

Fire Eyes

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Introduction

The subject of prophecy has been the endeavor of liars, lunatics and the true lovers of God since it first began to be spoken and recorded. For the liars, it has been a tool for deception and self-interest. For the lunatics, it is ultimately a tool of pathetic discredit and nonsense. For those who sincerely love and seek to understand God's Word, it serves to guide, instruct and encourage.

The principles to understanding prophecy are not complicated, nor are they restricted, as some assert, to scholarly mediators, mysteries or magi. God has always been willing to give the necessary wisdom for 'hearing' the message He conveys in His Word to those who seek Him with all their hearts. Highlighted below are seven of them:

Principle One – let the Word of God interpret itself. Like a marvelous tapestry, the scriptures are integrated and complete. Careful study of the whole Bible reveals a consistent revelation throughout. God's Word is perfectly inspired, translations are not.

Principle Two – God's key focus in prophecy is Israel – the nation, the people, the capital and especially, the Savior. Of course, there are prophecies concerning other people and nations but only because of their relation to Israel.

Principle Three – God is consistent with His Word. Key imagery does not mean something in one prophecy and something else in another.

Principle Four – pay special attention to the first mention in the Bible of important words, phrases and/or imagery for significance and broader understanding. Compare them with other scriptures for confirmation or correction of your impressions.

Principle Five – be aware of the subtle tendency toward the erroneous influence of substitutionalism. Misguided teachers of scripture all the way back to the third and fourth centuries have claimed that the promises of God to Israel became those of the church since the Jews rejected Christ. Not so. That teaching is heretical and demeaning of God. Nevertheless, the overt and sometimes subtle tendency of most 'gentile' believers is to interpret prophecy, to varying degrees, in that mindset.

Principle Six – there's no 'fluff' or 'filler' in the Bible. Every word is included for a purpose. Again, you should not put faith in the myriad translations so much as the original languages. Of course, this means study and discernment of intent.

Principle Seven -- there are no contradictions in scripture though some who are misguided by translations or assumptions of context would claim the contrary. No faithful instruction on prophecy will contradict the scripture or lead to 'new scripture'.

Fire Eyes deals with the Revelation of Jesus Christ – chapter by chapter, verse by verse. Each of these verses, as well as others, are *italicized* in the following text. May you be blessed and encouraged as you read.

Our Lord in Glory

Revelation 1

Since it was first revealed, this book has brought tremendous encouragement and controversy. It speaks of the indescribable majesty of our risen Lord and the utter depravity of a Christ-rejecting hellish world. In its message, we'll see God Almighty upon His throne and the debauched Satan sitting in rebellion upon his. We'll be told of the course of events during the age in which the church faithfully spread the Word and when she failed by corrupting its message. We'll see that there have been those in the church who were true, and sadly, those who were twisted; those who hungered for God and those who craved the rewards of the god of this world, the devil.

The book of the Revelation, however, is primarily focused beyond that age and upon two theaters of action – those we call heaven and earth – which explode with the most amazing, beautiful, terrifying and catastrophic activities during the up coming and final days of the creation as we know it.

Intuitively, we've always recognized this and consequently, reacted or 'interpreted' the Revelation based upon our personal expectations, hopes and desires concerning that end. Rather than looking to the entirety of the Bible for its own interpretation of the amazing story herein, men have sometimes butchered the book and based their teaching of it on fantasy or self interest. Others have 'played it safe' so to speak and simply cited scholars from earlier times whose language is flowery and full of praise but still leaves us guessing.

And so, it remains somewhat mysterious to the overwhelming majority of us, but it should not. I won't attempt to explain the myriad opinions that surround parts of this book – time would fail me. Neither do I consider what I'll offer to you for your prayerful consideration as any kind of 'final word'. Rather, I encourage you to read with as much objectivity as you can and then search the scriptures to "see if these things be so".

If you're reading this, it's likely that you already sense or truly believe that we are living in the final hour of the age preceding Christ's return. You know the days are short and that the consequences of being unaware of the times is dire to say the least. On the other hand, the blossoming blessing of anticipating, as a believer, the return of our King is what the scripture says actually hastens His coming. I hope you'll find the 'fullest bloom' of that joy herein even if it's in the midst of tribulation.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw. The Revelation is the great ‘taking the lid off’. It is the disclosure of Jesus Christ. But it came straight from the Father, God Almighty, who gave it to Jesus to show His servants. It is not intended for His enemies or those who in ignorance consider themselves ‘neutral’.

Although the span of earthly time this book covers is lengthy from our perspective, its beginning is even at the time of its delivery and thus the phrase, “shortly take place”. To “signify” is to “mark” or show, and we will indeed see that this was a true ‘audio-visual’ experience for the apostle John (not to mention, spiritually overwhelming!) As a result, he bore witness to three things – what God said, what Jesus Christ personally exhibited and all the visions he saw.

Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near. With 66 books in our Bible, this is the only one that promises a blessing to those who ‘digest’ it. The requirement is not that you simply scan its contents or peruse it in a scholarly fashion. You can’t simply flip through its pages, neither can you just tear through it with your Greek lexicon and expect the blessing (though lexicons are important). You must read, hear and keep. That is, you must “know again”, understand, and “prevent escape”.

There’s a sense in which reading itself is knowing something again, perhaps a confirmation of something you already ‘knew’ deep within your heart. It also implies the value of reading the text over and over. Understanding is more than knowing; it’s when the ‘light goes on’ – the great “Ah-ha!” And keeping is critical, for everything in this sin-filled world works to take away that “Ah-ha!” and replace it with a “Ho-hum.” You must prevent the escape of that understanding into the abyss of apathy.

But you won’t do that if you figure the time is far away, will you? Fortunately, for every sincere believer, the time is indeed near and always has been. That’s because you are not rooted in this world. God’s servants know their home is in His presence and it is only a heartbeat away.

