believers sometimes disobey the Lord, but never disobey the government; that Christians sometimes fail to tithe to the church, but never default in paying taxes to Caesar?

Why is that religious people feel they can disobey God and get away with it, but never disobey government and get away with it?

Why is that we are so impacted by a flawed government we can see, and not as impacted by a perfect God we cannot see?

The “Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” With the fall of Babylon, the voice announces the reign of God. The voice is for the benefit of Christians. That God reigns is the heart of the gospel in the Old Testament (Psalm 97:1); and, that God reigns is the heart of the gospel in the New Testament (Matthew 4:19; Acts 4:12; 17:6-7; Romans 10:9-10). Thus, this text exhorts Christians to believe in the sovereignty of God and to behave like “ the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”⁵⁶

God always reigns! But because His government is invisible and obscure, believers do not readily perceive God’s rule until they see their enemies crushed by an act of Providence. The overthrow of this citadel can only be attributed to the might and power of God. As a way of application, Christians would do well to discern God at work in the events of history.

Revelation 19:7 Let us be glad⁵⁷ and rejoice, and give⁵⁸ honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

Again, the saints are called to respond to Providence and to join the heavenly chorus in praising God for the revelation of His judgments. Holiness is the joy of the saints. God will not tolerate evil forever. Let us be glad, rejoice, and give honor to Him.

We have a strange picture here—a lamb ready to be married. The relationship between YHWH and his people was sometimes compared to a marriage (Isaiah 54:5-7; Hosea 2:19). The relationship of Christ to his people used the same analogy (Matthew 22:2-14; Romans 7: 1; Ephesians 5:32). John is urging his people to see themselves as a bride preparing to meet her

⁵⁶ “Reigneth” (evbasi,leusen) is an aorist which is the historical tense. Some scholars label this as “an ingressive aorist” for the purpose of supporting a theological proposition that God does not really reign until Babylon has fallen. The idea behind this position is that God / Christ is not reigning now. According to this view, Christ will not reign until he returns to defeat the final Babylon. In my opinion, this is stretching Greek to fit a particular theological view. God reigns now. Christ is on the throne and He reigns now. However, men do not always recognize that rule until wickedness is judged. This is what is happening here.

⁵⁷ “Be glad” and “rejoice” (cai,rwmen kai. avgalliw/men) are present, active subjunctive verbs calling for continuous or repeated action in present time.

⁵⁸ “and give honor” (dw,swmen) to him is an aorist subjunctive calling for Christians to immediately initiate worship.

husband. He wants them to shape up, clean up, and stand up (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 John 3:2, 3). Feet need to be washed, teeth brushed, hair groomed, and clothing prepared.

The word for wife here is *gune* (h` gunh) and not *nymph*. *Gune* pictures a woman that is betrothed and bound to her husband by contract even though the marriage has not yet been inaugurated. This is typical Hebrew custom (Genesis 29:21; Deuteronomy 22:24). Mary was called a wife before Joseph took her. Israel was called the “unfaithful wife of YHWH” (Isaiah 54:5-6; 62:5; Jeremiah 31:32; Ezekiel 16:18). The people of God are pictured as a bride under contract that is legally bound to her Lord.

Revelation 19:8 And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

The bride’s fine white gown is not her own. It is an exquisite gift from the Groom. This is John’s way of teaching the doctrine of justification.⁵⁹ He wants his readers to know that they are clothed in the righteousness of Christ and therefore accepted in God’s sight; that their faith in the faithfulness of Christ has qualified them to enter the kingdom of God. Like the lameness of Mephibosheth was hidden under the table of King David, our infirmities have been covered by the grace of God (2 Samuel 9).

The bride’s clothing is “fine linen, bright and pure” and can be contrasted with the seductive attire of the harlot. This bride is “washed in the blood of the Lamb.” Adam and Eve’s animal-skinned clothing has a fulfillment in the Christ event. God’s people are cleansed by the dying of Christ, and they are clothed by the doing of Christ. There are no fig leaves or corn husks here. This is pure linen—the righteousness of Another for the salvation of His people.

In Conclusion, Revelation 18 is a prophetic funeral lament regarding the fall of Rome. The metaphor assures believers Mystery Babylon has an end. Rome fell because it built its city on humanistic principles and brute force.

It is the will of God that every system opposed to Christ crumble and collapse. Thus, Christians are called to “come out” of this commercial system and to live a simple life of devotion to Christ in submission to His law-order. Early Christians anticipated the collapse of this cruel empire. Though this chapter does not predict the fall of the United States or other contemporary nations, it certainly applies to debt-based systems forced on the West by the international banking cartel.

⁵⁹ The phrase “righteousness of the saints” (ta. dikaiw, mata tw/n a`gi,wn) is a genitive of possession indicating that the people of God possess the righteousness necessary to stand accepted in His sight. This doctrine is called “justification.” The word “justification” means “to be declared righteous and treated as such.” Without righteousness, no man can stand in the presence of a holy God. How do we get this righteousness? It cannot be earned. It is a gift of God—the very righteousness of the Son—a gift given to people when they place their faith in Christ (Romans 5:1).

This system will fail and when it does, righteous men will be glad and joyfully sing this dirge at the funeral of the modern day fiat monetary system.

See the **Appendices** on “Additional Notes on the Dirge of Babylon.”

3.2.9 The Angel’s Command to John

Revelation 19:9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

Write: The angel speaking is not identified, but he orders John to pen his words. His announcement is no minor matter. This is the angel’s way of helping the reader to understand the tremendous importance of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

The most fundamental question a man needs to answer in this life is this: “Where will I spend eternity?” It is a blessing to be invited to share heaven with Christ (the marriage supper of the Lamb); and, it is terrifying not to receive an invitation. It is also a tragedy to receive an invitation to this heavenly banquet and to decline the offer. A man cannot will himself into heaven, he must respond to the gospel and the call of God (Matthew 22:3; Luke 14:17; Revelation 17:14).

The phrase “true sayings of God” is another way of reinforcing the veracity of the glorious gospel of Christ. The Beast and the whore practice “sorcery,” the art of deception. But, the truth can be found in Christ (John 14:6).

This feast is not limited to a race. It is for all of God people, that is, those who repent of their sins and seek shelter in the accomplishments of Another.

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Fell at his feet: So overwhelmed was John by the truth of the gospel that he collapsed at the feet of the angel and began to worship. Probably, he mistakenly thought the voice was the voice of Christ, but in reality the voice was an angel close to the throne⁶⁰. John is modeling to believers the proper response to the grace of God. If you have received an invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb, you ought to fall on your knees and thank God with all of your heart for the extreme privilege of being chosen to attend the greatest of all celebrations. If you don’t feel like falling at his feet after reading this chapter, you don’t understand it.

⁶⁰ Note the angel’s gentle correction. God alone has an exclusive claim on worship.

The testimony of Jesus is legal terminology referring to one who was an eye witness to the Christ event. Courts do not permit “hearsay evidence.” John testified to what he saw, heard, and touched (1 John 1:1-4). And, the eye witness accounts of the life of Christ have been in the custody of the church since the beginning; that is, the Christian faith is founded on fact, not presumption, not myth, and not fideism. Unlike the other religions of the world, the gospel of Christ provides its own proof of claim.

The “spirit of prophecy” is either a subjective or objective genitive⁶¹ meaning either that the witness to God’s redemptive purpose borne to men by Jesus is accomplished only through the spirit of prophecy, or it may mean that any true testimony for the person and redemptive work of Jesus must have its source in the spirit of prophecy.

3.3 The Rider on the White Horse

Futurists understand this section to refer to the second coming of Christ, the *Parousia* mentioned in 1 Thessalonians four at the consummation of the church age. The preterist-symbolic view understands this as imagery pertaining to the present risen life of Christ warring for the gospel on behalf of His people against the anti-God forces in the course of history.

I hold to the symbolic approach for following reasons: (a) the scene is a heavenly vision; (b) the white horse, blazing eyes, robe dipped in blood, and sword out of the mouth are not a literal description of Christ but an apocalyptic presentation of our Lord’s command from heaven; (c) the warrior is symbolic and not literal; (d) the war is spiritual and not physical; present, not future; synthetic, not analytical; (d) the context of this section is surrounded by iconic imagery, and (e) John’s presentation is written in apocalyptic style, a dramatic literary metaphorical form suitable for his purpose of revealing the work of Christ in history. This image functions like a political cartoon we see in newspapers—a caricature of actual political events.

The vision before us is personified by the Rider on a white horse showing us how Christ wages war from His position in heaven. The vision shows us that it is through the gospel and the proclamation of the Word of God that He penetrates society to win souls and to root out evil. Christ will indeed come again, but this is not a picture of the Second Advent. It is an image of Christ coming in history to defeat adversaries. We have seen in previous chapters the defeat of

⁶¹ Ladd points out that the phrase “bore witness” was first used in Revelation 1:2 is a subjective genitive, indicating it was Jesus who bore a testimony. Here it may be understood as an objective genitive; that is, it is the witness born by the church about Jesus. This same construction is found in 20:4 and 22:16.

the Beast and the destruction of the great harlot. Now we see the means of that defeat and the ultimate destiny of the unholy trio of evil.

Revelation 19:11 And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

Heaven opened: The periscope of prophecy has just announced the marriage supper of the Lamb, and what we see are a captain warrior and His mighty army arriving on a battlefield. The warrior can be interpreted in no other way than Christ. He is the One Who intercedes at the right hand of God “above” us (Romans 8:34) and sends his Holy Spirit to help with our infirmities “in us” (Romans 8:26-27).

The white horse is not literal. Christ does not come to fight the anti-God forces on a war-horse. The white stallion is a symbol of conquest, of royalty, of military leadership, of a righteous cause, and of pure virtue.

Faithful and true: John identifies the Rider as “Faithful and True” as opposed to fraud and deception which characterized the Beast, the whore, and the devil. By “faithful” John means that Jesus is dependable. By “true” John means that Jesus is reliable. The idea is that in Christ’s person and work, God is keeping His covenant with men. Ascended to the right hand of God, He acts in history to save his people and to defeat the anti-god forces.

Judge: The word “judge” means “to sever” or “to cut through.” Christ is the Warrior-King.

“He doth judge and make war” informs us that our sweet Jesus is more than a gentle, loving shepherd-Savior, but a fierce, bone-crushing general waging war against the gates of hell on earth. Jesus is not some ooey gooey butter cake that tolerates sugar-coated political correctness going on in this age. After Israel was delivered from Egypt, Miriam wrote a song announcing the nation’s new insight into the God that delivered Israel from Pharaoh’s army: “The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is His name” (Exodus 15:3).

We tend to think of Jesus as “sugar and spice and everything nice,” but our Bible informs He is tougher than marines. Ready to flex his military muscle, Jesus smashes hostiles to the law of God. He commands all men to repent including politicians, legislators, judges, and presidents. He is at war against deceivers, thieves, abortionists, Sodomites, fraudulent bankers, trickster lawyers, and humanistic professors. And, if we are going to follow him, we’d better be ready for mortal, hand-to-hand combat on the killing fields.

Revelation 19:12 His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

Eyes: The Savior is portrayed as having *eyes as a flame of fire*. This imagery signifies his piercing knowledge and intense focus on the mission. This is how we need to see Jesus. Our

Warrior King is not some milquetoast politician sitting on a cushion of strawberries in an air-conditioned office. He is a seasoned battle commander with dust on his face and grit on his teeth fiercely engaged in the acrid battle for hearts and souls.

The crowns are not literal figurines worn on the head. These are symbolic images representing the fact that Christ has a victor's authority to wage war against evil by virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection. He has achieved nothing but victories against the anti-God forces in history. He is the Victor over Satan, sin, and death. He is the King of creation and King of the new creation (Colossians 1:15-18). He, not Satan, rules the universe. He, not Caesar, deserves ultimate allegiance. His law, not man's law will prevail. He is on the throne now and Head over all "all rule and authority" (Colossians 2:10).

A name written: The fact that He has a name that no man knows indicates the personal depth of his character as well as the fact that there is much about our Lord that is incomprehensible to the mind of man. There are unexplored galaxies yet to be discovered in our heavenly Commander. His ministry in heaven, his work of saving souls, and his conquest over evil in history is obscure and invisible. It remains a mystery.

Revelation 19:13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.

Having a cloak dipped in blood is not literal, but representative of experience in war. Our Lord knows what it is like to have face-to-face, hand-to-hand, nose-to-nose combat with the forces of evil. Our Savior King is a battle-scarred Veteran of holy conflict. The blood here is not his own, but that of rebels splattered in a hack-and-cut sword fight to the death. His garment is stained with blood before the battle begins demonstrates that this is apocalyptic imagery, not prose. Reality, not sequence is the issue here. We are dealing with facts, not fiction. Our Lord is the Scorpion Warrior-King, and those who serve him will find themselves engaged in a stinging, bloody combat for the truth of the gospel.

The Logos of God: John now erases any ambiguity about the identity of this general. He is none other than the Word of God, the eternal *Logos* made flesh. Christ is the exact representation of the invisible God, the complete revelation of the will of God, and the supreme reflection of deity in bodily form. To see Him is to see the Father, and to obey Him is to obey the Living Torah (John 1:1, 14; 14:6-10; Colossians 1:15-18; 2:9).

Revelation 19:14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

The armies of heaven: Christ leads the charge. His army is dressed in white riding upon white horses. The strength of the saints is their holiness and pure devotion to the Savior. We are not told what they do or even that they participate in battle—only that they are Holy Ones. Before us

is a huge army, a symbol of hope and power and deliverance. They are Christians. Believers are on the winning side. They are more than conquerors through him that loved them. Not because they fight the war, but because they rely upon the victories and accomplishments of Another. His gospel will prevail.

The armies of heaven could be angels (Zechariah 14:5; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:7), but more than likely the army represents the sum total of Christians who trust Christ and follow him in this life. Before us are captives who share in the conquest of our Lord and Savior. Believers are not defeated foes, but beneficiaries of His royal accomplishments at the cross (Romans 8:37; Ephesians 4:6ff; Colossians 1:9-14).

The “fine linen, white and clean” represents imputed righteousness, the forensic justification of the saints. Because of their faith in the faithfulness of Christ, the people of God are viewed as holy and righteous in his eyes. This is positional truth. It is idealistic. In reality, Christians are more like Joshua clothed “in filthy garments” (Zechariah 3:30). Nevertheless, overcomers claim their glorious position in the Beloved by faith, and they aspire to be holy and virtuous in their Christian walk. In heaven, they are righteous men; on earth, they are flawed and fractured soldiers learning to hate evil and to love good.

Revelation 19:15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

His only weapon in this conflict of the ages is not in his hand, but in his mouth -- the Word of God. He does not use the clanking, thundering, banging metal rods of bayonets and muskets to force the retreat of His enemies. He uses persuasive arguments consistent with the Word of God on the bloody battlefield of public debate. Political adversaries lie like corpses before His gospel offensive. The imagery looks back to Isaiah 11:4 where He shall smite His enemies with the rod of His mouth. It is the power of the gospel rather than the exercise of brute force that achieves victory. Jesus wins souls, not by compulsion, but by persuasion; not by force, but by the faithfulness of his followers; not by coercion, but by the character of His people.

In using the terms “**iron scepter**” and “**winepress of the wrath of God,**” John informs Jewish readers that Jesus is Israel’s true Messiah, and that He is the One through whom the Spirit advances the kingdom of God within the human race. The King wages war and eschatological judgment smites the nations in advance of the dynamic consummation of the kingdom at the end of history.

Enough of man! We pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy rule be done.” This is a rebel’s prayer. By this, Christians are not praying for some millennial kingdom but that God’s will be done now, in our time, in our nation, today!! And, the rule of God is extended when hearts surrender to the authority of the King of the nations as their Ruler and Lawgiver.

Much that is wrong with our age is because global leaders have rejected God's law and are hellbent on creating their own utopia through man-made legislation—legislation opposed to God's Law-word. The problem is not “the economy, stupid” but the lack of theonomy in the hearts of men (Jeremiah 10:7; 32:22; James 4:12).

Here we understand **the nature of this battle**. This is spiritual warfare. Christ does not wage war against the forces of evil with guns and tanks, but by proclamation of the gospel! It is through the Word of God that Christ defeats the anti-God forces, wins hearts, and judges men (Hebrews 4:12). He is seen here in the fierce capacity of treading the winepress of the wrath of God squashing the wicked and uprooting tares.

As a way of application, the early Christians would have taken courage from this vision to proclaim the gospel to neighbors and friends. This is why Christians involved in political struggles and cultural wars of our age must never stop quoting the Word of God. There is a tendency, in order to be politically correct and not to appear religious, to fail to quote the Bible in the arena of ideas because it irritates humanists. When Christians stop quoting God's Word, they lay down their swords and experience a loss of power and effectiveness. This does not mean Christian politicians must hammer people with Scripture, but it would be refreshing to hear Christian politicians quote an appropriate verse in critical debates. It is their honor to acknowledge the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ to the right hand of the Father. It is this truth that will defeat the decrepit ideas rooted in the tenets of atheistic humanism. Christ reigns; not Caesar; Christ rules the affairs of men; not the governments of this world.

Revelation 19:16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Christ has a secret name that only He knows. The church knows Him as “faithful and true.” The world knows Him as “King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.” If he rose from the dead, he conquered the greatest enemy of all and deserves the title “Lord.” By virtue of His exalted position to the right hand of God, He is our representative to God and God's Mediator to man. There is no potentate whose power exceeds that of Christ. All are responsible to Him and will one day stand before Him in their individual capacities to give account of their stewardship. Take off your crowns! Bow your heads, O kings. Jesus reigns!

According to the German historian, Ethelbert Stauffer, the religious principle of the Roman Empire, from the days of Augustus on, was salvation by Caesar: “Salvation is to be found in none other save Augustus, and there is no other name given to men in which they can be saved.” When Peter preached Christ and said about Him, “Neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved,” Peter declared war on Rome. The gospel that “turned the world upside down” in the first century preached another king—King Jesus (Acts 17:6-7).

3.3.1 The Great Supper

Revelation 19:17-18 And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; That ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.

To see **an angel** standing in the Sun was a blinding spectacle too brilliant to behold. He calls to the birds of the air to come to a great feast. Beckoning to the call, John sees turkey vultures circling in the sky. Vultures invited to feast of human corpses are images of death. Men are called to the wedding feast of the Lamb. There is continuity between this vision and the proceeding visions announcing the defeat of the anti-God forces.

The great supper: The background of this scene is found in Ezekiel 39:17-20. We see a feast and a supper in contrast to the Marriage Supper of the lamb. The guests for this supper are the carrion. The Spirit invites vultures and eagles and crows to attend this battle because of the tremendous slaughter that will take place in the land. But, this is not a literal slaughter with literal birds on a literal landscape. John's vision is logical and spiritual, not spatial and geographical. This is John's way of describing "the baptism of fire" and the defeat of the wicked.

The main course at the banquet will be human flesh. This imagery is not literal but symbolic of utter defeat. Destroyed in this battle will be the great and the small, generals and privates, mercenaries and soldiers and any who accepted the mark of the Beast. Regardless of wealth, or status, or sex, or achievement, all will bow the knee to Christ; that is, men can bow the knee now voluntarily, or bow the knee later by force.

Revelation 19:19 And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.

The Beast and kings of the earth: The center figure in this campaign is the Beast and his forces. This war is presented as the battle of the ages, the final showdown. John wants his readers to understand that Rome was not fighting Christians, but the King of kings. Godless States arise because they hate the Christ and His gospel. The icy chill in the wrinkles on their brow are rows of murmurs against God's law order. Rulers are like angry roosters with purple faces crowing in protest against the authority of Christ.

There is no description of the battle. John described the defeat of the Beast and the great whore in early chapters. John wants his readers to understand that Christ knows their trials, and that in the mind of God, He has already defeated the ugly monster. His demise is certain.