John, to the seven churches which are in Asia: John’s ministry was far greater than these seven literal congregations and in no other epistle do we find an address to multiple specified churches in this manner. It is not clear that John even ministered personally to all seven. So why address this missive to these seven and deal with them individually in the next two

chapters? Why not an individual letter to each as virtually all the other epistles do or a general letter as with James or Jude or John's other missives?

Apart from this distinctive, we'll see that the Revelation is different from every other letter of the New Testament in another way. As we have already read, this is the only 'epistle' which records its divine origin – it says for itself that it came specifically from Father God and Jesus Christ. A fine point, I know, but it is not directed by John to an audience all of whom he had ministered to; nor is it addressed to the general assembly of the believers everywhere. Significantly, it is directed specifically by Jesus as an important part of His Revelation.

Therefore, to interpret it as being only a literal message to those historical congregations is missing the point. The audience itself is a revelation.

Grace to you and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,... Here is the greeting from Father God and the Holy Spirit. Yes, it says seven Spirits. This may be the seven-fold spirit that is described in Isa 11:2, but I'm much more inclined to believe just what it says which indicates that the Holy Spirit is seven and yet we know from other scriptures that He's one. After all, the trinity itself is three in one. This also aligns with the next two chapters in which the Spirit or one expression of the Spirit speaks to each of the seven churches.

... and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. Here is the greeting from Jesus -- past, present and future. "Faithful witness" speaks of His perfect life and ministry to Israel. "Firstborn from the dead" is clearly His resurrection and status in heaven until His return. "Ruler over the kings of the earth" is equally "Ruler over the leaders of Israel". Here's where we must introduce a principle of prophetic understanding and theological truth in general.

In the writings of some of the early church fathers was a heretical doctrine that spread to influence church teaching for nearly 1700 years. It is called substitutionalism – a big word for a simple but very erroneous concept. It simply was the notion that after Christ's death and resurrection, God was through with the Jews. It is true that God brought judgment to the people of Israel for rejecting His Son. And it is true that the primary witness to the world after that point has been the mostly gentile church.

But it is heresy to teach that God's promises, His stated commitments prophetically to His chosen people have ended or even altered. That makes God a 'flake', a precocious deity and short sighted. It positions Him as scrambling to somehow make things right when we fail –

managing the cosmos by putting out fires so to speak. It's an insult to His omniscience and character.

Nevertheless, throughout the church age, this travesty of evil, a self-serving Narcissistic view, has permeated so much theological understanding that even when it is acknowledged as wrong, it still slithers its way into our teaching from time to time.

Having said that, let me forewarn you that a LOT of what we'll study in the Revelation, though it can often be appropriated or appreciated by the church, is only understood in the context of keeping Israel as the focal point of its prophecy.

OK, in many other portions of prophetic scripture, "the earth" refers to the land of Israel. The word "world" on the other hand refers to the whole world and often implies the gentile nations (as does the sea). As the church has been far and away comprised of gentiles, we have lost a handle on prophetic types or imagery like this, partly due to this substitutionalism.

To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Isn't it just amazing that Christ would do this for slobs and losers like you and me?? He loved us, lavished us and laid on us the last thing we ever deserved – a royal and holy relationship with Father God.

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. When Jesus literally ascended into the clouds of heaven after His resurrection, an angel present told the disciples that He would return in like manner. And when He comes, everyone will see Him. It won't be done secretly or in some remote location hidden from view. It will not only be in plain view, but it will be like lightning crashing from one end of the sky to the other.

Who was it that pierced Him? It was the Romans who were ruling over the land of Israel at the time, and vicariously, it was the Jews who insisted on his execution by way of crucifixion. Indeed, "tribes of the earth" again speaks of the tribes of Israel for we read in Zechariah 12:10 *And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.*

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End," says the Lord, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." With John's epistle-like intro you may have lost track

of the true Source of this message, so God makes it crystal clear. It's almost like He's looking over John's shoulder watching him write.

I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Many of the people for whom this message is given were or will be in great trial. Most of the people of that part of the Roman Empire in John's day would have been aware of the conditions on Patmos. There's really nothing like it in our modern penal systems. Even the Russian gulags were tame by comparison.

They had tried to poison John, but he didn't die. Then they had tried to boil him in oil and he still didn't expire. If you're a Caesar of Rome, what do you do?? The guy won't die and it's embarrassing. So, you put him on a rock in the middle of the Aegean Sea with a bunch of your worst criminals and torturous conditions. Surely, you can shut him up there.

Patmos was the Alcatraz of the Roman Empire. Thus, John starts this letter with a word of empathy for all who suffer for the cause of Christ.

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea." Everything up to this point was penned as an introduction by John post facto, after he received the Revelation. But now it begins. Evidently, John was meditating in prayer and/or worship when he heard the voice of a trumpet giving him the heads up on Who was speaking to him, then came the directive to scribe everything he saw and to send it to the seven specific churches.

The Lord spoke through Isaiah, *Cry aloud, spare not; lift up your voice like a trumpet; tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.* (Isa 58:1) In parts of this book, the Lord will be doing the same thing. As for the voice coming from behind him, we are reminded of another word given to Isaiah:

And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, "This is the way, walk in it," whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left. (Isa 30:20,21) So, with the appearance and direction of these first words we're already given a foreshadow of their purpose –transgression, adversity and affliction.

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. Later in this book, we will read that Jesus is the “candle” or “lamp” which in the original language specifically speaks of a light that is set upon a lampstand. So here we have seven stands that are designed for displaying Jesus as this Light and they are golden. Gold in the Bible pictures or is associated with royalty and faith. We’ll see in a moment that that fits as well. Additionally, in the middle of these stands is someone Who looks like the earthly figure of Jesus and He is clothed as a King.

His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; Each part of Christ’s glorified appearance is important. The whiteness of His head and hair speaks of purity of thought; His flaming eyes speak of the penetrating insight and thus the understanding He has. The brass appearance of His feet speaks clearly of judgment and it’s a fiery judgment. The sound of His voice “*as many waters*” speaks of trouble. David wrote in Psalm 18, *He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me.* And in Psalm 93 we read, *The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters, than the mighty waves of the sea.* And of course, the first “many waters” we recall from scripture is the flood of Noah that covered the earth. So why does the Lord’s voice sound like this? Later in the book, we’ll note other situations in which a voice or voices sound like many waters but here, it is possibly because judgment and tribulation are on His mind. On its own, many waters can refer, like the sea, to the gentiles. The noise is like the crashing waves of the ocean.

He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. We’ll see in a moment what these stars represent, but here it’s significant to note that they are in His right hand. This speaks of ownership, authority and control. Out of His mouth goes forth His Word which, as the book of Hebrews says, pierces into the heart of man. And when you look at Him, it’s blindingly brilliant. This is no “Sweet Jesus” or “Cute Little Lamb” but a mere glimpse of the glorified state of the Creator of all things seen and unseen -- the risen Judge and Ruler of all the cosmos. It is absolutely overwhelming for John.

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death. John collapsed, evidently in fear of the awesomeness of Christ. In tender mercy, Jesus reached out His nail pierced hand, laid it on His disciple, told him not to fear and then told him why – the power behind fear is death, but Jesus conquered death and in the process took possession of the keys to death and hell. But what's that "Amen" doing there in the middle? Doesn't that just come after prayers? Actually, Amen means "firm" and implies trustworthy. In chapter three, we'll see Jesus call Himself the Amen. Here, it's Jesus saying, "John, believe it! It's firm and trustworthy."

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this. Pay attention to this! This is the divine outline for the Revelation. "The things which you have seen" is Jesus in the midst of the golden candlesticks holding the seven stars. It's the risen glorified Son of God – chapter one.

"The things which are" is the church age which John was in at its beginning (and which we are in at its conclusion). This is covered in chapters two and three.

"The things which will take place after this" will begin in chapter four. When will it take place? After this. What this? The things in chapters two and three – the church age. "After this" or "After these things" will run from chapter four to the end of the book and will cover the rapture, the throne room of heaven, the tribulation, the second coming of Christ, the millennium and the new heaven and earth!

The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. This is really the introduction to chapters two and three. We already know that the function of the churches is defined by what they are – lampstands. They are made specifically to hold the Lamp – Jesus Christ – in a prominent place. When the church tries to be any thing else, it falls short. Jesus is not standing in the midst of seven sports arenas or seven country clubs or seven polling booths or ... you get my drift. He's in the midst of seven golden lampstands made to put Him on display, not themselves.

And the seven stars, "the angels" -- if we consider the fundamental function of a star, just as we did with the lampstand, we note that a star, more than anything else, is known for shining in the darkness. Jesus said in the gospels that while He was in the world, He was the light of the

world and He is also known as the “Bright and Morning Star”. In addition, He told those who believed in Him that they too were the light of the world.

When Jesus was crucified, deep darkness covered the land even though it was mid day. And that darkness has continued, in a spiritual sense, ever since.

In the next two chapters, a single angel is addressed for each church. In other scripture, we are told that the archangel Michael stands watch over the people of Israel. In like manner, it could be that these angels stand watch over their respective churches. The problem with this, however, is that each address from Christ clearly is meant for the congregation and unless the angels are each members of the groups, the addresses don’t make sense.

Since the Greek word for angel means messenger, some people think this may be referring to the pastor/teacher of each church. That seems to make sense, but it cannot limit the application of the addresses to the historical congregations for we are told in chapter 22 that the whole book of Revelation is prophetic.

As we study chapters two and three, it will be evident that there was a historical application, but more importantly, what Jesus says to each church is intended to be heard by the whole church throughout the ages and it serves as a prophetic description of the seven eras within the church age.

So, as those who shine the light of the gospel in the dark world and those who are responsible to Christ for the spiritual care of the church, I’m inclined to think of the angel of each church as the historical pastor/teacher as well as each and every gospel sharer since then in that particular environment or era. Of course, there are many stars in any group of sincere believers aren’t there?

Daniel was told concerning his own people, *Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

(Dan 12:3)

And Jesus has these stars in His right hand. That implies strength and control. The preaching of the gospel is only as effective as it is done in His strength, not by human schemes and means. The fruit is His doing as well.

Now, just how well has the assembly of lampstands and the constellation of stars lived up to their structure and design. Have they been doing what they were made to do? Just what does Jesus, Who is in their midst, have to say about it? What do His flaming eyes see? We’ll find out.

Fire Eyes

Revelation 2 and 3

It is probable, since the Lord directed John to send this book to the seven churches which we'll study, that there was a historical application for each. However, since Christ's warning in the last chapter of the Revelation specifically refers to "the words of the prophecy of this book" we will treat it all as prophecy and as a Revelation.

The words spoken to these churches, handled in that manner, speak to all believers and foretell of seven church eras which comprise the church age or age of grace.

In brief, Ephesus speaks of the first church and is estimated by many scholars to run from the church's inception until about 100 AD. Smyrna is known as the persecuted church period and runs approximately from 100 to 312 AD. Pergamos is the compromising church era and runs from about 312 to about 600 AD. Thyatira is the corrupted church era and runs in strength from about 600 to 1517 but also continues until today. Sardis is the reformed but dead church era which runs in strength from about 1517 until 1750 but continues on in deadness until today. Philadelphia is the feeble but faithful church era that started around 1750 and runs until today. Laodicea is the rich apostate church era whose existence is contemporary with the last generation of believers. These dates are approximate, but a thorough study of church history shows that indeed the characteristics spoken by the 'One with the flaming eyes' which follow are a snug 'fit'.

We will focus, however, upon what we can glean from the string of elements which when placed in sequence will help us understand the church age as a whole.