God wants us to understand the continuous process of history. The Lord Jesus is the central fact of history. His death, burial, and resurrection is the triumph of history; and, His ascension to the

right hand of God must be embraced and acknowledged for the progress of civilization. Where Christ reigns there is peace, where Satan reigns we see division and death. In the end all politicians and political parties will be crushed by Christ the King.

3.3.2 Destruction of the Anti-God Forces

Revelation 19:20-21 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth: and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.

Missing is the description of the battle. In its place is the final reality--a captured Beast, a false prophet, their followers, and their execution. This is the period at the end of the sentence; the last rail on the road; the final fact in the judge's verdict.

The “casting alive into a lake of fire” presents man with an image of ultimate, unspeakable suffering.

The Spirit uses **the metaphor of war** and the ghastly images of a battlefield to depict the defeat of the anti-God forces.

As the original readers listened to the Book of Revelation being read, John wanted his audience to understand that in the mind of God the Beast and all his followers were already defeated. Likewise, we must discern evil that arises against Christians and know that in the pace of life adversaries will experience the defeat of Gog and Magog. Christian enemies, though they appear invincible now, will one day be nothing but carcasses on which the feathered carrions behind the veil of history shall feed on eternally.

Many treat Revelation as a literal, precise, scientific, chronological, detailed road map toward end time events. In my opinion, this approach is unwise and unhealthy because it leads to false expectations about the future and an unhealthy preoccupation with prophecy. Moreover, this approach causes Christians to rely upon the *Parousia* as the solution for every political conflict rather than rely upon the highly exalted Christ in His present risen ministry to intervene in political battles. Further, this approach encourages Christians to flee the fight, instead of standing up and showing up to fight; to be irresponsible, instead of responsible. It is far better for Christians to pick up their swords and to confront opponents in political causes than it is for Christians to couch before their enemies and pray for the rapture.

John writes in apocalyptic style using imagery to expand the imagination and to impress the senses. Through these visions, John wants his readers to understand and be deeply motivated by three fundamental facts:

(a) The gospel is the most wonderful, powerful, fundamental fact of history. The ascended Savior died, rose from the dead, and rules over the affairs of nations to win souls and to defeat evil; and,

(b) the wicked in society and the institutions through which they rule will be defeated and will not prevail. Their destiny is Armageddon, the defeat of Gog of Magog, destruction and hell. Like birds feed on corpses pluck out eyes after an intense battle, the scavengers of God's judgment will feed on these foes forever. They will be thrown "alive" and "conscious" into the lake of fire; and,

(c) the righteous will be feasting and celebrating the joy of redemption for ever and ever in blessed company of Christ. Earthly Jerusalem finds its fulfillment in the new Jerusalem. Therefore, believers should embrace the gospel and live boldly in this present evil age for the cause of Christ when the followers of the Beast try to force their religious devotion to world government down the throats of the most vulnerable in society.

3.4 The Thousand Year Reign of Christ

Having described the Battle of Armageddon and the defeat of the Beast, John now describes the defeat of the one behind the Beast, the old serpent which is Satan himself. Revelation 20:1 takes us back to the beginning of the NT era. It is only proper that John takes us back to the beginning of Satan's defeat so he can show us Satan's final ruin at the end of the age (20:7ff). It is obvious the thousand-year reign of Christ is symbolic of His present reign from the right hand of God and that it occurs before, not after the Second Coming of Christ.

The key to this passage is to understand the nature of apocalyptic literature. The apocalyptic is not concerned about time, chronology, and sequence as much as it is concerned about impressing the mind with ultimate realities. Again, this is not literal language: the key, the pit, the chain, the serpent, the dragon, and the thousand years are merely giant metaphoric symbols that convey a literal truth.

3.4.1 The Binding of Satan

Revelation 20:1 And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand.

The angel: No name is mentioned nor does this angel seem to have special powers. We tend to think Satan is next to omniscient, but he is bound by one angel having a key to the bottomless pit.

Key & chain: This is not a literal, material key or chain. These images are symbolic of the power to arrest, restrain, and incarcerate.

Bottomless pit: The “abyss” was mentioned in chapter 9:1-6, and the demonic locusts swarm out of it. This is the home of the Beast (11:7).

Revelation 20:2-3 **And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.**

Devil: Note the multiple of names for Satan. He is the dragon, the old serpent, the Devil, and Satan.

The Millennium: The number thousand is also symbolic. How can one hold to a strict literal view in light of the symbolic use of numbers in this book? A thousand is ten to the third power and it represents an ideal period or a long, long time. The kingdom of God was inaugurated in our Lord’s first advent. Believers are now living under the reign of the highly exalted Christ and look forward to the consummation of His rule in the future⁶². Thus, the thousand years represents the Christian era – a long, long time to the original readers.

Bound: The word “bound” is not literal language. What kind of chain can bind a spiritual being? This is apocalyptic imagery designed to communicate the control and restriction of Satan during the age of gospel proclamation.

Linguistically, the word “bind” means “to bind, to tie, or to wind.” Jesus rode a bound colt (Matthew 21:2). Jesus was bound before Pilate (Matthew 27:2). Saul intended to bind Christians and bring them to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2). Paul was bound in spirit (Acts 21:11). Satan’s defeat began during Jesus’ reign: Jesus’ temptation in Matthew 4, His exorcisms (Luke 10:17), and at the cross (John 12:2-32), Finally, Satan’s defeat will be complete when Christ returns (Revelation 20:7ff).

The term “bound” is the same word as found in Matthew 12:28-29, “bind the strong man.” In Matthew, the entrance of Jesus into history is interpreted as the thief invading the household of

⁶² Paul Kroll, Worldwide church of God comments: Considering those limitations, some commentators nevertheless believe the figure given in Revelation 20 represents a literal 1,000 years. Other biblical commentators feel that while the “millennium” is a real period of substantial length, its actual time is undetermined. In the same way that “one hour” means a very short time (Revelation 17:12), 1,000 years would mean a very long time. Those who feel the number “thousand” refers to an indefinite though long time cite examples of similar usage from the Old Testament. In Psalm 50:10 God speaks of himself as owner of all that exists. He says, “Every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills.” Obviously, the expression is not to be taken literally, as though God owned cattle only on 1,000 specific hills. (<http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/Rev/millenn.htm>: Retrieved April 2004).

Satan. The thief ties up the “strong man” in order to steal his treasures, that is, rescue men out from underneath his power. The “treasures” represent souls. The “binding” represents control. How could Jesus rescue men out of the kingdom of darkness unless he had control over Satan? In this passage, binding the serpent describes limitation and control, not total restriction and helplessness. John wants believers to know that Jesus is in authority now, and the power of Satan is restrained now (Hebrews 2:14; Luke 10:17; 10:19; Matthew 12:22-29; Colossians 2:15; Matthew 29:19-20; 2 Thessalonians 2:7-9).

The reason for the incarceration is that *the nations should be deceived no more*. We have here the curtailing of Satan’s power during the gospel age. At the end of the Christian age, Satan will be set free to do deceive and confuse the nations.

What an encouragement this must have been for the original readers. They were given the assurance that gospel proclamation to which they were dedicated would not be defeated, and that their efforts to make Christ known are not in vain.

Likewise, we have the assurance that during this period, Satan does not have absolute power to squash missionary efforts to reach the lost for Christ. Furthermore, history proves this is true. Before the cross, the knowledge of the LORD God barely reached beyond the borders of Israel. After the death and resurrection of Christ, the gospel traveled into Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the world. Why did the gospel have such power in the first century and why does the gospel continue to expand into every nation and tribe today? The answer lies in the truth of the gospel, the ascension of Christ, and the binding of Satan⁶³.

We must remember that it is not at Jesus’ *Parousia* that Satan is defeated. It is through Jesus’ death and resurrection that Satan received his terminal wound: “Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out⁶⁴” (John 12:31).

3.4.2 The First Resurrection

Revelation 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had

⁶³ Dispensationalist Carl Hoch (Grand Rapids: PNT) in his essay (Blaising and Bock, 1992) argues for an historical approach to Ephesians in contrast to a personal salvic interpretation; that is, there has been a change in Gentile status before God by virtue of the cross. If this is the case, then Revelation 20:1-3 would be a by-product of the cross and explain the massive success of the gospel during this era.

⁶⁴ The word “cast out” (evkblhqh,setai,ekballo) means that Satan was cast out of power by virtue of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Satan was defeated at Christ’s first coming. This does not mean that Satan does not exist or have power in this world. He is still the “god of this age.” However, it does mean that our Savior snatched away Satan’s legal right for unrestricted control over men. He does not and cannot exercise unlimited authority to deceive entire nations about the truth as iterated in the gospel.

received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Thrones: John sees thrones and people sitting on them. Thrones are a symbol of authority. The word “throne” is used forty-seven times in Revelation. All but three appear in heaven, not earth.

Souls: The use of the word “souls” indicates that the locale of John’s vision has moved to heaven. Jesus promised through John that those who overcome will sit with and rule with Him (2:26; 3:21; 5:9-10). Now John sees the fulfillment of this promise.

These are the followers of Christ who refused the mark of the beast – John way of telling us these souls believed in the King of kings and resisted the authority of the Caesars. The saints are not ruled over, but share in the reign of Christ; i.e., they enjoy the benefits of his rule now. Daniel saw thrones and dominion was given to the saints (Daniel 7:27). Jesus promised his disciples that they would rule with Christ over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28). Paul said the saints would “judge” (*krino*) the world (1 Corinthians 6:2). Every Christians that uses the Word of God to stand up to rulers pushing their godless policies down the throats of citizens becomes an instrument of the reigning Christ now.

Who is sitting on the thrones? The people sitting on the throne are those who “*had been beheaded*” for Christ and those who refused the mark of the Beast; that is, these people represent believers--those that lived and died for Christ on earth—those that bear witness of the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord.

The first century Christians had many questions about the fate of the apostles and those that had been martyred by Caesar and his administrators. John answers these questions in his work. He introduced the martyrs to us in chapter six where we see them safe under the altar. Being *under the altar* is a symbol that the martyrs were secure and enjoying the benefits of the work of Christ at the cross. Now, John shows us *another fact* about the present state of the martyrs: *they sit on thrones*, that is, they are victors who share in the blessing of Christ’s accomplishments. Reigning is another way of describing the fact that life triumphs over death⁶⁵.

“They lived” is possibly the most important phrase in this section. The pronoun “they” refers to “those who had been given authority to judge” and to the “souls of those who had been beheaded.” All saints are included in these two descriptions. Believers either have the privilege of living for the Lord or dying for their Lord. Both living and dying involve personal sacrifice.

⁶⁵ Revelation 20:4 “the souls of those who had been beheaded” and 6:9-11 “the souls of those who had been slain” are parallel texts. Note “the souls” (6:9) are conscious, alive, and with Christ. They are told to wait a little longer for the resurrection of the body. The only difference is that the saints in Revelation 6 are told to “be at rest” and the saints in Revelation 20 are said to be living and reigning with Christ.

“Lived” is the Greek word *ezezan* (e;zhzan) – an aorist verb.⁶⁶ John wants us to know that the departed saints are safe, secure, alive, and enjoying the wonders of Christ’s accomplishments. “They lived” is simply another way of saying that death did not end the existence of departed saints. John saw Peter, James, Paul, and all the disciples alive enjoying the Savior. They lived!!!! What a revelation!! Martyrdom at the hands of Roman officials in time did not impact their eternal status.⁶⁷

This is called the “**first resurrection.**” The idea of a spiritual resurrection has its roots in Jesus’ message in John five. Our Lord made a distinction between the first resurrection, being spiritually regenerated (John 5:25), and the second resurrection, being physically regenerated (John 5:28-29). The first resurrection is either (a) being made alive through the new birth so that a believer is said to sit with Christ in the heavenlies (Ephesians 2:1-7) or it is (b) the transmigration of the soul into the presence of the Lord at death. Both are true.

Revelation 20:5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

Lived not: This verse is parenthetical. The word “lived” means the same thing here as it does in verse four. Neither refers to a physical resurrection. The “not” negates the verb.

“**The rest of the dead**” corresponds to unbelievers. In contrast to the departed saints who *are alive* and enjoying the reign of Christ. Unbelievers are viewed as dead, separated from God, condemned, unregenerated, and without hope of eternal life!

The rest of the dead (unbelievers) do not appear until the end of history. At the end of history, there will be a physical resurrection of the just and the unjust (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:25).

The “first resurrection” is not a bodily resurrection⁶⁸, but a spiritual resurrection⁶⁹. It either refers to (a) the coming to life of a man by virtue of *the regenerating work of the Spirit of God* as

⁶⁶ e;zhzan is a aorist, active, indicative, third person plural verb. It means, “they lived.” Ladd objects to “they lived” (e;zhzan) as having any NT authority to describe living souls. However, Luke 20:37 describes the state of the dead, “I am the God of Abraham of Isaac, and of Jacob . . . He is not the God of the dead, but of the living (zwntwn), for to him all are alive (zw,ntwn)” (NIV . zw,ntwn is a present, active participle—a present tense, not future. The Sadducees denied not only the physical resurrection of the saints, but continued existence after death. Souls died with the body. Jesus corrected both errors of the Sadducees. Admittedly, no other uses of *zao* with this meaning can be found in Revelation.

⁶⁷ This class of souls would include all believers who have died in the faith since the first century; and, it would include, I believe, all babies murdered by unwed, fornicating mothers. Think of it! Babies under the altar crying out in a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on *our mothers* who dwell on the earth?” (6:10).

⁶⁸ According to Jesus (John 5:25-29), there are two kinds of resurrections. The first is a *spiritual resurrection* that we identify as regeneration. When a person hears the gospel and believes in Christ, he comes to life; that is, he is born again and united with the Savior (Romans 5:3-5; 6:2-6; Ephesians 2:4-5). The second resurrection is a *bodily*

Jesus iterated in John 5:25, “a time is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live,” or it refers to *the transmigration of the soul to God* following physical death as iterated in 1 Corinthians 5:6 “to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”

The phrase “they came to life” is not referring to a physical resurrection at the end of the age. A simple reference, it lets the original readers know what happened to the martyred apostles and the first generation of Christians who had passed from the scene of history. The departed saints are alive! John sees the church triumphant. Glory! Victory! Hallelujah!

Revelation 20:6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

The first resurrection is a *spiritual resurrection* that unites souls with Christ. Those resurrected are called “blessed” and “holy” because the second death hath no power over them.

The “second death” refers to the final judgment of unbelievers where they will be sentenced to depart from the presence of Christ forever and ever—a terrifying thought! Know that the physical resurrection is no guarantee that one will escape the fate of the second death. To be united with Christ in eternity, one must be united to Christ now. If one is first saved from sins, he will be saved from the second death.

Priests of God: Another fact supporting the interpretation that the first resurrection is spiritual in nature is the fact that those participating in the first resurrection are called “priests to God.” The church does not have a priesthood (as in papalism), it is a priesthood. Being a priest to God is not

resurrection and it refers to the physical transformation that will take place at the *Paarousia* of Christ when the believer’s body will be raised from the dead (1 Thessalonians 5:17ff; 1 Corinthians 15:35-58). The “first resurrection” is not physical, but the “transition from physical death to life in heaven with Christ” (Anthony Hoekema, p. 237). It is an unusual term, but understandable against the background of the text.

⁶⁹ Much is at stake theologically on the doctrine of resurrection and much theological capital is spent seeking to justify doctrinal positions. Dispensationalists advance three or four resurrections in history (the rapture before the tribulation, a rapture after the tribulation, the resurrection of believers that die during the supposed millennium, and the resurrection of the wicked dead after the supposed millennium). I fear that my dispensational brethren are guilty of multiplying distinctions. My understanding of Scripture is that there are only two resurrections mentioned in Scripture, spiritual and physical. The spiritual resurrection that happens when one believes (or when one dies and his spirit is taken into the presence of Christ) and the physical resurrection that happens at Christ’s Second Advent.

a status connected with the second coming of Christ but a status connected his first coming or with faith in this lifetime. According to Peter, Christians join the priestly caste when they believe in Christ (1 Peter 2:5-9). Reigning with him has the idea of kingship, of sovereignty, of authority. Being a priest involves a life dedicated to glorifying God (holy priesthood), and a life of sharing the gospel and mediating for the souls of men (royal priesthood).

3.4.3 Gog and Magog

Revelation 20:7 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

The conclusion of history is shrouded in mystery. Any interpretation of Gog and Magog must conclude that this war is postmillennial. It happens after the millennium mentioned in this chapter. The only way the battle of Gog and Magog could be the next great event in history is in light of an amillennial or postmillennial interpretation of this passage. In the premillennial scheme of things, the battle can only come before the earthly millennial reign. To say that the Battle of Gog and Magog will happen before and after the millennium in the dispensational presumption is to multiply events that are not supported in Scripture. Those who advocate multiple judgments, resurrections, temples, returns, and Magogs suffer from spiritual diplopia.

The thousand years: This research takes an amillennial⁷⁰ approach. The thousand years does not refer to a supposed 1000 year reign of Christ on earth future to our time. The thousand years refers to the Messianic Age, the Gospel Age that is taking place now, but that was totally future to the original readers. At the end of the Christian era, Satan will be released to deceive the nations once more.

The “four quarters of the earth” refers to the global nature of Satan’s recruitment. He will have no difficulty finding subjects willing to menace God’s people. The battle between God and Satan, good and evil, and the sons of light and the sons of darkness will continue until the end. However, toward the end of history, Satan will emerge with unprecedented power to deceive souls and to squash Christianity⁷¹. At this time, Christ will act and bring the prophecy of Gog

⁷⁰ Amillennialism: Positively, it refers to the belief that the thousand years in this passage represents the Christian age; that this is the Christian era; that this age will consummate at the return of our Lord wherein the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be punished. Negatively, it denies there is a literal thousand year reign in an alleged millennium at the end of the Christian era following the return of our Lord.

⁷¹ The neutering of Christianity in Europe and Great Britain, and the cultural decay in America like the propaganda of abortion, homosexuality, the assault on the phrase, “In God We Trust,” the removal of the Ten Commandments from public buildings, and the secularization of Christmas appear to be consistent with the apostasy toward the end of the age mentioned in this chapter.

and Magog to its prophetic fulfillment; that is, toward the end of the Christian era Satan will have unprecedented power to deceive. He will be endowed with sweeping powers not known in the first two thousand years of Christian history. The rise of liberalism, humanism, evolution, abortion, and homosexuality may be preliminary tremors that indicate an earthquake of horror to come.

The battle of God and Magog is a symbolic, mythological battle presented in Ezekiel 38-39 and Genesis 10:2. This account unites historical detail with apocalyptic imagery to show the ultimate fate of the wicked and the ultimate victory of God's people. Death and destruction will feed on the enemies of God, and God's people envisioned as "Israel" in the setting of Jerusalem will be safe and secure. Augustine, in his work "The City of God," taught these nations shall rise up against the church in a final confrontation. The followers of the Beasts (humanist, Jews, secularists, Muslims, etc.) will continue to persecute and censor active Christians until the very end.

Apparently, John is informing us that the gospel will triumph in the Christian age, not completely but substantially. Toward the end of this period, there will be some type of departure from the faith due to Satanic deception ("the apostasy" or "the rebellion" of 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 Timothy 4:1ff). The age will end with a climatic display of God's power resulting in the dramatic defeat of God's enemies and the salvation of God's people.

Revelation 20:9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

Breadth of the earth: The reference here is not to geographical Jerusalem and some alleged battle in the Valley of Jezreel, but to "the breadth of the earth" indicating cooperative global resistance and intolerance of the gospel.

The terms "camp" and "city" are a double symbol of the true church, the people of God. The term "camp" may refer to the pilgrim nature of the church militant, and the beloved city may refer to her permanent status before God.

There are only two cities in Revelation: the city of Satan where the Beast and the harlot rule, and the city of God that honors and exalts Christ. These two worlds collide. No literal battle actually occurs, but the armies are destroyed. Possibly, the battle is logical rather than geographical. God's people are destined to enjoy God's protection. God's enemies are subject to the terror of his wrath. This is the message John wants the readers to grasp—the dual aspects of salvation for God's people and wrath for God's enemies.

Revelation 20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Cast: The emphasis is again upon the spirit behind the rebellion. First, the armies are destroyed, then the power behind the army is arrested. In Revelation, the Devil is mentioned first, then the Beast, then the false prophet. They are ruined, however, in reverse order. Babylon is demolished first (17 & 18), the Beast & false prophet second, and finally Satan himself. The destruction may be logical rather than referring to something in linear time.

The lake of fire, which was planned for Satan, now fulfills its purpose. The language here is difficult. Satan is a spirit; fire is an earthly phenomenon. How can a non-physical being be touched by fire? These are apocalyptic images designed to impress the imagination and not a literal description of physical realities. The imagery presented, however, is that of eternal painful suffering which is an eternal phenomenon. And, this suffering will literally take place to the degree we understand the painfulness of burning in fire.

John is showing us ultimate truth with physical analogies that men can comprehend. Satan will be utterly defeated and he will experience the same fate as the Beast and false prophet.

The term “torment” (basanisqh,sontai) is translated “tossed” or “toiling in the winds” in Mark 6:48.

The phrase “day and night” is used in 4:8 to describe the eternal nature of praise. It is used here to describe the terrible, round-the-clock punishment of all the anti-God forces.

The phrase “for ever and ever” comes from the Greek words “ages of ages” and properly conjures up images of an endless nightmare so terrifying our finite souls cannot grasp it. There is no sense of annihilation here. This is eternal suffering—the endless, desperate rowing in the fires of eternal affliction on the seas of hell towards shores that do not exist. Before us are images of final comic destruction and the conclusion of history as we know it.

3.4.4 The Great White Throne Judgment

Revelation 20:11 And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

The great white throne is the same throne that John saw in chapter five. This is a vision of a courtroom. The first adjective describing this throne is the word “great” (mega). How can one describe the regal, imposing, grandiose authority and power and finality of the throne of God? He simply says “great,” used 80 times in Revelation. The fact that it is a white throne informs us that this court is holy, pure, and true. White represents the glory and majesty of God.

“Him that sat on it” is not identified, but we assume it is the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:22) -- a reference to the “Ancient of Days” working through the Son to render true judgment.

“From whose face the earth and the heaven fled away:” The poetic language states a theological truth that the holy judgment of God is a terrifying encounter for sinners. In Revelation one, “His face” is described as having eyes of fire—a symbol of intense, incredible perception and knowledge. Stripped and exposed before the piercing knowledge of pure righteousness, there is no place to hide, no clothes to cover one’s nakedness, no cave to crawl into, no forest to camouflage one’s presence, no fig leaves to conceal one’s most private matters. The earth and the heaven which appear so fixed and permanent will flee in a panic like streakers on the day when God’s penetrating holiness is revealed.

This imagery is seen in the sixth seal. The old order must pass away that God might establish a new order. This is not the dissolution of the universe, but the emergence of a new cosmic cast.

Revelation 20:12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

Small and great: This verse assumes the resurrection of all the dead. The small and the great will be examined in this Court. The maid, janitor, and bricklayer will stand before God as well as lawyers, doctors, politicians, senators, and presidents. The antediluvian giants, Nimrod, the Pharaohs, the Caesars, Napoleon, Freud, Huxley, Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Russian Czars, Zulu princes, and American presidents, senators, and congressmen will all be there. Evil stepmothers, wicked witches, Medusa, Baba Yaga, hags and harpies, will shutter in terror. Movie stars, actors, bankers, and millionaires will shake with disbelief as the sentence of their fate is announced.

Books: Daniel 7:10 mentions books. By “books” John wants his readers to know that God keeps records on everyone’s life with accountant-like accuracy. The One in heaven sees and knows all that we do and say (Psalm 139:1-4; Proverbs 15:3). What a terrifying thought! Aren’t you thankful that you have a body to hide in where people cannot see your thoughts or feelings? But, on that day the efforts to hide the real us will be met with naked frustration.

When an African was asked why he made his idol with his eyes shut and no holes in his ears, he replied, “I did not want my god to see what I do or to hear what I say.” In a burlesque peek-a-boo nudes dance behind seven veils, but on that day the all-seeing, all-hearing one will be present—and, there will be no veil to hide shame. All the hocus pocus of a Reno magician will not help one to escape the terrifying judgment of Almighty God.

The Book of Life (zoas) is also opened and it includes the names of all who have believed in Christ (Exodus 32:32; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 21:27). What a wonderful thought! God’s judgment will not be arbitrary or capricious, but will be based

on facts -- the deeds of men (Romans 2:6). No one appears to be saved from judgment as a result of having his record examined. Only faith in Christ saves the man.

Revelation 20:13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

The term “**gave up the dead**” is a term of resurrection. Death is a state. Hell is a place. The sea--the awesome, turbulent, uncontrollable sea—the place of wonder and mystery will yield to the arm lock of Almighty God. All the sailors on all the ships, including the victims on the Titanic, that have perished at sea will rise from their watery grave and appear before Him Who commands spirits. There is a day when the bailiff in His courtroom says, “All rise!”

“**And they were judged**” are sobering words. “Judged!” When the truth-telling God points his finger and reads His indictment what will we say? What Philadelphia lawyer can defend us? Smith & Wesson are barred from the pleading. Hal & Horton are not licensed to practice law in this courtroom. There is only one Counselor and Advocate. One would do well to contract with him now (Isaiah 9:6; 1 John 2:1).

Revelation 20:14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Lake of fire: John sees the final destruction of death, the grave, and the place of the dead. Death and hell are personified. Fire cannot necessarily be taken literally. Fire appears to be condescending imagery to describe the final punishment of the wicked. Fire is a symbol of terrifying punishment. A shocking, ghastly, piercing, sizzling fate awaits the Christ-rejecter.

Second death: The first death is the soul’s separation from the body; the second death is the soul’s eternal separation from God. All must face the first death, but none who trust in Christ will see the second death. This is the Christian hope.

Revelation 20:15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Book of life: Life is a gift of God given to those who confess their shame and flee to Calvary to be washed in the blood of the Lamb (Romans 5:6-8; 6:23). When a person trusts in Christ, their name is written in the Book of Life (Romans 10: 9, 10). Hallelujah!!

If a man does not believe in time, there is no hope for him in eternity. He will be cast alive into the lake of fire like the Beast and false prophet toiling to escape towards a shoreless eternity.

3.5 The New Heaven and the New Earth

New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to the new earth represents the culmination of eschatological hope for the people of God from ages past to ages present. Revelation twenty portrays the ultimate destiny of the present universe when it is renovated by the redemptive powers of the resurrected Christ.

Revelation 21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new⁷² earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

“**And**” (kai) connects chapter twenty-one with chapter twenty. The following events follow the events of the great judgment.

“**New:**” Does the word “new” (*kainos*) represent a renovation of a thing or a creation of a new thing out of nothing (*ex nihilo*)?

It appears that the “new” order is a renovation of the present heavens and earth. He does not obliterate it. The “making new” is equivalent to the “regeneration” (*paliggenesia*) of Matthew 19:28 or the restoration (*apokatastasis*) of Acts 3:21. The cosmos is not the source of sin. Sin is not “out there” in the environment. It is in man. Rather than total annihilation and a creation *ex nihilo*, it appears that God will radically reconstruct the new cosmos out of the present cosmos. The new heaven and new earth is not ontological, but ethical and spiritual.

This renovation involves a continuity between the old order and the new order. Just like there is continuity between the old Adam and a new Adam, there is continuity between the old cosmos and the new cosmos.

The term “no more sea” indicates a totally different environment. The sea with all its terrors and mysteries, with its brewing storms dipped in thundering darkness surrounded by crushing waves will vanish like a vapor in the wind. This is not renewal of the old order, but replacement by a new order.

In Greek thought, the philosophers conceived reality in terms of the physical world and the spiritual world. This kind of dualism is contradicted by this section of Scripture. Heaven and earth are merged into a new world order. Spirit and body exist in harmony. Here there is a union between heaven and earth.

Revelation 21:2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

New Jerusalem: Old Testament (OT) saints, because of Israel’s temple and God’s presence in that structure, saw OT Jerusalem as the hope of all mankind. But, in the New Testament,

⁷² The Greek word “neos” means *new in time or origin*, while *kainos* means new in nature or quality.

Heavenly Jerusalem is conceived of as the homeland of the saints—the antitype of OT Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22; Galatians 4:26; Philippians 3:20). The Biblical hope, even though expressed in very earthly terms, is not the renewed Holy Land but the reality to which it pointed. OT Jerusalem is really a shadow or type of true Jerusalem, the residence of God’s people. The detail of the city is described later on in the chapter.

Heavenly Jerusalem, the home of the redeemed, is portrayed as a beautiful bride with braided hair, ornamented with jewelry, decked out in a white wedding gown. This image captures our attention and our imagination. Just as there is nothing more beautiful or curious than a young bride with glowing skin and an innocent smile, there is nothing more attractive to the believer than the purity and hope of the New Jerusalem, the capital city of Christ.

Strangely, however, we are not allowed to see the bride till later.

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

A great voice: Booming from heaven was a piercing voice with a marvelous announcement. The glory of Israel was God tabernacling among men. Though short lived in history, God dwelling with Israel was the pride and joy of God’s ancient people. What was shadowed in the OT during the Period of the Judges and Kings, what was lost during the Captivity, and what was proclaimed as a hope by the exilic prophets, is now announced as a tangible reality by a thundering voice. What a thought: *God among men!* What expectation: the unseen, holy and loving Creator walking in the midst of a cleansed and holy people!

The tabernacle, the temporary dwelling of God made after the heavenly pattern, is now brought to fruition in this vision: God dwelled in the Tabernacle, then in Solomon’s Temple. In Christ, God dwelled among men (John 1:14). In the church age, the church experiences Theos in a spiritual sense (Ephesians 2:22). On the new earth, faith will be turned into sight; hope into reality; expectation into fulfillment. The Holy Trinity dwells among His people, and His people taste the ripe fruits of fellowship with Him.

The phrase, “they shall be His people,” introduces the hope of the Torah, the goal of the prophecy, the results of Christ’s redemption, and the purpose of our Heavenly Father coming to fruition—to redeem a people for Himself. Oh, to be called “His people!” What a joy!

Revelation 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Wipe away all tears: When the New Jerusalem intersects time and history, there will be no more sorrow over losses, setbacks, failures, or sins. “God” is the subject. “Wipe away” is an

active verb. He will remove all the trials and troubles that cause grief, and grief itself. What a thought!

No death: The king of the ages will not enter here. Destruction of death is not an end in itself. It is the result of fellowship with God. Christ defeated death at Calvary (Hebrews 2:12ff), but its realization happens at the *renewal of all things*.

No crying or pain: Tears are the physical manifestation of overwhelming emotion. They are the result of frustration--the inability to articulate joy and grief. In this new order, emotions will be able to be expressed without tears. There will be no crying for joy or for sorrow. There will be no more pain, no disease, no fractures, no heart attacks, no terrorism, no war, no pandemics, and no cancers. What a glorious day that will be! Even so come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 21:5 And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

He that sat on the throne is the resurrected, glorified, ascended Christ.

All things new: Back of this new creation is the One who makes all things new. The new order is the creation of Christ. The old order will disappear and the new order will saturate existence.

Faithful and true: This may seem like a mere dream. It is. But, the resurrected, ascended Christ is not. He is on the throne! John reminds us that all things are possible with God and that his vision is true and that it will come to pass. God is faithful! Not one of His good promises will fail.

The Eschaton began with the coming of Christ. The blessings of the Eschaton like justification and regeneration are thrust into the believer's experience in advance of the consummation of history in a first fruits way to enjoy now. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). The life of the Eschaton that indwells the regenerated soul will one day experience total fulfillment in a new cosmos we call the kingdom of God.

Revelation 21:6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

"It is done" assures John that the future is secure, that is, it is "as good as done!"

Jesus is **"Alpha and Omega,"** the beginning and end, the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet . . . and, He encompasses all reality from "A to Z."

The figure of thirst represents man's deepest sense of need. All bleed. All die. All men feel their immortality. Death is man's fundamental problem. But, not all thirst for forgiveness and a relationship with the living God. But, those blessed souls that thirst to know God and to be

forgiven are promised refreshment from the wells of eternal life. This is John's way of telling the reader that the door of salvation is still open for those that hunger to be right with God.

Water of life: The promise is not to the religious, but to the thirsty. All religions are not equal; nor is religion a way to know God. Islam, Buddhism, and the mystic religions cannot lead a man to the true God. While there is much truth in "Christianity," even the Christian religion cannot save the man. Salvation is in a Person, not a system. The promise to be given "the water of life" is from the risen, ascended Christ Who is the "way, the truth, and the life." To have life, men must believe in Jesus and surrender to His authority. He died for our sins. He rose again. He ascended to the right hand of God . . . and, He can save the believing soul.

Be careful for what you hunger for. A man will become the sum total of his desires. Having a thirst for God is a blessed spiritual state. And, if a hunger for God is the expression of spiritual health, then complacency must be the main symptom of spiritual sickness.

"Thou movest us to delight in praising Thee; for Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee?" (St. Augustine).

Revelation 21:7 He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Overcometh: The metaphor switches from "thirst" to "overcoming;" from a human need to a war and a battle of ideas. We get the term "nike" or "nikon" from this word. It means "victor" and takes us back to the promises of chapters two and three. "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

The term *overcoming* implies that there is tremendous resistance to becoming a true Christian. "Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life" (Matthew 7:14). All religions are not equal. "**Jesus Christ is not one savior among many but the "only Savior" of the world and of all humanity**" (*Placuit Deo*. The Vatican, 2018).

Sonship is not for the religious, but for those who believe that salvation is in Christ and no other. There is a difference between believing something about Christ and truly trusting in Him as Lord and Savior.

Revelation 21:8 But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

The Spirit provides a list of those who will be excluded from the Heavenly City.

Fearful: The first in the list of wickedness is the cowardly -- those timid souls that would not commit to Christ out of fear of being ridiculed for His name's sake. It is much easier to be

compliant than to have courageous faith. Some people have no molars to chew the elephant hide of criticism for Christ.

Fear not, for I have given you authority. – Matthew 28:18-20

If a man harbors any sort of fear, it percolates through all his thinking, damages his personality, makes him landlord to a ghost. -- Lloyd Cassel Douglas.

*Never fear shadows... they simply mean there's a light shining somewhere nearby.
-- Unknown.*

The coward believes he will live forever.

*If he holds back in the battle,
But in old age he shall have no peace
Though spears have spared his limbs
The words of Har*

Unbelieving: The unbelieving are those souls with no heart for God; those people and who will not seriously examine the historical evidence of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the people who prefer to live like a dumb goose in a new world. They can believe in Santa Clause and the Easter bunny, but they can't sink their teeth into the forensic evidence of a risen Christ. The can believe in evolution, but not creation; science, but not the God of science; in a new world order, but not the new heavens and new earth.

Abominable: The “abominable” are those who do the unthinkable and unspeakable, the obscene and outrageous – detestable things that violate the laws of nature and nature’s God: Sodomy, pedophilia, necrophilia, and cannibalism fit this category. These are the people who court the Sultans of perversion with demonic madness. These are the carrion that feed off the maggots of society, that liter civilization with Jezebels, pimps, and whores.

Murderers: Murderers would include criminals, crime figures, and abortionists—those immoral butchers who have the conscience of an amoeba. It would also include the irascible, the violent, the incorrigible, rapists, and those who use coercion and violence to achieve their devilish ends. Murder includes not only premeditated murder, but war crimes, assassinations, torture, DWI, slanderers, drug addicts, gluttons, those who abuse their bodies, and those who promote a culture of death. Slander is a form of murder. Vicious is the tongue. Slanders kill the soul and murder men’s reputation. Taxation under color of law is a death sentence to the working man. Thugs and thieves would be included in this list.

Whoremongers: Whoremongers refer to the sexually immoral. From the word “whoremongers” we get the word “pornography.” It refers to the sexually promiscuous, fornicators, prostitutes, rapists, homosexuals, lesbians, Sodomites, transvestites, and adulterers. These are the bedroom

bimbos that drink deeply from the well of sensuality and who eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of “consensual” sex. Like parasites, they suck innocence out children. Those who board this ship of obscenity will drown in the black, foaming sea of God’s judgment.

Sorcerers: Sorcery involves deception and fraud howbeit spiritual or economic. Sorcerers would include deceivers and cult worshippers and primitive witches. These are the tricksters who consult the dead and allege the ability to read palms; those who practice the black arts and white magic; those who have more frog legs and shed more chicken blood than the Cajun queen of voodoo, Marie Laveau. Sorcery would include politicians, lawyers, and bankers engaged in brewing “words of art” to trap men in commercial schemes. It includes legislators and IRS agents pushing taxation schemes, and those money changers involved in predatory lending practices.

Idolaters: Idolaters include ancient idol worshipers as well as those who presently love money and pleasure above God. Lust is a form of idolatry (Ephesians 5:3ff). Pornography attracts many idolaters to its icons of lust. Sporting tattoos is a form of idolatry. The images scripted on the body are statements of a person’s greatest values at the time of obtaining the tattoo.

Idol worship includes statists --those who reject God’s law-order believing the State is the highest authority on earth. Legislators, Democrats and Republicans, constitute this class of idolaters because they seek to replace God’s law-order with man’s law order. Modern States pursue power and arrogate to themselves the prerogatives of deity. When the State sees itself as the ultimate source of law instead of seeing God’s Word as the source of all law, then the State claims total jurisdiction over man. To claim total jurisdiction over man, from the womb to the tomb, is a claim to be as god. When the State requires allegiance to itself above the Lord and demands a thirty percent tithe or more of all its worshippers, it sets itself up above Christ.

The First Commandment is a proscription against statism, tyranny, and totalitarianism – the defining character of Mystery Babylon. To demand children routinely pledge allegiance to the State while proscribing prayer in the classroom is nothing more that State worship—the crowning achievement of the totalitarian, new world order. To surrender to the State and obey its law-order is idolatry—a form of treason-- a defiance of the rule of God. This is not to say, however, that one cannot love his country and his fellow citizens.

The Spirit calls us to acknowledge His rule and to surrender to His law-order. To reject His rule and to possess a fanatical allegiance to the Babylonian State is idolatry.

Liars: Liars include perjurers, defrauders, extortionists, and slanders. Propagandists, gossips, and media pundits are accommodated on God’s black list. False advertising, commercial schemes, and fraud are a products of deception. The term “caveat emptor,” *let the buyer beware*, is a product of humanism not Biblical thinking. The Word of God places the onus of truth telling upon the seller, not the consumer. Valid contracts demand full disclosure.

A liar's tale is as deadly as a bite from a black mamba. The trouble with a liar is that he is believed even when he speaks the truth. The trust of the innocent is the liar's Trojan horse that captures his soul and plunders his wealth. The most expensive purchase most men will ever make is their own government. And, when the government lies, you know that it has declared war on its people. And, all war is the art of deception said Sun Tzu.

"Instead of politicians, let the monkeys govern the countries; at least they will steal only the bananas!"(Ildan).

Americans are required to sign all kinds of government documents under "penalties of perjury" while at the same time you can't get a government agent to verify anything under oath with a wet-ink signature. Do you wonder why? One asked, "When can you tell if a politician is lying?" "When he has his mouth open," responded the other. Thus, misrepresentations, half-truths, and sophistry using "words of art" are the tools of the modern totalitarian State and its corporations who engage in ultra vires acts. So damaging is deception that hell eagerly awaits to devour the souls of liars.