Each section contains seven elements:

- An address
- An introduction
- An observation
- A verdict
- A command
- An exhortation
- A promise

Therefore, we will look first at all the addresses, then all the introductions and so forth. Let's begin.

*To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,
And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write,
And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write,
And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write,
And to the angel of the church in Sardis write,
And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write,
And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,*

The names of each of these churches have meanings pertinent to the church age but notice first that all of them are addressed to congregations IN or OF a city except the last one which is addressed to a church of a people group. We'll see how this is significant in a moment.

“Ephesus” means “permitted”. It’s application to the church age is quite fundamental. You see, the word, by definition, implies a choice. The church exists by God’s permission; it exists because of His grace. It is not the ‘right’ of His creation to have access or a relationship with its Creator. God’s hand was never forced to do what He did for us in sending His beloved Son to die for the sins we committed. In addition, entry into the church has always been something God permitted or allowed but never forced on anyone. Unlike the spread of Islam, faith in the true God is always voluntary and a matter of individually accepting God’s grace.

“Smyrna” means “myrrh” which is an incense that releases its sweet smell when it is crushed. Like it or not, trials and persecution are realities in this world for every sincere believer. The Bible says, *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”* (2 Tim 3:12) But they produce that which is beautiful to God in our hearts. Godliness is not achieved by how well off you can be in this life but how well you come through the ‘crushings’ God permits to come into your life. Do they produce the sweetness of continued trusting and faith or the bitterness of offense and wounded pride?

“Pergamos” means “height or elevation”. It speaks to the church of where we are headed, where our true home is – heaven. Paul wrote, *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (miserable)*. The return of Christ to take us there is called in the Bible the blessed hope. When we experience the hard things that God allows in this life, it is not this life that is the hope which sustains us but rather the hope of heaven where all things will be right.

“Thyatira” means “odor of affliction”. To the world’s senses, this odor is either sweet or sour. Paul wrote, *Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life.* (2 Cor

2:14-16) In “Smyrna”, we have the sweet odor that God perceives in our affliction. “Thyatira” is the world’s response.

“Sardis” means “red ones”. Red in the Bible speaks of sin and blood. This applies to the church in two ways. We are the “red ones” for we are full of sin. God didn’t permit us into His kingdom, nor does He give us a hope in heaven because we’re perfect. The reality is that we are as “red” with sin as anyone and in need of His “red” – His atoning blood, covering our “red”. We, as the church, are the “red ones” because we are sinners and because we are forgiven. The Lord says to us, *Come now, and let us reason together,*” says the LORD, *though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool.* (Isa 1:18)

In addition, Paul wrote, *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.* (Rom 5:8,9)

“Philadelphia” means “brotherly love”. Most people will immediately recognize the application of this name to the church. But, most people will also confess that is periodically one of the greatest failures of the church. This isn’t agape love which is godly love that compels us to do the right thing and love unconditionally; to love God and our brethren divinely. This is the relational phileo love.

Church is not just about being doctrinally right. It is rooted, as much as in anything, in this kind of love. Paul wrote to the church, *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;* (Rom 12:10) and, *But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;* (1 Thes 4:9) and from Hebrews we read, *Let brotherly love continue.* (Heb 13:1) That’s because love undergirds all our faith. Agape love is the highest form of love, but like Peter on the shores of Galilee after Christ’s resurrection, it may be a ‘stretch’ for us at times. We are called to love – first, to agape, but also to phileo.

Lastly, we have the address to “the church of the Laodiceans”. Notice it is to the church of the people rather than the church in the city of Laodicea. The city’s name can be translated as “execution of judgment or punishment of the people”. When the church becomes the property of the people rather than God, it is set up for judgment. In fact, this church is the one that shuts Jesus outside its doors. Man is its center regardless of the Christian-like words and routines it displays. The members of this congregation, along with two others are in danger of experiencing the tribulation.

Next, we'll consider the introductions and how they pertain to the whole church. Introductions are meant to describe some attribute(s) of the speaker which signify a message that pertains to His relationship with the hearer.

To Ephesus: *'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:* Some churches can get pretty heady about their importance in God's kingdom. It can happen to the mini-church as much as to the mega. It happens to individuals as well, especially those whose idea of ministerial success hinges upon their own notoriety or 'resources'. In this intro, Jesus makes it clear that He's in control of the "seven stars" and walks in the midst of the "seven golden lampstands" – all seven of them, that is the complete church. His kingdom is a big one. It involves more people and ministers and ministries than you can imagine. So, fundamentally, this group is reminded that they are part of a much greater whole and it's intended to be a humble reminiscence.

To Smyrna: *'These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life:* This intro focuses on death and life. Jesus was the First to die in that He is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the earth. He was also the Last member of God's kingdom to die in sin and the Firstborn from the grave. He was dead, but death could not hold Him. For the church, no matter how hard life or death may be, we can rest in the assurance that Christ has been there before us. And because of His victory over the grave, we who believe shall never see death. If you are saved, when you breathe your last in this life, you'll 'breathe' your first in eternity.

To Pergamos: *'These things says He who has the sharp two-edged sword:* Compromise is always birthed in and nurtured by hypocrisy. The compromiser always has his/her rationale that is fundamentally dishonest, sometimes because he/she doesn't want to face the truth. God's Word is unwelcome but desperately needed by the compromiser because it pierces deeply into the heart. (Heb 12:1) It separates the emotional from the spiritual, the joints from the marrow, the thoughts from the thinking process itself. Nothing is too intimate, too closely associated, that it cannot discern the difference. The church has often made idolatry and narcissism intimates with doctrinal truth and selfless ministry. Only God's Word can sort it out and do the surgery necessary to save the 'patient'.