But, this is not a condemnation of all lying. Abraham, the Egyptian midwives, and Rahab lied. Nowhere does Scripture condemn them for doing so. In a sinful world, you do not owe the truth to those who would abuse the truth. It takes more courage to lie to a corrupt official than it does to tell the truth. Thus, God rewarded Abraham, the midwives, and Rahab for their moral courage.

The second death is defined as the assignment of the wicked to the lake of fire is d as a fact.

4 THE FOURTH VISION

4.1 The New Jerusalem

Revelation 21:9 And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.

The angel summoned John to see the harlot (17), now the angel summons John to behold the bride – a contrast between the city of man and the city of God. What was announced at the beginning of this chapter now comes into view. We can almost hear John's heart pounding with joy in anticipation of viewing the queen.

Revelation 21:10 And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

“In the spirit” is an ecstatic state of preparedness. John was in a condition where he was able to receive the vision. Carried to a “mountain” is a point of vantage from which to view the city.

Holy Jerusalem: We are told that John is going to see the bride, the wife of the Lamb. We are shown instead heavenly Jerusalem. This Jerusalem is the same as the holy Jerusalem of verse two. Though of historical interest, there is nothing holy about modern day earthly Jerusalem. Heavenly Jerusalem above is the holy city, the heartland and hope of the redeemed, the dwelling place of God—the equivalent of the bride. Heavenly Jerusalem, the bride, the temple, Israel, the candlestick, and the church are all representations of the people of God. They shadow one truth—the perfection and beauty of the redeemed.

4.1.1 Description of the Holy City

Revelation 21:11 Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;

The great distinctive of this city was that it possessed “the glory of God.” Missing is the praise of humanistic man. The glory of God was in the Tabernacle, a single room. Here the glory of God fills the entire city. John compares the city to the glittering of a precious stone, bright and beautiful.

Revelation 21:12 And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

A great wall: The city, like ancient Jerusalem, had a magnificent high wall. The wall is not practical, but esthetic. Who in John's day could imagine a great city that did not have walls? All great cities in the Levant had stone walls and majestic towers.

This city has **twelve gates**. The twelve angels stationed at each gate did not keep men out, but act as holy gatekeepers ready to serve the redeemed.

Names of the twelve tribes: The gates are named after the sons of Jacob, one name for each gate. The names do not honor Jews, but those upon which the New Israel has been constructed; that is, this fact reminds us of continuity between OT people and the NT people of God.

Possibly, the names of Israel were permanently etched on the gates to remind us that the redemption of mankind came through the toil of Israel. All the values we honor and esteem as Christians come from God through the Hebrew people.

The twelve angels may be the watchers (Isaiah 62:6) who pray for Israel and the messianic kingdom (Ladd, p. 280).

Revelation 21:13-14 On the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The twelve apostles may be an illusion to the theology of the church, the precious gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel comes to us through the work of the ascended Christ in and through the apostles.

Ladd points out that both dispensations are represented and that both groups of people have their place in the city of God (p. 281). The Old Testament saints and the New Testament saints live together as *one people of God*. Hebrews had to believe the prophetic teaching regarding the Redeemer; while the nations today are called to believe the historical facts of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 21:15 And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof.

The angel is the same angel that had a bowl and that summoned John to the high mountain.

The action of measuring the city is shown to John in order to amplify the city's greatness and importance in the mind of the original readers. Just as large cities occupied a place of greatness in the Greek world, the vastness of this city was designed to impress the imagination with the supreme importance of this megalopolis.

The reed is mentioned in Ezekiel 40:5; 42:16; 45:1; Revelation 11:1; 21:15,16. The length of the reed is 6 cubits, each cubit being a cubit and a palm, i.e. the large cubit of 7 palms, or about 10 ft.

A cubit is the length of the forearm from the tip of the middle finger to the elbow. Originally the actual reed was a pole used for measurements of considerable length, but came at last to be a definite length in English measures.

Revelation 21:16 And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal.

The city is presented as a perfect cube, a quadrangular structure of perfect symmetry. It resembles nothing on earth. Its length and height and width are equal showing us the perfection of this city. Its dimensions are not geographical and spatial but logical and spiritual. Such dimensions are designed to stir the imagination and to impress the reader as to the greatness of this domicile for the redeemed.

12,000 furlongs, or stadia is 1500 miles. This equals 2,250,000 square miles, or 3,375,000,000 billion cubic miles.

Note the square miles of the following according to the Hammond World Atlas (p. 2):

1. Texas: 267,339 sq. miles
2. United s 3,615,123 sq. miles
3. Canada 3,851,809 sq. miles
4. Europe 4,063,000 sq. miles
5. Australia 2,967,741 sq. miles
6. Mexico 761,601 sq. miles

This city staggers the imagination when one thinks that the distance from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean was scarcely 60 miles.

Obviously, this city is not to be interpreted in a gross literal fashion any more than we should interpret Christ as having bronze feet in John's first vision. This would destroy the intent of the image. John does not want surveyors to get out their slide rule and calculate the size of this city. Rather, he wants us to interpret the symbols, not to use the sledgehammer of the literal hermeneutic to engineer a carnal city. Symbolically, the measurements of the city represent symmetry, perfection, vastness, and completeness of the New Jerusalem. The Jerusalem above is a grand and glorious city with ample room for all who believe.

Revelation 21:17 And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

An hundred and forty and four cubits is two hundred and sixteen feet or about two-thirds of a football field. If this is taken literally, then the outer wall is out of proportion to the rest of the city. A walled city in ancient times meant the city was important, wealthy, protected, and a place of safety. John is communicating the beauty of New Jerusalem according to the values of antiquity in terms the original readers could understand; that is, Heaven condescends to the limitations of man to explain itself.

Revelation 21:18 And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

John introduces us to the building materials, the like of which, we have never seen on earth.. The emeralds and precious metals communicate the beauty and wealth and grandeur of this city.

The wall was made of jasper, transparent quartz, designed to reflect light. Pure gold clear as glass suggest perfection, translucence, and a cache of treasures.

Revelation 21:19-21 And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; The fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst.

Cities past and cities present are not known for their beautiful subterranean structures. They are known for all their ugly water lines and sewer pipes. The preciousness of the foundation stones shows us that the beauty and grandeur of this city is genuine and not just cosmetic, internal as well as external. Here is true wealth and riches. Even the foundations of the city are garnished with precious stones of all sorts. The message is clear: *Do all you can to escape the city of man and find the city of God.*

Revelation 21:21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

Again, the structures here are not literal and concrete, but logical and spiritual. Each gate was made of one mammoth pearl. No oyster could possibly produce such a gem. This is a heavenly jewel produced by the Spirit. Pearls were rare in Roman times and only the very wealthy owned them. At the height of the Roman Empire, when the lust for pearls reached its peak, the historian Suetonius penned that the Roman General Vitellius financed an entire military campaign by selling just one of his mother's pearl earrings. The fact these gates are made of huge pearls shows us that all believers have access to the wealth of salvation.

Levantine peoples took special pride in the gates of ancient cities. Gates were a place of business kind of like a city hall or town square with a vibrant social life. But, all ancient gates were made of common earthy tone stones. Each gate in the New Jerusalem, however, is made out of a single

giant pearl. Gold will be so common it is used for pavement. In describing the Heavenly City, John pushes language to its limits in order to communicate the splendor and prosperity of this urban complex.

Revelation 21:22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

Every ancient city had at least one temple. Solomon built the first temple in Israel and the God of heaven was pleased to dwell in it for a time (circa 950-589 BC). Herod reconstructed the second temple complex (20 BC to 70AD) to unwittingly set the stage for the coming of the Son on which the greatest drama in history would be played out. In the apostolic era, the local church is considered a temple. The New Jerusalem will have no temple because God Almighty and the Lamb will dwell there among men. The full reality of what it means to be “in Christ” will be fully realized in this heavenly city.

Revelation 21:23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

Levantine cultures worshipped the Sun and the Moon. Who can imagine an existence apart from the Sun and the moon? A distinguishing feature of this city is that its source of light does not come from the sky above or the earth below. The glory of God is the eternal florescent torch in this city. This remarkable metropolis is illuminated by the splendor of the presence of God.

Note that God (the glory of God) and the Lamb become indistinguishable—more evidence of Trinitarian Theology.

Revelation 21:24 And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it.

By using the word “**nations**” (ta. e;qnh), John is referring to people groups and the different ethnicity that make up the people of God. He is not presenting a dualism between the people of God on the inside and the pagans on the outside. There is no social structure of kings and pawns. There is only one King for the people of God. The point John wants his readers to understand is that this city is the center of life in the new cosmos and that all registered in the book of life marvel at its splendor and venerate its beauty.

Apparently, the richness of ethnic cultures will be preserved. All nationalities will find something in this city which they can identify with and admire. Its values are universal and transcend ethnic distinctives. There is no xenophobia or racism here. All are accepted in the Beloved.

Revelation 21:25 And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

Open gates affirm the safety, security, and trustworthiness of the city.

No night suggest there is nothing to fear in this city. There are no thieves, no burglars, no rapists, no muggers, and no criminal element in the New Jerusalem. There are no concealed weapons in this city. No martial arts classes will be offered. Love and trust will reign supreme in the hearts of all citizens (Isaiah 60:11).

Revelation 21:26-27 **And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.**

The glory and honor of the nations indicates that the people will retain certain undefined cultural distinctives.

Nothing that defiles: There will be no liars or defilers in this city. John is not suggesting that thieves and robbers exist and will enter the city, but that the city is the proper possession of the redeemed. Only those who truly confess Christ as Lord will have an inheritance in this metropolis. Unbelievers are banished. Most bankers and politicians will never see the wealth of this city. It is reserved for those who repent of their sins and trust Christ now. Absent are murderers, abortionists, transvestites, queers, pornographers, schemers, and slanderers.

4.1.2 The Reign of Life

Revelation 22:1 **And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.**

The phrase “**pure water of life**” is a symbolic way of revealing the reign of eternal life in the age to come (Ladd, p. 286). Death and all its accompaniments are abolished because life reigns. Death cannot exist where Christ rules. (Background: Psalm 46:4; Zechariah 14:8; John 4:10, 14).

The following verses represent a contrast between the old order and the new order; between the dominance of sin in this age, and the reign of eternal life in the age to come.

Revelation 22:2 **In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.**

The river of life: John is not suggesting that a literal, physical river runs down Main Street in the Heavenly City. Rather, this is a symbolic way of pointing to the centrality and reign of eternal life in the kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem. Life, not death, characterizes the new order.

Tree of life: Adam was forbidden to partake of the tree of life lest he live forever in a sinful state. The tree of life is a symbol of what Jesus accomplished on His mission to earth through His consummate sacrifice. Because He died for sins, believers have life eternal.

The background of this scene comes from Ezekiel 47:12ff. Ezekiel sees a bank and trees yielding fruit on each side. The material picture helps us understand the kingdom of God is oozing with energy, life, and vitality.

The twelve trees with twelve kinds of fruit yielding twelve times a year express the total triumph of the new creation over the old creation. In Adam, all die; in Christ, all are made alive.

Revelation 22:3 And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

Because Adam, the governor of creation, sinned, the ground was cursed. In his fall, creation fell with him. **No more curse** represents the total triumph of redemption over the fall (Genesis 3).

“**It**” is the New Jerusalem. This phrase repeats the familiar motif of the New Jerusalem. It is ruled by God. It has been won by the victories of the Lamb, and it is inhabited by the beneficiaries of the New Covenant. The people of God are called “**servants**” because they are subjects of his sovereignty and grace. In one sense, the redeemed will not serve God in heaven. He will serve them forever and ever. Any service we render must spring from a grateful heart in this life now.

Revelation 22:4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

The act of seeing his face is language that describes the joy and completeness of fellowship that comes with salvation perfected. Christ opened the door for a new fellowship with God. The Christian experience is a communion with God in a first fruits way. Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 12: 45ff). However, this truth is apprehended only by faith. In the age to come, faith will yield to sight. Glory!

Having his name in their foreheads expresses loyalty, possession, and ownership. This tattoo is not literal anymore than the mark of the Beast on the forehead of men is literal. This is John’s way of informing us that God knows his people and that Christ knows his sheep. God’s people are marked for eternity at the time each one accepts Christ’s offer to come and believe.

Revelation 22:5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever.

“**No night**” highlights a fact already presented. There is no darkness, no death, and no wars in this city. The utilities of this urban center are wired to the glory of God. There will never be a need for emergency generators in this community. No one will see the terrors of darkness.

Because God is light and God is eternal, the supply of light is endless. Grace and purity and holiness adorn every nook and cranny of this metropolis.

Reigning with Christ refers to sharing in the benefits of His accomplishments. Titles won at the cross are distributed to all to enjoy forever. As king-priests, the people of God share the riches of His royal palace by faith. One day, faith will be turned into sight.

4.1.3 The Epilogue

Revelation 22:6 And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true: and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to show unto his servants the things which must shortly be done.

Faithful and true: John ends his book with the assurance that his vision is sure and reliable; that his message is from the Lord God of the Bible, the Revelator to the prophets of old; that the angel was sent by the Father to John for His servants.

The testimony of Jesus is the “spirit of prophecy.”

The phrase “must shortly be done” has been a subject of debate. Either this means (a) that as man measures time it has been nearly 2000 years since John received this message; but as God measures time it has only been a few days; or (b) the major forces predicted in this book were about to break upon the Christians in Asia Minor. If we take this verse literally, the prophecies of this book were about to break forth on the scene in which the seven churches participated. While the conflict between the anti-God forces and the work of the gospel will exist until Christ returns, we must conclude that the bulk of John’s visions were substantially relevant to the original readers of Revelation. We must view this book through the eyes of first century Christians.

Revelation 22:7 Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

The phrase “come quickly” commandeers the heart of the church in every age to look for the coming of Christ. *Imminence* is a scriptural proposition. Every Christian has the hope that the Lord will come in their life time. But, in another sense, His coming quickly could refer to His presence among the seven churches in their time in their hour of need. Both are true.

The injunction “**to keep**” means to hold dear, to live one’s life in light of the warnings and hope of this book. Surely, the admonition ignited first century hearts with application to our age.

Revelation 22:8 And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed me these things.

“Heard and seen” is a legal testimony. John wants his readers to know that he was an eye witness to the scenes presented in his book. These visions were not imaginations from a creative mind, by revelations to John by the God of Heaven.

Fell down: John felt so honored to be the recipient of this vision, John prostrated himself to honor Him Who sent His angel to reveal these thing to him. What other response could John render?

Revelation 22:9 Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God.

The reason for the gentle rebuke is that the angel is not deity, but a fellow creation of God, a servant of the prophets and of all who obey Him. It is a gentle reminder to all of us that when good things happen to us, remember that God is the Source of all gifts. We are grateful for His agents, but we can only worship Him.

Revelation 22:10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book: for the time is at hand.

In ancient times, prophets were admonished to seal up prophecies if the bulk of the message did not concern their own time and the life of their contemporaries. John’s prophecy, however, was immediately relevant to the people in the seven churches and not for some remote generation. For that reason, the angel ordered John to not place a seal on the book. While applicable to every age, the primary purpose of this book was for the first century readers.

Revelation 22:11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

The just and unjust: John has invited men to come to the river of life. But he also realizes that his prophecy may not affect everyone in the same way. The “Sun that melts the wax also hardens the clay.” Time reveals the habits and character of men, and great tribulations reveal the truth of hearts. Some would respond and join the holy faithful and obey the admonitions in the book, others would remain unchanged and continue down their filthy, worldly path.

Revelation 22:12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

I come quickly: John again inserts a promise to the faithful, the hope of Christ’s return, the hope of reward. But, this time, it is the Lord Himself that speaks. There is a tension between imminence and perspective. Every believer should live expecting the Lord to come, but he must also live with the view that Christ may not return in His life time.

John also points us to Christ's official duty, that of Judge and the Rewarder of faithful service.

Moreover, the phrase "I come quickly" could refer to his coming in time to reward and strengthen the churches in their need.

Revelation 22:13 I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Alpha and Omega: Christ is qualified to Judge because He is eternal. He transcends every age and all of human experience. Our Lord is the A and the Z of everything meaningful. If you need it and can spell it, He can supply it. He remembers every act of kindness done in His name; every stand for a righteous cause; every pain suffered in His service against the anti-god forces. He has a reward for all who follow him and suffer for the cause of righteousness. The One who carried the cross now wears the crown.

4.1.4 The Inhabitants of the City

Revelation 22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

This state of blessedness is not universal salvation, but entrance into the Messianic age through faith. The blessing is not to do-gooders but for those obey the command to believe in order to be washed in the blood of the Lamb (1:5). His commandments are for all men (and their institutions) and encompass the entire Word of God. *Doing* proceeds from *believing* that He is not only the Savior of sinners but also Lord of the kingdom. At the core of His commands is the order to repent and believe the gospel (Acts 17:30; 20:21). If one believes that Jesus stands at the right hand of God, then he will sit at his feet and do what he says. Entrance into the Holy City and rights to the tree of life are not based on human merit, but based on the doing and dying of Jesus; that is, on faith in Christ—the whole Christ—the Lord Jesus Christ.

"(To have Faith in Christ) means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey Him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you." (C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity)"

There is all the difference in the world between obeying the law to be saved, and obeying the law because one is saved.

Revelation 22:15 For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

Those without: John now reveals those who are outside the New Jerusalem; those not invited to the Messianic banquet; those outside the kingdom of God. In contrast to those who have rights to the tree of life and the city of God are those whose character remains unchanged during the age of gospel proclamation.

“Dogs” could refer to homosexuals, bisexuals, transvestites, and lesbians (Deuteronomy 23:17-18).

“Sorcerers” are those who practice the magic arts; those engaged in deception and trickery for commercial gain; liars and deceivers and scammers; that is, those people in high places that tax and plunder people economically. Bankers and politicians come to mind.

“Whoremongers” refers to fornicators and the sexually promiscuous.

“Murders” refers to acts of rage, assassins, abortionists, and those who sanction the homicide of the unborn.

“Idolaters” in Revelation refers to statist who believe government is the source of all law and power. “Thou shall have no other gods before me” means that thou shall have no authority above the living God and His Law-word; that is, no law-source other than the Lord God (Exodus 20:1-3).

“Whosoever loveth and maketh a lie” refers to all acts of deception whether it be a banker’s contract, the advertiser’s spin, media deception, a salesman’s false promises, the rewriting of history, or fraudulent faith claims. When the New Jerusalem is revealed, the wicked will be cowering like dogs barking for scraps thrown over the city wall. But, not one piece of bread will fall within their reach.

Revelation 22:16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

I Jesus: This statement affirms the introduction of the book -- that the prophecy was sent from the Son of God.

As the root of David, He is the branch, the Anointed One, the Messenger of the Covenant, the Creator / Lord (Adonai) of David.

As the “offspring” of David, Christ is the son of David--a physical, fleshly descendant of David. Our Lord is the root and the fruit of David. How can that be? Jesus is the God/man. Because He is David’s Lord, Master, and Savior, Jesus is David’s root (Psalm 110:1ff). Because Jesus is the Word and the Word became flesh, He is David’s fruit.

Morning star: Venus, the morning star with its thick boiling atmosphere that traps heat in a runaway greenhouse effect, makes it the hottest planet in our solar system. As the morning and

evening star, it greets stargazers after sunset, and it says “good bye” to astronomers as the sun rises.

As the “bright and morning star” Christ is the only hope for a world staggering under deception and stalked by death. He is the star that shines through the night of history. By virtue of His death, burial, and resurrection He is the only religious teacher Who has demonstrated that death is not the master of men -- that He is Lord over all. His victory over the grave is the sunshine and hope of men. Because he overcame man’s fundamental problem (death), we now have historical / legal proof of claim.

4.1.5 The Invitation to Enter Life

Revelation 22:17 And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Come: This is John’s invitation to join the company of the redeemed. It is through persuasion, not through force that men are won to Christ. Hearing is a prerequisite to salvation.

The “bride” is the church, the true people of God. The Spirit of God speaks through Christians to invite men to come to Christ. There are not two peoples of God. Jews are in view here. Believers in Christ are the one and only instrument God uses to reach the lost. He does not use methods or programs or organizations to win men to Christ. He uses His people.

4.1.6 Two Conditions Necessary to Enter Life

Thirst: The first requisite for eternal life is “thirst.” Thirst speaks of need. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” It is a wonderful thing when a man realizes he is spiritually bankrupt and thirsts for the water of life.

Come: The second condition necessary to enter life touches the will. One must consent to enter the kingdom. Salvation is an offer and the covenant must be accepted. The grantee must sign the contract offered by the Grantor. He must receive Christ as His Savior and bow the knee to Jesus as Lord if he wants to enter the Rule of God. The Spirit stands in the market place like a holy hawker waving his arms and calling to men to come and drink from the waters that lead to everlasting life. His merchandise is eternal and the price is affordable for all (Isaiah 55:1-2). The Messianic Feast is ready. Everything is provided. Will you come on covenant ground? He has made an offer; will you accept? Leave your idols and false hopes. Come to Christ and register as a kingdom citizen.

Revelation 22:18 For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book:

This warning is typical of prophets (Deuteronomy 4:2ff). His message was not to be changed, warped, or amended. Mistakes in interpretation are not under the curse, but willful, intentional, reckless distortions are!

Revelation 22:19 And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

This is a severe warning to any that might be tempted to tamper with the message. This passage appears to be addressing those who have access to the tree of life. John is not teaching theology here, but expressing the seriousness of tampering with the vision.

Error is one matter, but deliberate distortion with the intent to deceive is quite another. Corruption will be judged severely.

John is not saying men can lose their salvation. There is no record of those who are expelled from this city. It is simply a warning about the severity of unbelief.

4.1.7 The Promise

Revelation 22:20 He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

This is the final affirmation and the final hope. Who among God's people cannot but say, "Amen! Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

The word *maranatha* is an Aramaic word meaning, "our Lord comes." See 1 Corinthians 16:22. This prayer is rooted in the earliest Christian liturgy as an expression of hope that Jesus will return soon. We not only want Him to come and meet our needs in our life time, we want to see his visible, tangible appearance in the clouds wherein he comes to wrap up Christian history and to take His church to His heavenly home (1 Thessalonians 4:17ff).

4.1.8 The Glorious Conclusion of the Book

Revelation 22:21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

In conclusion, John reveals the activity of Christ during this present evil age from his highly exalted position at the right hand of the Father. The Alpha and Omega is the glorified King walking among His churches judging sin and strengthening weak hearts.

The first century Christians were about to experience a holocaust by the scourge and power of Rome. John's letter instructs the saints on how to live for Christ during this turbulent time. He comforts them with the assurance the gospel will prevail during this age and that their works will not go unrewarded. Some will not prevail against the beast of raw Roman power, but the gospel

will prevail. Be wholly devoted to Him and love not your life unto death was the message of John. You are known by God; only be faithful and true to your Lord.

Likewise, this book is relevant to Christians in every age. Corruption abounds. The powers of beastly governments will surface at various times in history to test the faith of the saints. We are called to recognize when the State becomes hostile to the gospel and to resist its attempt to control us and to squash the Christian faith. We are not to make an idol out life or out of our “stuff,” but to identify fully with the claims and demands of the cross. Proclaim the gospel. Resist evil. Be courageous! We are known by God. Only be faithful and true to our Lord. **Stand firm in our time** for His eternal reward surpasses all earthly suffering. Even so come, Lord Jesus! Amen! And, Amen!

5 APPENDICES

5.1 Rules of Interpretation

First, interpret the book within its historical context.

One should **not** look at Revelation through the lens of one's own culture with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in another, nor with a magnifying glass in search of esoteric clues signifying the end times.

How an American Christian and a Palestinian Christian looks at Revelation may be completely different.

The key question is **not**, "What does Revelation mean to me?" but "**What did the book mean to the seven churches?**"

Get into the mind of Original Readers! What did the vision as a whole mean to the Greek-Hebrew Christians living in Asia Minor? Revelation was not written to modern people, but for the edification and encouragement of the early Christians in Europe. The objective is to discern, where possible, the first century Christian mind and their moral, religious, social, cultural, and political issues of the time. In so doing, we will better understand John's revelation.

Second, interpret the symbols in the book.

John's work utilizes Hebrew-isms and apocalyptic language to convey truth.

Images are presented to the readers like a giant political cartoon to stir the imagination. Truth is transported from heaven to earth using mythological imagery to impress the mind. Images are the conduit through which truth travels. Though John borrows from the OT, he infuses those images with NT meaning. John was thoroughly Christian, and his book was designed to be read and understood by Christians. Therefore, the New Testament (NT) has authority over the OT, and must be the referee where disputes arise.

The use of a symbol is **not** the reality conveyed. Rather, the use of a symbol is the vehicle of communicating reality. Symbols point to a truth or a fact, but the symbol is not the essence of the

truth represented. It only indexes the reality. Symbols act like a sack full of wheat. We eat the wheat not the sack. Our job is to open the package and to devour its contents⁷³.

For example, in Revelation chapter 22, John describes a river flowing from the throne of God and the Lamb. This is not a literal river. The river is John's way of describing the reign of eternal life in the age to come. Some of the numbers in Revelation are literal numbers, but many are symbolic. *The interpreter's task is to identify the symbol and attempt to interpret it in light of the first century Christian mind.*

Third, consider that the intent of the icon is to impress the imagination:

Why did God use a particular representation or vision?

Quoting Pieters, Summers says, "*Revelation is addressed chiefly to the imagination.*" This does not mean we are to let our twenty-first century minds go wild using our own codes and symbols. Rather, the reader **should seek to adopt the mind of the original reader and inter into the intense drama of the book from their point of view.** The modern reader must allow himself to be caught up in the "majesty of the movement as Christ walks among his broken churches with healing for their hurt. Unless the reader can do this, he will miss the greatest messages of Revelation." Summers continues, "*The man who has not, or has and refuses to use, a fertile imagination, will do well to leave this book alone*" (Summers, 1951, p. 51).

John is **not** laying out a roadmap of the last seven years of man's history. He is showing us the facts of history—**not** from a logical, historical point of view, but from an imaginative, pictorial perspective.

John's revelation is **not** an engineering, mathematical, lawyer-like presentation of the last seven years of history. It is written to right-brain people with artistic, creative, imaginative, and intuitive set of skills. An engineer who uses his calculator and slide rule to interpret this book will end up in Looneyville near Lake Silly.

The visions of Revelation are images—giant paintings—holy cartoons similar to the political cartoons you see in a local newspaper. **John does not tell. He shows.** John does not analyze. He paints truth on the canvas of men's minds. John does not appeal to the left side of the brain, the logical analytical side of the human mind, he appeals to the right side of the brain, the emotional, imaginative part of man's nature. Look at the Book of Revelation like a political caricature that

⁷³ One of the problems with the literal approach to Revelation is that it fails to interpret the symbols. It takes no interpretive skill to literalize the images. John's colossal apocalyptic presentations demand an interpretation. A flat acceptance of mythological representations as fact means that readers are devouring the package and missing the kernel of truth.

we see in daily newspapers. In the editorial section of the news, we see dancing elephants and talking donkeys. They are not real, but they do express a political reality.

Those who approach Revelation seeking a logical explanation of history or a roadmap of the future will be disappointed. Quite the contrary! Revelation is an emotional, pictorial, brush stroke regarding the spiritual forces at work in the first century, at work now, and that will be at work in the future. There is a “was, an is, and a not-yet” to this book.

When Elijah prayed that God would open the eyes of his servant, God opened the heavens and his servant saw the armies of God (2 Kings 6:17ff). John does this for us. He pulls back the curtain so we can see the scenes behind history. The apostle acts like a spiritual guide showing us the conflict between the heavenly world of the risen Christ and the earthly world of unredeemed humanity. The Book of Revelation is good news about our Lord’s highly exalted status and His control over history. His death, burial, and resurrection transforms men, purges out evil, and confronts the anti-God forces in history.

Apocalyptic writers did not generally speculate about the end of the world and some far-off future time. Terminal concerns about the end of history held little meaning for the people to whom they wrote. The apocalyptic writers were interested in the here and now. God's Messiah was coming very soon to take away the burdens of God’s people and to exalt them over the gentile nations⁷⁴.

Writers of apocalyptic, says M. Eugene Boring:

Addressed their own generation with the urgency of those who cry out for meaning in their struggle and suffering. Their question was not "When will the End come?" but "What is the meaning of our suffering?" It was not speculative calculation but the tenacity of faith which came to expression in their conviction that the End must be near (M. Eugene Boring, 2011, p. 43).

John’s challenge is

- (a) to provide perspective to his original readers about their current struggles, and
- (b) to provide perspective to Christians throughout all of history about the battles they face with against anti-God forces. John succeeds by using symbols. Some of these symbols are broad brushstrokes that relate to the *general* conflicts within history and some of the symbols are *specific representations* that apply directly to the first century. *Specificity* shows the relevance of

⁷⁴ Noted by Paul Kroll: <http://www.wcg.org/lit/bible/Rev/apocalyptic.htm>. Retrieved April, 2004.

John's work to the original readers. *Generality* enables Christians in every age to apply the work to their lives and to make sense of the conflicts they face during their time.

Fourth, distinguish between interpretation and application.

In interpreting the Book of Revelation, we must interpret John's work in light of John's mind and understanding. The Apocalypse must be interpreted in light of the first century mind and first century politics; that is, much of Revelation applies to Rome's magisterial political pressures on the churches. *There is only one correct interpretation . . . but there are many applications.*

Revelation is meant to be applied to all Christians in every generation. An interpretation that thrusts the majority of the book into the future chills an application of John's work to present day readers. Radical preterism robs future Christians of the comfort found in this book.

Revelation should not be interpreted in light of modern day politics or American life. But, it must be applied to the modern American life. It does not predict future events in the United States or Britain or Europe or South Africa or Australia!! But, it can be applied to modern politics because modern States often become hostile to the true gospel. Those totally devoted to Christ, like the pure virgins in chapter 14, will find themselves a target of the modern State and the Beast that morphs its way through history.

5.2 Christians as Kings and Priests

As chosen ones, saints are anointed as priests to represent men to God. In Israel's temple there were four courts: The court of the Gentile, the court of women, the court of the Jew, and the court of the priests. The Israelites were not allowed to go into the court of priests. Due to the gospel, however, all Christians are appointed to perform the duties of a priest excelling in their influence upon history for good. The church does not have a priesthood, the church is a priesthood: As a holy priesthood Christians offer up praises to God; as a royal priesthood they proclaim His glories to men (1 Peter 2:5-11).

He "made us kings and priests" is a reference from Exodus 19:6. This is the first of many references whereby John applies images of Israel to the church: "The regal and sacerdotal dignities are the two highest that can possibly exist among men; and these two are here mentioned to show the glorious prerogatives and of the children of God" (Clarke, 1831). The church is a royal house of priests. Thus, the church is the people belonging to Christ, the true Israel of God. John perceives the church as sharing regal authority over the nations—not under the authority of governments, but under authority of Him who has authority over the kings of the earth (2:26; 3:21; 5:10; 20:6). Moreover, the exalted nature of men by virtue of the accomplishments of Christ impacted the status of Americans in relation to their government.

2 Timothy 2:12 If we suffer, we shall also **reign with him**: if we deny **him**, he also will deny us:

*“ Sovereignty itself is, of course, not subject to law, for it is the author and source of law; but in our system, while sovereign powers are delegated to the agencies of government, **sovereignty itself remains with the people**, by whom and for whom all government exists and acts. And the law is the definition and limitation of power.” [Downes v. Bidwell, 182 U.S. 244 (1901)]*

*"...Our government is founded upon compact. **Sovereignty was, and is, in the people**" [Glass v. Sloop Betsey, 3 Dall. (U.S.) 6 (1794)]*

The hope of the world is the church. In no sense in the Book of Revelation does John hold out a conversion of the Jews in the end times. The church, not Jews, are the chosen people of God.

God's strategy to reach the world is a witnessing church. He has no other plan. The church is composed of God's chosen people. Believe it. Enjoy it. Act on it.

5.3 References to Clouds

The phrase “coming in the clouds” is found in Matthew 26:64. Jesus announced to the high priest that he shall “see the Son of Man” coming in the clouds. Though difficult to interpret, it must have had a first century fulfillment.

Possibly, the word “see” (*optanomai*) should be translated “perceive.” That is, in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Annas would perceive that Jesus fulfilled the imagery of Daniel where the prophet saw the Son of Man in the clouds approaching the Ancient of Days. The phrase is also found in Matthew 24:30 where the context is clearly the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Again, it appears Jesus is saying that in the destruction of the Jerusalem, men would “perceive” that Jesus, the risen Christ, was judging the city as predicted (Matthew 24:1-3).

Exodus 16:10 The glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud

Exodus 19:9 I come to thee in a thick cloud

Exodus 34:5 And the Lord descended in a cloud

Leviticus 16:2 I will appear in a cloud upon the mercy seat

Numbers 11:25 And the Lord came down in a cloud

Psalms 18:9-12 Around about Him were . . . thick clouds

Psalms 97:2-5 Clouds and darkness are round about him

Psalms 104:3 Who maketh the clouds his chariot

Isaiah 19:1 The Lord rideth upon a swift cloud

Daniel 7:13 One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven

Joel 2:1, 2 the day of the Lord cometh . . . a day of clouds and thick darkness

Nahum 1:3 The clouds are the dust of his feet

Zephaniah 1:14-15 That day is a day of wrath . . . a day of clouds and thick darkness

Matthew 24:30 they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven

Matthew 26:64 You shall see the Son of man sitting . . . coming in the clouds

Mark 13:26 They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds

Mark 14:62 You shall see the Son of man sitting . . . and coming in the clouds of heaven

Revelation 1:7 Behold, he cometh with the clouds and every eye shall see him

Revelation 14:14 Upon the cloud one sat like the Son of man.

5.4 Members of the Synagogue of Satan

Revelation 2:9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.

“The Jews are not conceived as true Jews at all” (McDowell, 1951, p. 46).

True Jews: The “true Jews,” by way of implication, are those who believe that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, and who accept Him as their Savior. Since being a true Jew is a matter of heart, and not genetics, believing Greeks were included in the Messianic community. Thus, Gentile believers shared in the common wealth of Israel, the true Israel of God (Romans 2:28; Ephesians 2:11ff; Ephesians 3:5-10).

False Jews: John indicates that all unbelieving Jews with their stars of Remphan⁷⁵, taliths, prayer shawls, kippahs and yamakas are members of the synagogue of Satan; that is, they worship demons! Likewise, any man who calls himself a “Jew” today and does not honor the Lord Jesus Christ belongs to the *synagogue of Satan*. And, Christians who return to the cultic practices of Jews right deserve to be called “fake Jews.”

These “Jews” are enemies of Christ. There are not two peoples of God, Christians and Jews. There is only one people of God and they are composed of Hebrews and peoples of other nations who believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The belief that all good men, regardless of their religion, are going “to heaven” is a modern day heresy opposed to Him who is “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 1:10-13: John 14:6).

This work is not “anti-Semitic.” Our best friends are Jewish: David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Jesus, Peter, James, and John. But, because modern Christians have fallen into errors of “Christian Zionism” which promote Ashkenazi Jews as “true Jews,” and mindlessly repeat the false “Judeo-Christian Ethic”⁷⁶ mantra, and Christians as second class citizens in the kingdom of God, the following must be said:

Jesus **said of the Jews** the following:

*John, 8:44 **“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is not truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it. - then answered the Jews -- ”***

Jews have always been contrary to all men.

St. John: John 7:1 "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry because the Jews sought to kill him."

St. Justin Martyr stated in 116 A. D. "The Jews were behind all the persecutions of the Christians. They wandered through the country everywhere hating and undermining the Christian faith."

Cicero, Defense Counsel at the Trials of Flaccus: "The Jews belong to a dark and repulsive force. One knows how numerous this clique is, how they stick together and what power they

⁷⁵ Acts 7:43 the Star of Remphan refers to Saturn, to Moloch, “star of David,” and emblems of Masons.

⁷⁶ Judeo-Christian ethic: America was **not** founded on the Judeo-Christian Ethic, it was founded on the Reformation Puritan Ethic. Period! Jews had nothing to do with the founding of America. The term “Judeo-Christian” is a Zionist, Jewish anti-defamation league propaganda term errantly adopted by the Christian community in the twentieth century.

exercise through their unions. They are a nation of rascals and deceivers." (Quoted by Benjamin Freedman, Jesus was not a Jew)

Dio Cassius, Second Century Historian: "The Jews were destroying both Greeks and Romans. They ate the flesh of their victims, made belts for themselves out of their entrails, and daubed themselves with their blood... In all, 220,000 men perished in Cyrene and 240,000 in Cyprus, and for this reason no Jew may set foot in Cyprus today." (Roman History) (Quoted by Benjamin Freedman, Jesus was not a Jew)

Thomas Aquinas: 13th century scholastic philosopher. In his "On the Governance of the Jews," he wrote: "The Jews should not be allowed to keep what they have obtained from others by usury; it were best that they were compelled to work so that they could earn their living instead of doing nothing but becoming avaricious." (Quoted by Benjamin Freedman, Jesus was not a Jew)

W. Hughes: Premier of Australia, Saturday Evening Post, June 19, 1919 "The Montefiores have taken Australia for their own, and there is not a gold field or a sheep run from Tasmania to New South Wales that does not pay them a heavy tribute. They are the real owners of the antipodean continent. What is the good of our being a wealthy nation, if the wealth is all in the hands of German Jews?" (Quoted by Benjamin Freedman, Jesus was not a Jew).

Jews are the cause of most if not all the suffering of the Twentieth Century wherein 180 million people perished. The Jews are the liberal socialists and communists and progressives. They were behind the Bolshevik Revolution and were the direct cause of WWI and WWII. Cabalist Jew Lyndon B. Johnson was hell bent on America's war in Viet Nam after President Kenney ordered the withdrawal of American troops from the region. And, the Jews were behind America's wars in the Persian Gulf.

We must face some hard facts, as this apostasy continues today. Modern day "Jews" control the banking system, the diamond industry, pharmaceuticals, the credit card industry, and much of the department store chains. Hollywood and the media outlets in this country continue to smear Christians and denigrate the gospel. The American Family Association (AFA) did a study in the late eighties wherein they monitored prime time T.V. AFA reported that 85% of Hollywood was run by "Jews." The AFA documented media hostility against Christians that was being pumped through the airways. They observed that only twice in ten years was a Christian pastor every put in a positive light. Actors portraying pastors were more than likely the scum bags of the movie. While not all Jews are culpable, many of them have been engaged in revolution and are responsible for the majority the pain and suffering of the Twentieth Century.

Here in the United States, the Zionists and their co-religionists have complete control of the government. . . and, rule these United States as though they were the absolute monarchs of this country. - Benjamin Freedman, insider in the world of Zionist conspiracy, successful New York

businessman, a convert to Christianity, and a personal acquaintance of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and John F. Kennedy.

Sir Arthur Bryant (1899-1985), a respected historian on the first half of the Twentieth-Century, wrote that although Jews comprised only 1% of the German population in 1924 in the Reichstag, they constituted 25% of the Social Democrats—the democratic force that waged war on German manufacturing. Jews controlled 57% of the metal trade, 22% of grain, and 39% of textiles. More than 50% of the Berlin Chamber of Commerce were Jewish as were a spectacular 1,200 of the 1,474 members of the German Stock Exchange. Of the 29 legitimate theaters in Berlin, 23 had Jewish directors. Authorship was almost a Jewish monopoly. In 1931, of 144 film scripts worked, 119 were written by Jews and 77 produced by them (Silverman)⁷⁷.