To Thyatira: *'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass:* False religion has exalted the so-called Mother of God. Its hideous intent is to set the Son of God on the sidelines when in fact, He is everything to the born-again believer. He is the center, the Savior, the King of kings, the Lamb of God – you are running squarely into His wrath and judgment when you exalt any person or angel as holy. "Holy, holy, holy" pertains to God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit and none other. The church has played with this

heresy for much of its existence and those flaming eyes see right through it. Feet of brass speak of trampling judgment.

To Sardis: *‘These things says He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: Seven as the number of completion is important in this introduction as well, however notice that here it is applied to the Spirits of God rather than the golden candlesticks. The church who leaves out the breath of God’s Spirit, though they properly exalt Jesus and proclaim the gospel is dead. The oldest book in the Bible declares, The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life. (Job 33:4) Jesus told His disciples, It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. (John 6:63) And Paul wrote, For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. (Gal 6:8)*

So many hucksters have misrepresented the power and ministry of the Holy Spirit, you can understand why some are hesitant to know Him more. His every intention though is to point you to Christ. He is absolutely selfless in that regard. He never does anything contrary to the Word of God and is absolutely disinterested in giving you toys to play with whether it’s ‘tingles up the spine’ or treasures on earth. But He is more than willing to give you tools for the purpose of glorifying Christ. The deceived church simply plays games with the things of the spirit. The dead church only gives Him lip service.

To Philadelphia: *‘These things says He who is holy, He who is true, “He who has the key of David, He who opens and no one shuts, and shuts and no one opens”’*: When the Lord has to introduce Himself as holy and true, the church should be concerned. Some churches have gotten so familiar with the Lord that they lose the appreciation of His holiness and truth. Exclusively focusing upon His love and tenderness can lead to a less exalted notion of Who He is and even a fantasy version. He wants His church to keep all His attributes in mind. That makes for a healthy perspective.

The key of David is the right to rule over God’s people. It is taken from Isaiah 22:22. As such, it is representative of the kingdom of heaven. Christ says in effect, “When I open the door to heaven, no one shuts it, and when I shut it, no one opens.” And since Jesus told us in John 10 that He is the Door, He not only is the way of entry but also the determiner of who gains entry. In the age of grace, the door is open to all who will choose to believe in His sacrifice, death and resurrection – and what they mean. But the day is coming, as will be described in this book, when He will close the door to heaven just as He closed the door on Noah’s ark before the flood.

To the Laodecians: *‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: “Amen” is “firm or trustworthy”, “Faithful” is ‘full of trust’ or ‘fully persuaded’. “True” is ‘the real deal’, ‘the authentic’. So, in essence, Jesus says that He is firm*

and trustworthy. In addition, His witness is one that shows He is full of trust, fully persuaded of the real and authentic nature of the One to Whom He bears witness.

“Beginning of the creation of God” is a very poor translation and has led to some people thinking Jesus was the first created being. Jesus was not created. He is the Creator. He is One with Father God and God the Spirit. “Beginning” here is the Greek word transliterated “arche” and means “the person or thing that commences” or “that by which anything begins to be, the origin, the active cause”. Jesus is saying here the same thing the Holy Spirit told us in John’s gospel - *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.* (John 1:1-3)

This intro clearly tells us that He knows He’s addressing a group that doesn’t see Him as these things. This is a church that has lost its faith in this Jesus and has replaced it with what feels good emotionally (which is anything but firm), any type of ‘Christ’ that they perceive as being in vogue or contemporary with their needs, and perhaps in harmony with the fantasies of false science to explain our origin.

Next, we’ll consider the Lord’s observation of each church. This is where those ‘fire eyes’ come into play. Nothing is hidden from Him.

To Ephesus: *I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary.* This all looks good initially – patient, tenacious labor mentioned ‘on both sides’ of examining and exposing false ministers. However, the emphasis in this observation on their labors (the fact that it is repeated) is an indication that they are in excess, perhaps to the detriment of other important things. When the church is out of balance, something has to give; something is left out or sidelined.

To Smyrna: *I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.* To all seven churches the Lord’s observation begins with the fact that He knows their accomplishments – what they are engaged in doing. Smyrna’s activities led to three things: the pressure of affliction, material poverty and denegation from the false religious elite. Nothing changes. Even today, if a church was suffering afflictions and poverty, the vast majority of the contemporary church would look down their noses at them. The prevailing opinion would be that, ‘they must be doing something very wrong. Obviously, God’s not with them.’ But Jesus says they are rich

and that the ones dissing them are Satan's. No church should believe the name calling and lies of the 'health and wealth' elitists.

To Pergamos: *I know your works, and where you dwell, where Satan's throne is. And you hold fast to My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days in which Antipas was My faithful martyr, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.* Satan does have a throne, a literal base of operations so to speak, and for a time, it was indeed in Pergamos. We'll deal more with that in chapter seventeen. Again, He repeats something in His observation – the residence of Satan. In between that, He commends them for holding on to their faith even in the face of martyrdom.

The fact that Satan is nearby and that he is failing in undermining their faith by persecution begs the question, "What will he try next?" He cannot defeat the faith of the church from the outside. So, what do you think he'll try as recourse? He'll join it.

To Thyatira: *I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first.* Jesus notes that this church is just full of activity – their latter works are even more than the first. Their activities seem to be characterized by love, service, faith and patience – good things, don't you think? But the impression you get is that they must consider their works as the key to pleasing the Lord. There's no mention of God's Word or of worship or of enduring trials, but more and more works. It's not that the nature of what they are doing is wrong but that the emphasis upon works and service is creating a dangerous void – the truth.

To Sardis: *I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.* Ka-boom! This observation is thunderous. There's no sidestepping it. Jesus doesn't say this church is in danger of dying or that they are in critical care. They are DOA! This, despite their reputation, their name, which says they are or were at one point, alive. He also says that their activities are in fact all associated with their reputation – it seems to imply the politics of PR – possibly hospitals and universities that bear their name. But in reality, there's no life left inside. The shell is hollow. The life of Christ is absent from this 'in name only' congregation. This mindset of being focused upon a name -- that is, a reputation -- is of course not simply that of the whole congregation but of the individuals within it as well. It is worldly and rooted in pride.

To Philadelphia: *I know your works. See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it; for you have a little strength, have kept My word, and have not denied My name.* As with the other churches, Christ knows their activities and accomplishments – characterized by "little strength", keeping His Word and not denying His name or nature (that is, Who He is). As a consequence, the "open door" is set before them. Some say this is an opening to missionary endeavors. That's possible and historically, it can play well. But it is not an interpretation

derived from scripture. It is a retrospective, extra-biblical perspective. “Open door” and the “keys of David” are associated with the kingdom of heaven in the Bible, not missions.

For that reason, this group is more likely to enter that door in a unique way. Of course, this is also a prophetic characterization for all believers, in that the door to heaven is open to all who place their faith in Jesus.

Now, little strength means just that. This “strength”, however, is that which is inherent to the individual. When you realize that you don’t have much strength, you look more and more to God for your sufficiency. When you do that, you cannot help but hold dear His Word and the promises therein. The fruit of that is a closer, truer perspective of the nature (name) of our God and Savior. When others try to tell you He’s something that He’s not, you know it to be false, you cannot deny His name.

To the people of Laodicea: *I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot.* These people do not hunger or thirst. They are room temperature and comfortable. If they were cold, God would send a fire; if they were hot, God would use that fire. But as a result, they are ‘sensory deprived’. They are loved by God but absolutely useless to Him. Prophetically, this is the last days church, but this observation is valid for any congregation or individual believer who has become “at ease in Zion” – so ‘comfortable’ that the motivation which springs from need is gone. In this desperately wicked world, that state is like a ‘fantasy island’. It is a blind lethargy that only a proverbial ‘slap on the cheek’ can stir. But God is faithful – that ‘slap’ will come.

The Heeding Never Halts

Revelation 2, 3

Jesus started His messages to the seven churches each with an address, an introduction and then an observation. Next up is a verdict.

To Ephesus: *Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.* You should recall from our previous lesson that the church in Ephesus was headlining their labors so much that they had to be sidelining something else, and here it is – their first love. Did you think perhaps that it was your service Jesus wanted most? When Martha wanted Jesus to tell her sister Mary to stop just sitting at His feet in adoration and worship, He gently told her that Mary had chosen the better part – love over labor and worship over work. It's not that work for the kingdom is unimportant, it's very much so. But God gave His only begotten Son to share and show His love. And His desire is, as the scripture points out, that "love begets love".

Now, Ephesus didn't lose their first love, they left it. That implies a choice was made; other things were prioritized higher. That kind of a choice is dangerous. We'll see why later.

To Smyrna: Significantly, this group has no verdict from the One with the flaming eyes, probably because they are walking with Him in the flames of persecution and trials. This group has been/will be laying it all down for the Lord and He sees that. Tribulation, poverty and blasphemy are what has come to them from the world and Jesus has nothing negative to tell them. What does that tell you?

To Pergamos: *But I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.* Unlike His absence of a verdict for Smyrna, Jesus has plenty to say to this church. They are tolerating two false doctrines with three parts. First, is that of Balaam. This confused prophet (found in the book of Numbers) could authentically hear from the Lord but persistently placed himself in the position of a for-profit prophet. Balak, the king of Moab wanted him to curse the host of Israel and paid him to do so, but the Lord continually foiled his attempts. Time after time, blessings rather than cursings came forth from his mouth. Later, as a 'work-around', he told the king that if he could seduce the men of Israel to participate with his own women in their idolatry, they would be cursed by God. This was the stumbling block. Balak took his advice and many of the men of Israel ate things sacrificed to the false gods and had sex with the Moabite women. They compromised their faith for the sake of pleasure and indeed, they received God's judgment. There are those in

Christendom today who, knowing people's weaknesses, take full advantage of them for profit as well. Whether it is in the guise of social or network marketing schemes or ministries that will go off the air unless you send in your donations or the sweet sounds of the profit oriented music industry or stadiums full of 'fans' – take off the wrappings of Christianese and it's just for profit – Balaam's stumbling block.

The word Nicolaitans refers to ruling over the people. Christ set the example for His disciples that they should serve one another, not 'lord it over' each other. On the shores of Galilee, He directed Peter to feed and care for His sheep, not fleece them. Pergamos forgot this lesson, and their leaders lusted for power. It is the same in many churches today. Many people are, or want to be, in ministry for status and appreciation. Some very much like the authority it supposedly gives them to control the lives of others. Jesus said that He hates this. It is a satanic lusting and has no place in the true church. The 'authority' belongs to Christ and the leadership of his people is always to be demonstrated with humility and love.

To Thyatira: *Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. And I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent. Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of their deeds. I will kill her children with death, and all the churches shall know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts. And I will give to each one of you according to your works.*

“Now to you I say, and to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden.

This is by far the largest verdict. It is given to the church that began around 600 AD about 300 years after the Emperor Constantine claimed to embrace Christianity and thus it soon became the state religion. The age of Pergamos was the age of compromise. Thyatira was the age of deception and spiritual defilement. The former age transitioned to the latter. This is where Satan joined the church so to speak. We will show in more detail in chapter seventeen the migration of the false religion started by the prostitute Semiramus. She was the wife of Nimrod, the first empire builder after Noah's flood. In her religion, she of course deified her husband, herself and her illegitimate son, Tammuz. The scholar Hislop showed that Tammuz' god-identity became the Babylonian god Bel which later became Baal. The name Jezebel means “Baal is husband to”. This make clear that the church in question here allowed this false religion to first influence it and then seduce it into idolatry.