Jews are fierce enemies of Christianity and decency. Al Goldstein, Hollywood smut peddler, stated: “The only reason that Jews are in pornography is that we think that Christ sucks. Catholicism sucks. We don't believe in authoritarianism. Pornography thus becomes a way of defiling Christian culture and, as it penetrates to the very heart of the American mainstream...becomes more charged...”⁷⁸

Consider the prejudice in the Talmud.

Sanhedrin 58b

R. Hanina said: If a heathen smites a Jew, he is worthy of death; for it is written, And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian. [Ex. 2:12] R. Hanina also said: He who smites an Israelite on the jaw, is as though he had thus assaulted the Divine Presence; for it is written, one who smiteth man [i.e. an Israelite] attacketh the Holy One.

⁷⁷ Consider what Neil Gabler has to say about the dominance of Jews in America: Look at Hollywood in 1999. Jews totally dominate the film industry. Although most of the films are vulgar, violent trash, the industry falls all over itself giving each other awards for producing such corruption. Propaganda and 'message' films flow out of Hollywood and across TV screens. The news and communications industry is a Jewish kingdom. How many Jewish bylines do you come across? From the NY Times to your local paper, from NPR to radio talk show hosts, **you are being 'informed' by a specific group of people in American society.**

The American financial industry is essentially a Jewish franchise. From the Federal Reserve to banks and mortgage and other financing industries, the ownership is most often Jewish. Since Jews stick together as a group, they pull and shove each other up the ranks of corporations and pull strings ensuring members of their race are given first shot at student openings in the major universities and top jobs throughout the areas of their dominance in every type of business imaginable (Silverman). Today, Jews control vast areas of wealth in America. Estimates range all the way up to 70%. Whatever the figure, it is huge and immensely out of proportion to their 2% of the population in American society. In 1999, the U.S.A. is totally dominated by Jews. (Read 'How The Jews Invented Hollywood' by Neil Gabler: retrieved from Jonathan Silverman, Jewish Dominance of America-Facts are the facts (2011); Rense.com).

⁷⁸ Online, “The Jewish Masters of Porn” (2013).

Tosefta, Aboda Zara, VIII, 5

If a goy killed a goy or a Jew he is responsible, but if a Jew killed a goy he is not responsible.

Libbre David 37

To communicate anything to a Goy about our religious relations would be equal to the killing of all Jews, for if the Goyim knew what we teach about them, they would kill us openly.

Choschen Hamm 388, 15

If it can be proven that someone has given the money of Israelites to the Goyim, a way must be found after prudent consideration to wipe him off the face of the earth.

Another *elusive* example of Jewish ballyhoo can be seen in **the promotion of the phrase: “Judeo-Christian ethic.”** President Eisenhower (A Jew) made the term “Judeo-Christian” household term when he connected it with the Founding Fathers in a 1952 speech:

“all men are endowed by their Creator.” In other words, our form of government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don’t care what it is. With us of course it is the Judeo-Christian concept, but it must be a religion with all men created equal.”

America was founded on the doctrines of Puritan Christianity, not Judaism! Only in modern times, in order to gain superiority, has the term “Judeo”⁷⁹ appeared giving the false impression that somehow America was founded by Jews. Nothing could be further from the truth! America was founded by Pilgrims and European Christians. Those calling themselves “Jews” were afforded asylum due to the grace of Christian leaders . . . but not all Americans felt this way.

“Jews are Asiatics, they are a menace to this country if permitted entrance and should be excluded by this Constitution.” - Ben Franklin

⁷⁹ The present meaning of "Judeo-Christian" was first clearly used in print on July 27, 1939 at the outbreak of WWII, with the phrase "the Judeo-Christian scheme of morals" in the *New English Weekly*—a Jewish dominated city. The term gained popularity particularly in the political sphere from the 1920s and 1930s, promoted by Jewish liberal groups which evolved into the National Conference of Christians and Jews, to fight antisemitism. They did so by expressing a more inclusive idea of the United States of America than the previously dominant rhetoric of the nation as a specifically Christian Protestant country. It was a Jewish propaganda didactic designed to undermine the truth that America was founded by Christians—not Jews. By 1952 President Elect Dwight Eisenhower was speaking of the "Judeo-Christian concept" being the "deeply religious faith" on which "our sense of government...is founded." But, Eisenhower was also a victim of this Jewish propaganda. {Wikipedia}.

"They (the Jews) work more effectively against us, than the enemy's armies. They are a hundred times more dangerous to our liberties and the great cause we are engaged in... It is much to be lamented that each, long ago, has not hunted them down as pest to society and the greatest enemies we have to the happiness of America." - George Washington

Moreover, Christianity did not replace Judaism, nor is Christianity Judaism reformed. Stephen Feldman puts it well when he writes:

"For Christians, the concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition comfortably suggests that Judaism progresses into Christianity—that Judaism is somehow completed in Christianity. The concept of a Judeo-Christian tradition flows from the Christian theology of supersession, whereby the Christian covenant (or Testament) with God supersedes the Jewish one. Christianity, according to this myth, reforms and replaces Judaism. The myth therefore implies, first, that Judaism needs reformation and replacement, and second, that modern Judaism remains merely as a "relic". Most importantly the myth of the Judeo-Christian tradition insidiously obscures the real and significant differences between Judaism and Christianity."

Christians would do well to remember that Jews are members of the synagogue of Satan, not necessarily personal enemies, but enemies of the gospel. It was Jews who accused Jesus of treason . . . of being a tax protester (Luke 23:2). The problem in America is not anti-Semitism by Christians, but anti-Christianity by Jews. Further, there is nothing Semitic about modern day Jews.

Today's Jews are Ashkenazi Gentiles—Jews by faith and ancestry, not by Semitic blood. Even if they were, DNA does not commend a man to God.

As atheists, socialists, capitalists or communists, modern Jews are a race of men bound together by European ancestry. "Anti-Semitism" is the charge raised every time reasonable people criticize their liberal, socialistic, political agenda.

Benjamin Freedman stated,

"The Jews have not changed since the days when Jesus Christ took up a whip and drove 'the money changers out of the Temple.'"

Jews "The USA in 1999 is under that same degree of Jewish domination that Weimar Germany was under in 1929" (Silverman).

Philippians 3:2 Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

1 Thessalonians 2:14-15 Jews . . . who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary (against or opposed or hostile) to all men:

5.5 The Doctrine of Balaam in the United States

Balaam turned hearts away from YHWH by luring the young men into Moab's sex cult. In our day, the doctrines of Balaam are alive and well. Reflect on how the government protects the publication of pornography, Sodomy, and lesbianism. Consider how the State competes with Christ for the devotion of its citizens. The "pledge of allegiance to the United States" and singing of the national anthem have replaced the Lord's Prayer in the classroom.

It is the secular State that ordered prayer and Bible reading and the posting of Ten Commandments be removed from the classroom. It is the secular State that uses "public education" to advance moral relativism. It is the secular State that promotes evolution, feminism, abortion, sodomy, gay marriage, pornography, and steals from the people by encouraging everyone to "pay their fair share." It is the State that ordered churches closed during the Covid-19 "plandemic."

Because the United States embraces multiculturalism and polytheism, it has declared war on God's law order. Such a condition calls for Christians to take up the two-edged sword to rebuke public officials, and use the Holy Scriptures to Christianize the nation. Suffrage of statism only furthers the government's agenda.

5.6 Meaning of the Title, "Son of God"

The title *Son of God* is used 28 times in the Gospels, 10 times in John, 18 times in Acts through Revelation-- a total of 46 times in the New Testament.

The title is uniquely used in John to define a special relationship of Christ to His Heavenly Father. The word *Pater* is used by Jesus of the Father in Matthew 23 times and Mark 4 times, but He speaks of God as His Father 106 times in the Gospel of John. He uses the term "my Father" 24 times in the Fourth Gospel. In the Synoptics, it is used in the latter half of His ministry. John writes his gospel so that men might know that Jesus is the Christ, but more than that: He is the Son of God, the God-man very God of God [John 20:31] (Ladd, 1974, p. 247ff).

The title “*Son*” implies deity: John declares in his prologue that *Logos is Theos* and references His incarnation in verse 14: “*They beheld His glory, the glory of the only Son of God.*” The phrase, *monogenes para patros*, according to the best text is best translated “the only begotten from the Father” Robertson says the “only theos” in the flesh has declared “theos” [John 1:14; 5:27; 9:38] (Robertson, 1932),

The title “*Son*” implies that Jesus is the unique Son of God: The translation “only begotten” in John 1:18 comes from *genos* meaning “kind” or “sort.” John does not employ the term *gennaos*, which means “to beget” or “born” [John 1:18].

Further, John 1:18 is not accurately translated in the KJV. The correct reading using the witness of P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵ is *monogenes theos [God only begotten] or the only begotten God or the only manifested God.*

The idea behind *genos* is that Jesus is of “one class” or “one sort” or “one kind” or “one and only.” He is unique in that He is one in like kind with the Father; i.e., of the same substance. It does not mean that he came into existence at some point in time. As God, the Son has always existed.

Luke discusses the widow’s only son and uses the term *monogenes* to impress upon us her plight. Her one and only natural son had just died [Luke 7:12].

While others may become “sons of God” through adoption [John 1:12, 13], Jesus is the unique Son being of the same substance of His Father—that substance being spirit [pneuma, John 4:24]. The author of Hebrews employs the phrase “impress of the substance of Him” [charaktartas hupostaseos] implying that Jesus is one in substance, or of the same foundation, and made up of the same “stuff” that God is made. But, it does not imply that He is one in personality with the Father.

The Son is the special Object of the Father’s love [John 5:20; 10:17]. His words are the words of God [John 8:26, 28, 40]. His knowledge of God is exclusive and authoritative [John 6:47; Matthew 11:27]. His honor due is that equal to the Father [John 5:21ff]. To hear Jesus, is to hear God; To see Jesus, is to see God; to believe in Jesus, is to believe in God and to disbelieve Jesus is to disbelieve God [John 12: 44-48]. But, Jesus and the Father are maintained throughout Scripture as two distinct Beings made up of the same spirit substance.

As the Son, His mission is to impart life. He has life in Himself and He imparts eternal life to those who believe [John 5:21; 5:26; 3:35], the beginning of a relationship was in the bosom of the Father [John 1:18]; He also came to execute judgment [John 5:22-23] and to redeem men [John 1:29; 10:18; 12:24].

5.7 Jezebels, Tolerance, and Statism

Spiritually, Jezebel introduced the goddess Asherah (feminism) to Israel. This goddess, represented in Canaanite culture by the moon, was the controlling goddess of love and sensuality. Priestess-prostitutes and castrated males filled her shrines and serviced her worshippers. The lure of these erotic encounters was more than the virile men of Israel would resist. Because of Jezebel's programs, myriads of Israelites forsook the disciplines of YHWH for the pleasures of Baal and Asherah. Only 7000 people in the entire nation remained true to YHWH.

Politically, Baalism was a form of statism wherein citizens saw the king (government) as the highest authority in the land. The term "molock" is a Hebrew vowel perversion of "meleck" which means king. Kings in the Levant, as in Egypt, were mediators between the gods. In Thyatira, those who participated in the trade guilds performed religious rites in their celebrations.

Consequently, many Christians were forced to compromise the faith—a species of "spiritual fornication."

It appears many of the saints, in order to avoid losing the jobs, tolerated and participated in the religious rites of the guild sects which led to immorality. Furthermore, the guilds pledged allegiance to Caesar in order to participate in Roman commerce. Thus, the church at Thyatira compromised their pure devotion to Christ. These people were "a geein' when they should have been a hawin';" i.e., they should have risked ruffin' feathers even though they might have been kicked out of the hen house. Their fear of rejection and "losing their stuff" kept them from confronting the idolatry of the guilds.

Jezebel introduced statism into the northern kingdom when she married King Ahab. This religious, political policy of pluralism divided the people making it possible to eradicate the true worship of YHWH in the nation. Baalism prospered under a doctrine of toleration. *Toleration is the doctrine preached when a minority is seeking to gain power over the majority.*

Toleration of diversity is a virtue, but toleration of sin is a vice. "Sin not" Paul commanded. Many today will join a political party for a commercial benefit even though the party promotes fornication, abortion, sodomy, and a host of other evils. Many are more interest in being a BATF approved church than a Christ approved church (1 Corinthians 15:34).

The goal of statist is to control the people, and to control the people you must control the church. When the government forced churches to incorporate with the State, the State replaced Christ as Head of the church.

What is it about Christians that causes them to think they must obtain government permission for everything they do?

When challenged to claim their Biblical freedom to operate free from State control, church leaders melt like wax. Believing they must submit to the government, church leaders will contract with the Devil and compromise the headship of Christ (Colossians 2:19). Rather than stir up dust in the barn, many tolerate corn eatin' rodents in the pews. Fortunately, there are still Christians that refuse to bow the knee to Caesar:

"Mr. Marrs, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is exploring whether Living Truth Ministries has violated its 501(c)3 tax exempt status." . . . The IRS warned us that Christian churches and ministries that identify "threats to Christianity" may be at risk of violating IRS guidelines. We were even told that if anything we publish does not appear reasonable to the IRS we can be punished . . . Please pray with us that the IRS and the enemies of Christ will fail in their blatant attempt to silence the true church of the Living God and our Savior, Jesus Christ (Texe Marrs).

Not only will mushy congregations tolerate flies in the buttermilk, they may reject sermons which dish out whole foods and vegetables. Rather than developing policies to resist the advance of the totalitarian State, churches surrender to ridiculous statutes passed by State agencies. Why? None dare risk offending the government out of fear of losing their tax exempt status. If you can't resist government, then government is your god.

Holding out a golden carrot, these Jezebels offer tax exemptions for government franchises. Consider all the bastard children that came with women's suffrage: individualism, birth control, pornography, fornication, teen pregnancies, abortion, divorce, lesbianism, and women in the military. Whoever this woman was, she enticed the church to compromise its freedom in Christ for commercial gain.

These Christians were very loving but their love had degenerated into soggy mush and a tolerance of error. Putting this in modern imagery, this church seemed to be eating sugar slap cereals for breakfast instead of eating impossible pie. They struggled with truth and the cost they had to pay to follow Christ. They needed whole grains in their diet; calluses on their feet; classes on hard knocks; and, a course on weight lifting to beef up their spiritual muscles.

Questions for modern Christians: Does not the modern church fornicate with the government when it incorporates as a non-profit "organization?" When a church incorporates, does it not surrender the headship of Christ and come under the authority of the IRS—an agency renowned for its lies and theft? Does not the Scripture tell us to "come out from among them (pagan governments), and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing (government privileges); and I will receive you" (1 Corinthians 6:17)? Is not the church to be God's prophet to the nations? When a church begs the federal government for a tax exempt status, does it not

become a non-prophet “organization?” Repentance is in order for the modern day church just like it was for the church at Thyatira.

The evidence below proves that the vast majority of “Christian” congregations in this nation today serve two masters. (<http://www.christiangallery.com/twomasterchurch.htm>, Nov 26, 2002).

In America, we have a right to a separation of church and State, but the church has yielded that right to form an odalisque between State and church.⁸⁰ New churches on the advice of a government-trained attorney turn over their congregations, their finances, and their property to the secular State. The word “attorney” infers these esquires have the power “to turn” over church property to the State? When a church gives up its First Amendment Rights and Biblical obligations to honor the Lord Jesus Christ, it waives its right to freedom of speech, its right to freedom of religion, its right to privacy, its right to address public policy or influence legislation. Could this be the reason the modern church does not have “authority” over the nations?

Those who dare to lead their church under Christ’s authority face a head on collision with the State. John Rushdoony said more preachers lose their pastorate for being faithful to God’s Word than for any other reason. Aristotle said that “tolerance and apathy are the last virtues of a dying society.” . . . or a church for that matter.

5.8 The White Horse in Revelation 6

The interpretation of this figure is greatly disputed and biblical scholars are not in agreement as to its identity. It is the color “white” that gives us trouble. White is a symbol of purity and righteousness (19:8). A crown is a symbol of authority.

Could this be Christ? Our Lord is depicted as riding a white horse in Revelation 19. The problem, however, with the white horse representing Christ is the context. Christ has already come in history and is seen as sitting on the throne as the Lion-lamb. He opened the scroll on the throne not on the back of a horse. Secondly, Christ in chapter 19 is armed with one weapon, the sword of his mouth and not a bow. Furthermore, since the other three horsemen represent an evil upon men, **the context demands we interpret the first horseman as an agent of evil.** War, famine, and death are **not** the result of Christ coming into the world, but the result of evil at work in the hearts of ambitious men.

⁸⁰ Odalisque = concubinage; a female slave in a harem of a powerful master.

Could this be the anti-Christ or false religion? Paralleling this verse with the Olivet Discourse, futurists take the color white and apply it to false messiahs, even an end-time super Antichrist. History has its share of false prophets and false religions. Think of how Islam captured the minds of so many in the Middle East. Indeed, antichrist do come and conquer people. But, to say this is “the Antichrist” appears to be a the sum of Jewish myths and theological imagination.

Though this passage parallels the troubles mentioned in the Olivet Discourse, they do not appear to represent the same period of history because the vision in chapter six ends with the terminal judgment of God on all mankind. The bulk of Matthew 24 refers to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD., not the end of the world. Further, the whole idea of THE antichrist is a modern development within dispensational theology lacking exegetical integrity. Yes, there are antichrists in history (plural), but the concept of a single Antichrist flows out of Baconian compilation of verses rather than an exegesis of a single passage of Scripture. Dispensational futurism is a modern invention, and not a hermeneutic the original readers would have recognized.

Could this be the gospel? Jesus said in Matthew 24, the gospel must go forth into the entire world (24:14). The spread of the gospel is a subject Jesus associated with the traumas in Matthew 24. White is the color of Christ’s horse (19:11). His hair is white (1:14). The stone given to believers is white (2:17). White garments are given to saints (3:4, 5, 18). White is the color of the garments of the elders (4:4). The cloud of Christ is white (14:14). The robes of martyrs are white (6:11). God’s throne is white (20:11). It is, therefore, consistent to see white as something good, not evil. Ladd adopted this view but also recognized the problem with this interpretation saying this horse is dissimilar in kind with the other three horses--beasts that represent evil (p. 96).

Could this be a reference to Parthians?⁸¹ Holding to preterism, Summers and Caird say the first horsemen are Parthian horsemen who wore crown-like helmets. White could refer to white horses on which generals paraded through streets after a military victory. It is easy to visualize this army. However, if this vision spans the ages, interpreting the first horsemen as Parthians seems too specific. Taking a broader perspective, this horse appears to represent military imperialism. This certainly fits the character of this age and would fit nicely into the first century events.

I am compelled to be consistent and believe all the horsemen represent negative forces in history. The idea the first horseman represents military and political forces at work to conquer men under color of law or a cloak of honorable causes in this present evil age appeals to me.

⁸¹ Parthians refer to people occupying what we know as ancient Babylon or modern Iraq and Iran.

Political movements begin when some powerful leader declares war on a problem. Powerful dictators, tyrants, and ambitious politicians do rise to power . . . and they all promote themselves as righteous ones. Even the Pharisees “feigned themselves just men” (Luke 20:20). Henry the Eighth, Queen Mary, Napoleon, Mussolini, Stalin, Hitler, Mao Tse Tung, and Poll Pot, Saddam Hussein, and Kim Jong Il of North Korea are of this ilk.