As a result, this church's leadership spiritually became Jezebel. Christ says that He gave her time to repent... and she did not. Having begun around 600 AD, this church still exists today,

and so of the four church eras that continue to contemporary times, she has indeed had time to repent. Of course, not all within the structural organization of this church have bought into the perversion of Jezebel – Jesus says to them, *I will put on you no other burden.*

Many believe that this deceived church will provide the basis for the false religious system of the tribulation. Unless there is repentance, she and her adulterous companions will be cast into the great tribulation – the last three and a half years of the tribulation, the time of God’s bowls of wrath. “Her children” are not in the Book of Life of the Lamb. Despite religious appearances, God sees into the innermost being and knows their true state.

One of the attractions or promises of the false religion ‘descended’ from Semiramis was the ability to discover the *depths of Satan*. “In the days of the New Testament, many non-Christian religions (such as the Ophites and various Gnostic groups) said they knew the “deep things of Satan.” The ancient Christian writer Tertullian says that if you asked a Gnostic about their cosmic mysteries, they would furrow their brow and say, ‘it is deep.’ How could Christians ever fall for *the depths of Satan*? Perhaps the deceptive reasoning went this way: ‘To effectively confront Satan, you must enter his strongholds, and learn his depths in order to conquer him.’ People use similar reasoning in misguided spiritual warfare today.” – Guzik

To Sardis: *Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you. You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.* If you are following along, as you should be, with your Bible, you’ll note that this verdict actually follows the ‘command’ rather than preceding it and thus presents itself as a warning as well. The warning is that they will miss His coming because they are not watching. They don’t watch because they have stopped believing. Jesus spoke of their kind in Mat 24 when He said, *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing. Assuredly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant says in his heart, ‘My master is delaying his coming,’ and begins to beat his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunkards, the master of that servant will come on a day when he is not looking for him and at an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* (Mat 24:45-51)

Yet “even in Sardis” are a few that still have sincere faith, a few that haven’t defiled their belief in Christ and His return with liberal theology or the ways of the world.

This church also continues to this day.

To Philadelphia: *Indeed I will make those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie—indeed I will make them come and worship before your feet, and to know*

that I have loved you. Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. John frequently referred to himself in his gospel as the one Jesus loved. It was never an ego issue; it was a thankful humble perception. How about you? Do you really know that Jesus loves you? John said so before the cross; we say so because of the cross.

It is this awareness that gives the believer the strength in spirit to persevere in faith. Even when the whole world and seemingly a large part of the church is going the way of the world, you can keep His command to hold on.

Part of Christ's verdict to this group is to keep them "from the hour of trial", that is, the tribulation. Jesus used two OT saints to describe the two last days groups of His people – Noah and Lot. Noah was protected in the midst of God's judgment whereas Lot was taken out of way before (just before) God's judgment. Noah represents the faithful Hebrew remnant whom God will protect during the tribulation and Lot pictures the church, especially this one – Philadelphia. This is the group who I am inclined to believe will experience the rapture. Philadelphia as a church era is around today; however, individual believers who characterize the perseverance of Philadelphia have been around since the resurrection of Christ. The rapture has always been imminent.

To the Laodiceans: *So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'— and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked — I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten.* These people are lukewarm and thus distasteful to God. They are completely deceived concerning their condition and yet, amazingly, they are loved by the Lord. As a consequence, they will be rebuked by Him and chastened – it is quite possible that they will also experience the tribulation intended, really, just for Israel. We spoke earlier of their 'temperature' and their 'comfort zone' and how disastrous they are to spiritual health. But let's look at the Lord's remedies.

"buy from Me gold refined in the fire" – "buy" here really means to simply be in the marketplace. "Gold" is imagery for true faith and royal status. "Fire" speaks of trials, hardships and tribulation. Christ's first remedy is that they should put themselves in the place or heart attitude wherein faith is found. You don't literally buy faith, but you need to be looking for it, desiring it and thus in the 'place' of being receptive. Where is faith found? The Bible says, *So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* (Rom 10:17) And don't you know that it is usually the hardships of life that drive us back to God's Word, back to the place of

being willing to really HEAR it. Notice Jesus says to “buy from Me”. That is, He is the source, no one else.

“white garments, that you may be clothed” – white garments in prophecy always speak of righteousness and again, the language is clear that you obtain it only from Jesus. The church can be so self oriented that there is a mistaken impression that if you think you’re ‘OK’, Christ will agree; it all depends on your ‘self-image’.

“anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” – this seeing is spiritual discernment. “Anoint” points to the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, fundamentally, Christ is telling these folks that they need to get saved, filled and schooled in the Word.

The next thing we’ll consider is Christ’s command to each church.

To Ephesus: *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.* “Remember” is His first command – that is, remember where you used to be in relationship with Me. It’s like He’s saying, “You thought that weeding out the bad guys, the phonies was a high calling, but your over-focus on it has really been a descent, a falling from the heights of your first love.”

Repent is mentioned twice in this command. The consequence of disobedience to it is that Christ will distance Himself from them. Recall that He was first seen “in the midst” of the seven golden lampstands. Of course, this is a dire situation. He also repeats His hatred for the DEEDS of those who ‘lord it over His heritage’.

To Smyrna: *Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.* His command to those who suffer great persecution is twofold – fearlessness and faithfulness. Now, why would a loving God let the devil persecute the targets of His affection unto the death? He says simply, “that you may be tested”.

Now, I’ve never been a fan of tests – I hate the stress. But we’ve got to understand that God’s tests aren’t designed to see you fail but to make you fly. God knows the end from the beginning and His Word says He’ll not give you a test for which there is no way out. (See 1 Cor 10:13) And everyone is tested – even Jesus was. We may look at such testing as cruel or sad but that’s only because our vision is entirely myopic spiritually. You see, the rewards of testing resonate with joy throughout eternity.