Movements like “women’s suffrage” sounds good, but they end up killing babies and destroying homes. These movements begin when a political leader throws his or her weight behind a cause and declares war on some vague problem. Marxism, evolution, separation of church and state, social efficiency (John Dewey), Johnson’s Great Society, women’s rights, family planning, Voting Rights Act, Civil Rights Act, the Green New Deal, gun control, equal rights, Bush’s war on terror, equal pay, carbon emissions tax, the Patriot Act, Affordable Care Act, Farm Bill, “pay your fair share,” American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, marketplace fairness, Me-too Movement, Violence Against Women Act, and marriage equality come to mind. All sound noble, but every one of these movements destroy human rights, fairness, and the rule of law.

Whether we are talking about Vikings that raided and pillage the North Sea or Moslems that used the sword to conquer the Middle East, history is characterized by aggressors on a mission of conquest while holding out a righteous objective. Furthermore, entire societies are captured by religious philosophies. Paul warned the Colossians of being taken captive by philosophy; i.e., intellectual movements within history (Colossians 2:8).

The first century had its “isms” vying for supremacy: Gnosticism, Stoicism, Judaism, Asceticism, Epicureanism, Merkaba Mysticism and the like. Reflect on the “isms” in modern times that have conquered so many minds: atheism, humanism, liberalism, feminism, socialism, Marxism, Communism, multiculturalism, statism, legalism, naturalism, pragmatism, antinomianism, Zionism, psychotheism, existentialism, hedonism, and many others. Heads of State, heads of religious orders, and business marketers are all trying to capture the devotion of people.

The color “white” refers to the pretense of righteousness. All political leaders pretend to be righteous and to have the good of the people in mind. Further, all rulers have a crown of de facto authority. Officials use color of law to legitimize and to tighten their control over the people. Statutory enactments give a stamp of legitimacy to every ruler and mask their crimes against humanity. “It’s the law,” they say. It is through the **color of law** and the **use of police force to enforce the new laws** that civil rulers deceive and subjugate whole nations – a practice forbidden by 18 U.S.C. § 241, 242.

Rebuttal to “It’s the Law!” argument:

“In a statist society, the laws are a collection of opinions written down by sociopaths who have managed to either win popularity contests or murder their

competitors and enforced at gunpoint by thugs in costumes. The implication of the phrase “it’s the law” is that this state of affairs is both necessary and proper, rather than inherently illogical and immoral. Also implied is that the law is somehow sacrosanct and immutable, which is clearly false because the aforementioned sociopaths both frequently alter the laws and routinely disregard the laws they make for everyone else” (Tyler Durden).

Once a ruler is able to enact legislation to advance his political agenda, he is able to hide his imperial ambitions behind codes and statutes. Tyrannical policies are advanced behind such slogans as public health and safety. “The government is here to protect you,” announce the propagandists. President Richard Nixon once said, “If the president does it, it is the law!” In March 2020, governors ordered healthy people to self-quarantine in their own home, not go to church, and to not work in the name of public health. Amazingly, the sheeple obeyed.

Doesn’t every politician portray himself as an angel in white acting for the good of the people? And, do not these same politicians vilify their opponents as black devils exploiting the people? A legislative statute provides a white stamp of legitimacy for rulers extending their jurisdiction beyond the limits of law. **White, therefore, appears to represent the appearance of righteousness under the color of law; i.e., propaganda and indoctrination.**

Governments conquer whole civilizations while men are asleep. Through the enactments of legislation, men are deprived of civil liberties; that is, the power brokers do “mischief through law” (Psalm 94:20). We, must, therefore, question every man-made statute and ask if it passes Biblical standards. Dr. Eduardo Rivera, retired attorney, stated, “The first duty of man is not to obey, but to question all authority!”

The way a society is enslaved is by the principle: *Crisis-Reaction-Solution*. Whenever there is natural or political crisis, the people react and cry out for protection. The government then steps in with a solution. “Give up more of your rights, and we will protect you.” Presidents have used this principle for centuries. For this very reason the Lord ordered the church of Sardis to wake up! The thief was coming to capture the people and to take them captive.

In summary, there will be no peace as long as men reject the Prince of Peace. Because men reject Christ as King of the Nations, they will be subjected to frauds and impostors. Powerful politicians, philosophers, and cultic teachers will arise at various times in history to conquer people. **The first horseman represents political conquest**, howbeit through subterfuge or sophistry or color of law or through military might. The spirit of Nimrod is at work capturing minds and hearts. Until the end of the age, Satan continues to show ambition men “the kingdoms of this world” and gives it to them (Matthew 4:8, 9). Whole populations will be subjugated by tyrants that rob men of their rights, property, and freedom. War will crash on the shores of all nations. Famine will bite the heels of civilization, and death will plague the history of man. In the end, God’s wrath and God’s salvation will come.

The good news, however, is that the scroll and its seals are in the hands of the Lion-lamb. He controls history. War and evil are restrained by His hand. All things are working together for good to those who love God. The gospel will prevail. History is marching toward the kingdom of Christ. He must rule until all enemies are under his feet. Court is in session. Warrants are delivered. Men are summoned to give account. Judgments are being issued from the throne. Men will die, but many will come to know Christ and enter His kingdom.

5.9 Souls Under the Altar

Who are these souls? Ironside said they were Jewish brethren. Summers saw them as the martyrs of the Domitian persecution because Antipas is mentioned as a martyr in this book (2:13). But, again, this may be too specific.

I am compelled to think that in the mind of the original readers these are the martyrs of the first century who were accused of crimes against the State; i.e., the apostles. This would be a comfort to the first century Christians and it would answer their questions about the status of martyred leaders. But, in one sense they represent all believers who have suffered at the whims of authoritarian regimes. Ladd agreed saying these souls represent the entire church. The warning of an impending danger to the seven churches is now understood: *Persecution of Christians will continue throughout the age until Christ returns*. Sheep are easy targets for powerful tyrants.

5.10 The Gospel and the Apocalypse

See the following verses on the nature of apocalyptic literature⁸²: Psalm 18:7-13; Daniel 8: 10: Isaiah 13; Ezekiel 32:7, 8; 38:19; Joel 2:31 Hosea 8:10; Isaiah 34:4; Matthew 24:29).

⁸² It should be noted that concerning the “Burden of Babylon” (Isaiah 13) that a literal collapse of the universe did not happen. Babylon was judged but the stars did not fall from the sky. But, light and hope fled from the heart of Babylonians as the powerful forces of the Persian kings crushed the nation.

Isaiah 13:10 For the stars of heaven and the constellations thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shin

Isaiah 34:4 And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.

Jeremiah 4:23 I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light.

Through the gospel, God was shaking up the powers of the Roman Empire, threatening entrenched idolatry, embedded fornication, and a powerful imperialistic spirit. The same is true today.

The gospel confronts false religions, evils of abortion, pornography, corruption, theories of evolution, free sex, dictatorial governments, and humanistic foundations of society. Nations fear Christianity because its message threatens their base of power by teaching there is another king, King Jesus.—a King, by the way, that demands the rulers of the earth surrender to His law-order (Psalm 2:10, 11).

The statement that, “We are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights . . .” means that rights are not gifts of government, but gifts of God that cannot be dissolved by a stroke of the pen. The gospel holds men accountable to God now and announces judgment on unbelievers. When the lightning bolt of the judgment strikes, the Sun will not shine. The moon will not reflect its light. The universe of the sinner will collapse as he faces the awesome presence of a holy God. Some of these judgments occur in time, others occur in eternity (Acts 17: 31; 1 Timothy 5:24; 2 Peter 2:7).

5.11 Who are the 144,000?

Who are the 144,000 servants that are sealed? There is no lack of interpretations on this subject.

The dispensational view holds that these are strictly Jewish believers and the great host represents Gentile Christians—that the 144,000 represent saved Jewish evangelists that will market the gospel during the alleged tribulation period.

The symbolic approach says that the 144,000 represent all Christians, Jew and Gentile, who are sealed for protection. This is the view I hold, and I hold it for the following reasons:

Revelation is a book of symbols and must be interpreted symbolically. A literal hermeneutic in a book of full of symbols is a flawed hermeneutic. It is not surprising that God would use Israel as a symbol of all of God’s people since the church is the true messianic community composed of the spiritually responsive from Israel and the spiritually responsive among the Gentiles.

McDowell (1951) says, “It is difficult to see how the symbolism here can refer to Jews only.” Ladd agrees calling this “apocalyptic language” (1972, p. 111). Summers concurs, “Revelation is written in symbolical language” (1951, p. 146).

Kistemaker (2001) quotes William Milligan, “It is the custom of the Seer to heighten and spiritualize all Jewish names. The temple, the Tabernacle, and the Altar, Mount Zion, and

Jerusalem are to him the embodiments of ideas deeper than those literally conveyed by them” (p. 245).

All the way through Revelation, John uses Hebrew symbols to convey spiritual truth. Gross literalism violates the literary tool used by John to reveal as well as conceal spiritual truth.

Furthermore, in chapter 14, the 144,000 are identified as “those redeemed among men,” “first fruits to God,” which is the church, “the first fruits among His creatures” (James 1:18). The 144,000 are an *ideal depiction* of God’s people during this present age. They are “undefiled,” “pure,” “blameless,” and “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (14:4-5).

The numbers 144,000 and 12,000 do not appear to be literal calculations. Why not write down 11,495 from the tribe of Judah, or 12,241 from the tribe of Asher? If God were seeking to tally the literal sum of those being numbered, He would not round them off to 144,000 or to 12,000. He would use exact calculation as Moses did when tallying the twelve tribes in the Book of Numbers (chapters 1-3). The reason God does not use precise numbers is because the numbers are symbolic and not actual calculations.

The numbers 12,000 from each tribe and the total of 144,000 are ideal numbers. Twelve times 12,000 equals 144,000 which expresses *fullness* and *completeness*. That is, God’s harvest of souls on the earth will be full and complete. They are sealed “to protect them” while upon earth until their work is done and given an “assurance of spiritual safety” says Ladd (1972, p. 112).

The literal view says that John is following Ezekiel’s list of the 12 tribes and the hope of Israel’s conversion and return to the land (Ezekiel 48). However, John does not follow Ezekiel’s eschatological list (Ezekiel 48). John has an irregular list with Dan and Ephraim omitted⁸³. The tribe of Joseph may refer to Ephraim, but it is different from Ezekiel’s list in that it mentions Manasseh and Ephraim.

Those marked are called “servants of God.” Early Christian leaders accepted the title, “servants of God” (Romans 1:1; James 1:1). When we understand the Jewish nature of the early church, it was perfectly appropriate to use Hebrew symbols to symbolize the body of Christ. In John’s mind, there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles in Revelation. “To the eyes of John, the church is one,” says Summers (1951, p. 148).

⁸³ Why is the tribe of Dan missing? One view is that the AntiChrist will come from this tribe. But, this is speculative. Another view is that Dan was the first tribe to accept idolatry to be practiced in Israel. Since one of John’s messages in the Book of Revelation is that believers should be faithful to Christ even unto death, omitting Dan may be John’s way of reinforcing the imperative that Christians must not make an idol out of life, but be willing to lay down their lives for the gospel if called upon to do so.

McDowell, “The one hundred and forty-four thousand represent, it is most reasonable to conclude, God’s elect *upon the earth*” (1951, p. 97).

Quoting Charles, Summers says, “It is not believers descended from the literal Israel . . . but from the spiritual Israel that are here referred to . . .” (1951, p. 148).

Since all Christians are sealed (Ephesians 1:13), the 144,000 could easily symbolize all Christians who have trusted Christ during this age and are alive today; that is, the church militant.

In chapter 14, the 144,000 are said to have “his name” written on their foreheads. Surely, this is not a literal mark. The angel did not leave a physical tattoo on the forehead of his servants anymore than the “beast” places a literal mark on his followers. The “mark” is spiritual fact, which cannot be observed with the human eye, and the number is a spiritual fact, which cannot be counted by human observation. The marking of these servants is symbolic and was designed to encourage living believers that though they go through many trials and tribulations, they are protected by God; that is, they won’t be touched by the wrath of God nor will they experience the second death.

Before the first destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC., the faithful remnant was sealed with a mark known to God (Ezekiel 9:4). The mark was a Hebrew Tav which resembles a “t” or a cross “x”. This sealing assured the faithful that God knows His own and preserves them. Likewise, the sealing of John’s 144,000 assures the reader that God’s people are known and protected during troublesome times.

This list, therefore, must refer to all believers, the true Israel; that is, spiritual Israel (See Romans 2:28ff; Galatians 3:29; 6:16; and Philippians 3:3). Gentiles are grafted into Israel’s olive tree (Romans 11) to share in Messianic salvation. There is only one tree, true Israel, made up of believing Jews and believing Gentiles to form the complete family of God, the new reconstituted Israel. This is the remnant that formed the foundation of the church, the true Israel of God (Ephesians 2:14ff; James 1:1) as opposed to false Jews who are of the “synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9) and those who are “not all Israel (physical Israel), which are of Israel (spiritual Israel)” (Romans 9:6).

“The 144,000 of the first consolatory vision represent not Jewish Christians only but the whole body of believers” (Summers, 1951, p. 150).

Using the twelve tribes to represent the Jewish / Gentile church is perfectly appropriate since it is the Gentiles who have drawn near to Israel’s promises through faith; and, it is Gentiles who are used during the Christian era to “build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down” (Ephesians 2:12-13; Acts 15:16).

The conclusion, therefore, is that John's list of 144,000 is a symbolic representation of true Israel, the complete family of God, the church, who is known and marked by God for special preservation while on earth. These people are on earth where the hurricanes of judgment thrash the nations. *This would encourage the first century Christians that their cause was victorious and that no matter what kind of trials they face, they would be untouched by judgment raining on the Christ-rejecters* (1 Thessalonians 5:9). Rather, God's people are protected from the destruction that spies out the wicked.

Pieters: "The first group (144,000) represents the true believers on earth while they are still subject to the storms of divine judgment that break over the world; while the second group (the great throng) symbolize believers who are already in heaven . . . the two groups, then, are respectively, The church Militant and The church Triumphant" (Quoted by Summers, 1951, p. 147).

5.12 Measuring the Temple and Interpretive Principles

This passage is one of the most difficult texts to interpret in the Bible (Revelation 11). Consider these four possible interpretations:

Radical preterism: Preterists understand this chapter as having to do with early Jewish apocalyptic literature foreseeing Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans. If the early date is correct, preterism is a serious contender for interpretive dominance in this chapter. Preterists see this as the literal temple and this whole passage as a prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem. But, it is difficult to see how the old and dilapidated temple system would have any value or be identified with the two witnesses which are two olives trees and two lampstands.

Dispensationalism: this view sees the restoration of the Jewish temple in Jerusalem as a literal event that will happen at the end of the age in a struggle between Israel and the Antichrist.

Spiritual Jewish Survival: this view understands John to be predicting the preservation of the Jewish people, two prophetic witnesses, and their final salvation.

Symbolic Approach: This view interprets the temple as symbolic of the church, its persecution, and its preservation in a hostile world.

I conclude that this section is not literal but figurative for the following reasons:

(a) The use of the term "holy city" in verse two could not possibly refer to a physical, earthly Jerusalem. Literally, earthly Jerusalem was morally and figuratively corrupt as Sodom and Egypt. This temple in chapter 11 is not defective; and,

- (b) No where do we read in the NT of a restored, renewed Jerusalem or of its temple. The whole idea that prophecy demands the reconstruction of a third temple is a Jewish myth germane to Zionist propaganda. Judaism has its end-time myths and for this reason some Christians have taken a bite out of Zionism and its poisonous fruit (Titus 1:14); and,
- (c) The ripping of the veil marked the end of the OT temple era. The whole idea that early Christians would be interested in the Jewish temple seeing that themselves are the temple of God seems incongruent with the NT message on the glory of the church; and,
- (d) The temple in Paul's writings represent the church (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:20-21). Hebrews informs us that believers have come to Heavenly Jerusalem, of which, earthly Jerusalem was merely a prototype; and,
- (e) Since there is not a temple in the Eternal City, the temple performs a symbolic function in Revelation. Here it symbolizes the true church. And finally,
- (f) if the late date is correct, then the temple in Jerusalem was already destroyed. There was nothing to measure, and there were no people in the temple; if the early date is correct, the early Christians would see themselves as the temple of Christ and would be more interested in the safety of the church of Jesus Christ than they would the preservation of an outdated temple—a structure which most had never seen and had no real significance to them.
- (g) in a book that features mythological images, viewing the temple in chapter 11 as symbolic image of the church makes sense.

5.13 Jerusalem as Sodom and Egypt

Revelation 11:8 And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

The dead bodies of the two witnesses will lie exposed for public consumption and detestation. This announces the world's hostility to the gospel. The goal of "Jews that are not" and god-government is the death of Christ and his representatives. The dead bodies are symbolic of persecution and martyrdom for the cause of Christ. This is God's permissive will and a fact of Christian history—at times and in various parts of the world, Christians suffer martyrdom.

But, where is this city? Futurists see this as literal Jerusalem of the future. But, in John's day carnal Jerusalem was all over the Mediterranean.

"The great city" is not called "the holy city!" "Great" is an adjective. It is called the place where our "Lord was crucified" signifying Jerusalem and its hostility against Christ. However, this city

is **not** geographical and spatial; rather, it is a **spiritual** and **logical**. There are only two cities. There is the holy city and the profane city; the city of God and the city of man; Heavenly Jerusalem and Carnal Jerusalem. In one sense, every Christian lives in Sodom and Egypt during his pilgrimage here on earth. Rome, New York, Los Angeles, Jerusalem, Hong Kong, London are the habitation of abortionists and Sodomites. All are governed by pagans and all enslave men. To resist these godless authorities is to invite hostilities into our lives . . . but, resistance to tyranny is service to God.

John uses the term “this city” six times in Revelation. John’s readers would instinctively understand “this city” as Rome. Rome was the place where Peter and Paul were crucified. Rome and Jerusalem are a type of “the world” (1 John 2:15, 16). Both are like Egypt (worldly) and like Sodom (immoral and perverse). Worldly Jerusalem and worldly Rome were guided by the same spirit.

Revelation shows the church as a martyr church. It is the souls under the altar (representing the church) who were "slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained" (6:9). This is precisely what happens to the two witnesses—they are martyred for their witness to Christ as King of the nations (11:7). Rome martyred many Christians. Because of the character of Rome’s government, the witnesses (the church) were not to be intimidated. Like their Lord, many would die under the brute force of State powers. But, in so doing they were bearing witness to a higher authority and to the ultimate Tribunal in the ultimate City.

To narrow this city to a particular street in a particular metropolis would be a *reducto absurdum* says Caird. Rome depicts the character of all worldly governments that are powerful and corrupt. Rome was not just a city but representative of controlling governments originating with the Tower of Babel. “It was” represents Ancient Babylon; “it is” represents Rome in John’s day; and, “it will be” represents controlling governments future to John’s day.

5.14 The Beast that Was and Is Not

Revelation 17:11 And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

The Beast that was and is not: John said the Beast did not exist in the present. Twice he says the Beast will exist in the future. He was, but is not, and he will be again. This beast has seven heads. One head was wounded unto death and was then healed. Now he adds a new fact: He will be an eighth that belongs to the seventh. Possibly, the link between the 7th and the 8th king is a father-son relationship such as Vespasian and Titus.

A great deal of effort is expended by futurists to link the eighth beast with the visions and little horn in Daniel. Ladd says the solution is in identifying the eighth king as the antichrist. The beast is identified with two heads more than the five. Ladd draws upon Daniel identifying Antiochus Epiphanies as one of the two heads that was, and the second head will come out of the abyss as the Antichrist to come. But, this gets into futuristic schemes and presumptive eschatology out of character with the purpose of the book to the seven churches. When it comes to interpretation, it is a sound principle to reflect on the question: “What did the text mean to the first-century readers?”

The eighth⁸⁴ is part of the seven because he comes from the seven, but he is different than the seven. It belongs to the seven because it succeeds them in world dominion, but it is different because it ascends out of the abyss as the full embodiment of the Beast. Poythress says the eighth is the Beast, a power analogous to that of the seven. The five who are fallen are an indefinite number of previous emperors. However, since John is unmistakably referring to Rome, an interpretation relevant to the first century is preferred. Nero, as the Beastly ruler fits nicely with the facts of history but not so easily with the numbers presented in this section. It is difficult to be dogmatic on any view until we have more light.

John says, “The other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space.” As the Roman Civil Wars broke out in rebellion against Nero, Nero committed suicide on June 8, 68 AD. John informs us that the seventh king was “not yet come.” That could be Galba, who assumed power upon Nero’s death in June, AD. 68. But he was only to continue a “short space.” His reign lasted only six months — until January 15, AD. 69. He was one in a line of quick succession of emperors in the famous era called by historians “the year of the four emperors.”

5.15 The Beast and the United States

Babylon represents the worldly political systems and the anti-God forces united against God. To John, Babylon was Rome. To us, Babylon represents the systems of evil that works through democratic States to hinder the gospel. It could be Berlin, London, Brussels, Beijing, the Vatican, or Paris. Closer to home, Babylon is the city-state, Washington D.C., and the International New World order with all its commerce, moral compromise, and social programs.

The United States, Inc. is the bastard child of the European Roman Empire which shares much in common with ancient democratic, pluralistic Rome.

⁸⁴ Summers (1951) saw the eighth king as a Roman Caesar who would act like Nero, a sort of reincarnation of the evil emperor. He identified the 8th king as Domitian.

Today's politicians confuse freedom with democracy. According to Madison. "Democracy was the right of the majority to choose its own tyrants." How many references are there to "democracy" in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution? Zero! The Founders handed Americans a foreign policy of free trade and neutrality. Avoid "entangling alliances," advised George Washington. Do not go abroad "in search of monsters to destroy," warned John Quincy Adams. James Madison predicted, "If Tyranny and Oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy."

As countries in the ancient world courted the favors of Rome, modern States seem fixated on prostituting themselves with the nation's capital. Washington D.C., like Rome, appears impossible to resist. But, this government in its present godless form will experience the same fate as ancient Rome. In the end, the nations will hate her and rejoice at her downfall.

It simply isn't God's will that all secular, humanistic governments inhabited by the spirit of Babylon succeed. Only a government built on the solid rock will endure the tests of time.

5.16 Away in the Spirit into the Wilderness

Revelation 17:3 So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

Watchman Nee said, "Separation to God, separation from the world, is the first principle of Christian living.

You have heard it said, "It's too close for comfort," but its also true you can be so close to sin you cannot see it.

Those in love with Rome were blind to its faults. Only when John was separate from the chatter of the marketplace, could he see the crimes of Rome. Fiction triumphed over facts. People were so slapped around by lies they couldn't appreciate the kiss of truth. "If you tell *a lie big enough* and keep *repeating* it, people will eventually come to believe it." When we live with ugly, we can't see pretty. Making people cry is a whole lot easier than making people smile. Sometimes sin is so common around us, we no longer recognize sin in us. This was Rome. Life was cheap. Man's inhumanity to man was so common, Romans thought it was normal to treat men as commodities in the marketplace. And, it was into this scarlet red world "laden with iniquity" that John pointed men to the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ.

5.17 Notes on the Dirge of Babylon

Rome had her wings clipped in the 4th century, but she never really died. Mystery Babylon morphs its way through history and the same spirit that ruled military city-state found a home in the city of London, Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Stockholm, Rome, and Washington D.C. today. The Whore rides the Beast and she will seduce the nations until the end. Her judgment has come and will come. There is a “now, and not-yet” of prophecy.

Without Christ, all humanistic systems will fail. It is God’s will that every government that builds its house out of the straw of humanism instead of the bricks of divine law be destroyed just like Mystery Babylon. Just as it was God’s will for Rome to die, it is the will of God that all humanistic systems suffer defeat. Without Christ communism, capitalism, socialism, and democracy will eventually disintegrate.

18:1-2

If Rome existed as an economic system full of devils, then the Mediterranean was the Devil’s chessboard. Babylon was the source of the mystery religions that existed in the first century world where men worshipped *the sun, moon, stars and planets*. The spirit that birthed the occult in Babylon moved to Rome and infected the nations under her spell. The harlot city became the lair of demons. The unclean birds (vultures and eagles) are scavengers that feed upon the carcass of Rome and could be symbols of the occult. The carrions are messengers of death which nest on the cold stones of the mausoleums of fallen empires. They are symbols of the demonic, cultic, and uncleanness of Roman Babylon as well as her destruction. No longer will Babylon, the haunt of devils, be the mistress of the nations. The madam of whores was destined to die of venereal disease.

The language is similar to OT. prophetic literature (Isaiah 13:Isaiah19-22; 34:11-15; Jeremiah 50:39; 51:37; Zephaniah 2:15).

This is similar to the economic crash in March / April 2020 due to the Coronavirus panic. Consider these headlines: “There will be no easy cure for a recession triggered by the coronavirus” (March 9, 2020); “15 years of risk: from economic collapse to planetary devastation:” (March 15, 2020); “The Worst Economic Collapse in History is Starting Now,” (March 16, 2020); ““The Coronavirus Economic Crash Is Worse than 2008” March 18, 2020); ““Unrecognizable’: Experts warn of historic collapse in economic activity” (March 22, 2020).

State governors ordered churches to shut down, and the absence of calls for repentance was deafening.

18:3

Wine is used to seduce, to break down inhibitions.

Fornication serves as a totem for commerce. Rome lured the nations into her commercial contracts by seduction. Her allurements were wealth, luxury, and military protection. She prostituted everything for commercial gain, and the nations became inebriated by her charms. Because a contract with Rome required the adoption of policies that promoted trespass against God's law-word, the nations became materially rich but spiritually poor.

Merchants don't care about principle. They will do business with anyone as long as they make a profit. Rome's franchises were not offered by a benevolent government, but from proconsuls that snagged their customers out of the lure for wealth. Like the cat "left holding the bag," the contracts benefited insouciant Rome and the provinces managed all the liabilities. Isolated and alone, taxed and impoverished, the provinces hated the city.

This system did not tolerate dissenters. To broaden its economic potential, Rome had to include everyone. Rome practiced inclusion of all races regardless of their religion and sought to unify the different ethnic groups around statism.⁸⁵ Pluralism ruled the day. That "diversity is a strength" was the mantra of the day.

Romans believed diversity is a strength to embrace rather a weakness to overcome. Christians, who believed the authority of King Jesus were a stumbling block in the way of one world government (Acts 17:6-7; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15).

When people surrender their God-given rights (income) for some government privilege in order to gain a benefit from a statist regime for the sake of financial gain, they commit fornication. The only legitimate purpose of government is to protect the health and wealth of its citizens (Declaration of Independence). A government that plunders its people through fraud in the name of taxation for distribution and entitlement programs that create people dependent on the State makes itself an enemy of Christ.

Moreover, do not churches commit fornication with the Beast when they apply to be a "tax exempt" organization with a status as a government "approved" corporation?

18:4

Babylon built her system on the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. It built a city around man. It follows the principle; "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." Just as Lot fled Sodom, and the children of Israel fled the economic oppression by Pharaoh in Egypt, and the believing church fled Jerusalem in 68 AD., God ordered the churches of Asia

⁸⁵ See Note on Statism in Revelation 13:4.

Minor to get out of Babylon! God's people must live separated lives and become true followers of the Lamb. Recognize that major media outlets are propaganda machines that recruit worshipers of the great whore.

“Come out of her” is another way of expressing these Biblical injunctions:

Romans 12:2 “Do not be conformed to this world.”

2 Corinthians 6:14 “What fellowship has light with darkness?”

2 Corinthians 6:17 “Come out from their midst and be separate.”

Colossians 2:8-10 “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy . . .”

Colossians 2:19 “And not holding the Head . . .”

Philippians 3:20 “Our citizenship is in heaven . . .”

Hebrews 11:13 “Confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on earth.”

James 4:4 “Friendship with the world is enmity with God.”

1 John 2:15 “Love not the world.”

What does Rome control? It controls what it creates. What it created was government sanctioned corporations. Incorporation in any system creates slaves of the State. In Rome's case, she charged her corporations for the benefits of Rome's protection through a system of taxation. Incorporation led to a snare and a shift of wealth from the provinces to Rome.

There is a warning here for God's people. Churches must resist the temptation to incorporate with the State which compromises the headship of Christ. Believers must claim their heavenly citizenship and confess their heavenly domicile. They were not residents of Rome, but pilgrims and strangers on this earth (1 Peter 2:11).

God is warning Christians in every age to “not put their trust in princes,” which by the way is the center verse in the center of the KJV Bible. It is God's will that Christians live free of adhesion contracts and the controlling nature of government (Psalm 118:9). Christians must not only confront the immorality of this age, but resist being entangled with the Babylonian economic system, its oppressive tribute, and its ravenous lust for wealth and power.

States tend to lure the church into slavery through the enticements of privileges and benefits.

Alan Keyes, a candidate for the Republican 2000 presidential nomination, argues that the income tax is a slave tax and that Americans are slaves. He is correct.

A slave is a person who does not own his own labor. After tax, successful Americans retain no more of the income they produce than 19th century slaves — and considerably less than medieval serfs (Craig Roberts: Capitalism Magazine, January 2, 2001). In 2020, when governors ordered all non-essential businesses and churches to close, the American sheeple locked themselves out of God’s green pastures.

Unwittingly, America has returned to its pre-American Revolution, feudal roots whereby all land is held by a sovereign and the common people had no rights to hold allodial title to property. Once again, the American people find that they are the tenants and sharecroppers renting their own property from the county tax assessor for the State under the control of the Federal Reserve Bank. We the People have exchanged one master for another (Rep. James Traficant, Jr. (Ohio), United States Congressional Record, March 17, 1993, Vol.33, page H-1303).

18:5

Believers are exhorted to flee because of the coming doom. Remember Lot’s wife? God destroyed her in the destruction of Sodom because she would not separate herself from wickedness within the city.

Likewise, the Christians of John’s day were forewarned about trusting the fickle policies of Rome. They were called to work for a living, but they were prohibited from contracting with Rome for commercial gain. Christians would do well to avoid any all contracts with government and the benefits offered.

18:6

The Babylonian agenda is a one world government united around man’s potential. Because the world cannot tolerate one true faith, it rejects the exclusive message of the gospel that Jesus is the “way, the truth, and the life . . . “ (John 14:6). The world can tolerate “many ways” to God, but it cannot tolerate “one way” to God (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5). It never seems to mention there are many ways to hell. Relativism in Babylon is an enemy of absolute truth. Christians who fail to leave modern Babylon will suffer a much worse fate than those who make friends with the compromising system.

Thomas Jefferson said, “Resisting tyranny is service to God.” If Jesus is Lord, total obedience to the State is neither possible nor desirable. There are times when disobedience to the State is obedience to God and obedience to the State is disobedience to the Savior; that is, Christians need to forsake their fawning compliance to the rule of man and courageously surrender to the rule of God.

18:7

Babylon seduced the nations into thinking they can live without God, but that they cannot live without her; that they can live without God, but not without government. Some note that *the difference between a public official and God is that God knows he is not a public official*. This hooker sees herself as eternal and her luxury as a permanent achievement.

The Christian is not only to live a separated life, but **a salty life!**

The aorist verb tells the church she is to make furious haste to rain fire and thunder on the fortress of this political titan. While the Christian is called to be at peace with all men, he knows there is no peace without the Prince of Peace (1 Peter 3:11). He is called to resist injustice in civil rulers and confront the duplicity of kings. As a prophet, the Christian is not only called to announce mercy in his message, he is called to proclaim righteousness in the gospel. “And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire” (Jude 1:23).

An application: The danger for God’s people is that they might be tempted to incorporate with Babylon. The question for churchmen is how Christians should be in the world but not of the world? Look how the American church lost its “snap, crackle, and pop” as a fiery prophet by becoming a non-profitable government organization? It appears too many pastors are taking courses on the “Virtues of a Rubber Spine” instead of taking courses on “Aerial Pulpit Bombardment” from God’s Command and Control Center.

18:9-10

The greatness of the system is acknowledged. But what amazes the onlookers is how fast this city crumbled. Instead of falling in a day, Babylon fell in one hour as if hit by a huge tsunami.

This is much worse than what happened in the United States in the 1930s, in 2008, or 2020 when the stock market lost half its value. In order to try to save the bankrupt system, Congress agreed to “expand the money supply” and pump trillions of dollars into the corpse to prevent its heart from stopping. Let us never forget how vulnerable our electronic credit/debit “money” system has become. Like all fiat currencies, the credit system is doomed to self-destruct. We just don’t know when or how.

18:11-13

Merchants mourn. Positive cash flows disappeared. Corporations lost millions and bankruptcy haunted investors. Deflation, stagflation, and inflation sucked value out of every denarius.

Merchant corporations deserve this judgment because they compromise righteousness for the sake of commercial gain. As a way of example, consider how advertisers are the first to accept Sodomy, lesbianism, feminism, and transvestitism in an effort to create new customers for a boost in sales. If murder was in fashion, merchants would promote assassination if they thought

it would broaden their customer base. Revival never starts among traders because their interests are earthly, not heavenly.

“In the United States today we have in effect two governments ... We have the duly constituted Government... Then we have an independent, uncontrolled and uncoordinated government in the Federal Reserve System, operating the money powers which are reserved to Congress by the Constitution.” - Congressman Wright Patman, Chairman, House Banking Committee.

"The art of taxation consists in so plucking the goose as to obtain the largest possible amount of feathers with the smallest possible amount of hissing" (Jean B. Colbert).

If God created man, and man created government, and government created corporations, we have to ask why banking corporations feel compelled to control government, man, and religion?

Souls of men: Some countries in the world market ten to twelve year old girls in the enterprise of prostitution. When did children become commodities to be bought and sold like cattle? In America, the international bankers have made sharecroppers out of everyone. The government has perfected human trafficking by capturing our labor and person under color of law as sureties for the national debt.

18:20

The background for this call to rejoice is based on a fundamental issue: Should civilization be built on God or on man? Should men be State centered or Christ centered? Should the State be ruled by legislative statutes, or the law of the LORD God?

Every government system built on man-made utopian principles multiplies grief in society. Where ever you find the doctrines of Mystery Babylon, big government, communism, equality, the promotion of same-sex marriage, abortion, the mantra of equality, wealth distribution, debt, deception, propaganda, and heavy taxation you will find human misery. And, this is always the case where the Great Whore rules the people.

Francis Bacon recognized “the lord’s reign over us,” but conceded that the government of God over the world is hidden.” Moreover, the government of souls is also hidden. Bacon thought this principle was a good model for earthly governments. “Obscure and invisible” was how Bacon thought government worked best, but not unaccountable to the people which it ruled over. King James I agreed, but twisted the observation to his own personal ends. In 1624, instead of the king being accountable to his subjects, he instructed that none shall “meddle with anything concerning our Government, or deep Matters of State” (Works of Francis Bacon (1605); referenced by Greg Grandin, “What is the Deep State,” 2/2017).

What joy it brings to the righteous to see overreaching governments chained down by their own constitutions. The abolishment of the slave trade, child labor systems, communist oppression,

sweat shops, pornography rings, drug cartels, and abortion factories bring joy to God's people. Further, isn't a nation more secure when the righteous govern?

"When the wicked rise to power, people go into hiding; but when the wicked perish, the righteous thrive" (Proverbs 28:28 NIV).

"Providence has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty as well as the privilege and interest of our Christian Nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers" (John Jay).

18:23-24

A government that defrauds its people through taxation to enrich itself, and a government that fails to protect innocent life will not survive. Perhaps, the policy of abortion sustained by the spirit of Mystery Babylon is the greatest tragedy of our time. We, too, have become a culture of death.

Mystery Babylon practiced sorcery; that is, the art of deception. Modern banking that creates digital currency and calls it a loan is of this ilk. The whole digital monetary system produced by the Federal Reserve is built on fraud.

Let us remember that statism, the belief that the State is the ultimate authority on earth, is an enemy of Christ. The State competes with true religion for the devotion of its people. In the Bible, God placed a 10% tithe on Israel, but the modern State not only feels it is more important than God, it believes it is worth more than God because it levies over a 50% tax on the labor of its people. Such arrogance and theft under color of law demands judgment.

19:1

All governments are invisible and obscure said Francis Bacon including the government of God and the government of the soul. The Book of Revelation is called "the Apocalypse," which means "the uncovering." In the Apocalypse, the veil is pulled back so that we can gain insight into the fact that the scroll of history is held in the palm of nail pierced hands (chapter 5).

Because the destruction of Mystery Babylon unveils the judicial attributes of God, the demise of this city deserves study. The heavenly chorus informs us that salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God.

Salvation: The salvation mentioned here is more than triumph over the Beast or that of the redemption of the saints. It includes the whole salvic plan of God.

Glory: The heavens declare the glory of God in nature, but His glory as King of the nations is more concealed and mysterious. The choir saw in this dispensation of judgment a manifestation of the glory of God. The glory of God is the sum total of His attributes. The One Who was

despised on earth as a man, now receives glory as Judge. The One who laid aside His glory to endure the cross and to despise its shame is the glorified Son at the right hand of the Father Who exercised the powers of His office to the shame of Babylon.

Anyone who has spent much time in the courtroom understands that courts are not about justice but about winning. Man's justice can be ugly and cruel. Seldom does the Plaintiff and the Defendant feel like justice was served. But, in the judgment of the Mystery Babylon, the law was upheld and Rome met her just fate. In the destruction of Mystery Babylon, we see the glorious manifestation of His truth, law, justice, and righteousness.

Honor: Man has mocked and blasphemed God's delayed judgment. On earth Herod's soldiers "set him at nought (nothing)" (Luke 23:11). At His ascension the angels escorted Him to sit down at the right hand of the Father. On earth our Lord experienced the shame of the cross as a condemned criminal. In heaven our Lord receives honor from the cross as the Savior of the world. On earth, He was the Lamb; in heaven He is the Lion King. On earth he injured no man; but from heaven he crushed rebel Rome. On earth men declared Him unworthy to receive honor, but this heavenly choir burst into song proclaiming Him worthy to receive honor, and glory, and power.

Power: World leaders have proved again and again that they are unable to handle power. Because only God is good and wise, power belongs in His hands. Only our Lord is able to handle power and use it for good. He may restrain his engines of justice for a greater good, but delayed justice does not mean no justice. In the condemning the great whore, the heavenly hosts saw the restraint of God break into perfect justice, and for this reason they inform us that only God can be trusted with absolute power.

19:2

True and righteous are your judgments: Where lawyers have mastered the art of sophistry, truth is a commodity in today's courtroom. Because the Lord knows the truth about all things and is deceived about nothing, His just sentence on the Whore is worthy of praise.

The great prostitute was not tried by flawed judges prone to cruelty or compassion, but by the Lord perfect in holiness. Nor was this Fornicator tried by State statutes, Congressional codes, or man's permissive, vice-protecting regulations. The Whore stood naked before the Ten Commandments and was measured in the scales of God's law. Subsequently, the heavenly chorale burst into praise. At last, for once, the accused was held accountable for her "fornication" and the "blood of His servants."

19:5

In order for a man to be good, he must hate evil. Good men love what God loves; hate what God hates; and rejoice in what brings joy to the heart of God. Judgment becomes a cause of rejoicing as it reflects the righteousness of the Lord.

Christians should love their fellow countrymen, but this does not mean they have to love evil working in and through the State. Statists view government as a god that should be obeyed. They believe ultimate devotion should be to the State – that the love of God and country are synonymous. Where such is the case, it is difficult to “Praise our God” when He humbles their nation. When believers court fictions they will end up with factions. God calls men and women to join heaven’s choir and rejoice in the defeat of the prostitute.

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