Now, “ten days” may refer to the ten waves of Roman imperial persecution which came upon the church during this era. Notably, however, the first mention of ten days in the Bible (where it is standing on its own) is in 1 Sam 25:38. When David was being persecuted by Saul, he did the

right thing in protecting gratuitously the herds of Nabal, a very wealthy man. David later asked Nabal for a gift in kind for his men so they could eat. Though the request was reasonable, Nabal snubbed David and even mocked him. As a result, David told his men to gather and get ready to do Nabal and all his household in. Now, Abigail, Nabal's wife was a godly woman and wise. She got to David first with a load of goodies and a humble, insightful attitude. David repented of his vengeful anger and waited on the Lord. About ten days after Nabal heard of this, the Lord smote him and he died, and David took Abigail to be his own wife. Lesson – though the trials and testings you encounter may be mortally difficult, God is the One who will make things right – and permanently so.

To Pergamos: *Repent, or else I will come to you quickly and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.* Again, repentance is on the table. Repentance simply means a change of mind resulting in a change of direction. The Lord says that to refuse to repent will mean that He will come suddenly to His church and fight against “them” with the sword of His mouth. Who’s “them”? These were the ones who were holding to the doctrines of Balaam and of the Nicolaetans. Thus, Christ says that He will deal with the offenders, not the offended.

To Thyatira: *But hold fast what you have till I come.* I’m inclined to believe that although this can be a general command and a necessary one for all believers, that it is speaking to those from this church who will enter the tribulation unsaved but who, during the course of it, come to true faith in Jesus Christ. If they do not pay, during that time, for their faith in Jesus with their lives, they may find refuge with the faithful remnant of Israel.

To Sardis: *Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God. Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent.* Over and over and over again, the Lord tells his whole church to watch. Clearly, it is a fundamental part of good spiritual health. Then comes the command to strengthen and this is the word first used in Luke 9:51 of Jesus when He knew that it was time to go to Jerusalem and by crucified, that He “steadfastly set His face” to go. It was a firm resolve, unshakeable. This is the strength He tells Sardis to have.

To Philadelphia: *Behold, I am coming quickly! Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* Because He will come suddenly, the Lord tells these believers to hold fast “what you have”. Now, what do they have? Well, there’s a crown involved. Paul wrote, *Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.* (2 Tim 4:8) Philadelphians look forward to the coming of the Lord, to His appearing in the clouds of heaven, to the sound of the trumpet call, to the voice of the archangel, to the glorious resurrection and rapture of the Bride of Christ.

To the Laodiceans: *Therefore be zealous and repent.* Several of the churches have been told to repent, some more than once. To the Laodiceans, He adds, “be zealous”. There’s an appeal to zeal when it’s truly of the Lord. Legalistic zealots have been the plague of the ages, but humble, loving zeal is beautiful in the heart of a sincere Christian. It produces the likes of the apostles. It’s not ‘wide eyed’ hyper-energized nonsense but it is a ‘fire in the belly’ so to speak.

And now, we’ll look at Christ’s exhortation to His churches. It is the same for all of them -- *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.* He is making clear that the Spirit is speaking to all the churches and that much of what He has spoken to individual congregations applies to all. But we must have “an ear” to hear it. We need to have the heart that wants to hear from the Lord and not one that’s content with just going through the motions.

Significantly, the exhortation to the first three church eras precedes the promise, while it follows for the last four. Recall, the last four eras continue until today. By studying the nature of the promises, we also note a difference between the two groups:

Group of three and their promises

- Access to the Tree of Life in the midst of the paradise of God
- No hurt from the second death, i.e. taking part in the first resurrection
- Hidden manna (divine understanding) , a white stone (ticket to the wedding banquet or a sign of friendship or acquittal in court) and a new name (new nature)

Group of four and their promises

- Power to rule over the nations (during the millennium)
- Christ will not blot out name from Book of Life (Great White Throne)
- To be a pillar (principle, steady part) of the New Jerusalem (coincident with the new heaven and new earth)
- Sit with Christ on His Throne (throughout eternity)

As you can see, the fulfillments of the first promises come unto all the saints in heaven during the church age all the way up to the wedding feast of the Lamb. The fulfillments of the next four come after these, that is after the tribulation, and follow chronologically the events running through the millennium, the Great White Throne judgment, the New Jerusalem and eternity future. The point of demarcation between the two groups and the fulfillment of the associated blessings is the tribulation period.

Prior to the rapture of the church and thus prior to the tribulation, the Holy Spirit is in the church; thus, obeying the exhortation to hear what He says to the churches pertains to our

obedience in this life to the will of God. Naturally, the stated blessings follow this obedient life in heaven.

Then something happens concerning the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul, writing to the church in Thessalonica, spoke concerning it, *For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.* (2 Thes 2:7,8) The One who restrains is indeed the Holy Spirit and since His work during the church age is in and through the church, if He is taken out of the way, so must be the church.

Thus, the point of demarcation between the two sets of promises is not only the tribulation but the rapture and the 'taking out of the way' of the Holy Spirit. Since the exhortations to hear Him in the second group follow the blessings, it seems to point to the need for the church (Hebrew and gentile) to continue to heed Him during and after the tribulation on into eternity.

In our next lesson, we'll look more closely at the promises given to the seven churches. Hopefully, you can recognize that even in speaking to the seven churches in the age of grace, Christ has the tribulation and consequently His Hebrew followers in mind. God's not through with the Jew.

Victory!

Revelation 2,3

You know, I did a search in a sermon database on overcoming and found that the large majority of topics were about overcoming various vices such as alcoholism or pornography or discouragement – good topics. However, I am intent here upon presenting the specific things Jesus said we, as members of His church, should overcome and how.

In Revelation chapter two and three, He presented admonitions to each of the seven churches to overcome something. That is, He spoke to all of us because we're all in there somewhere – and so no one beats the rap. So, let's look and see if and/or where 'the shoe fits'. Please read Revelation chapters two and three then continue herein.

Here's Ephesus. Jesus says:

To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God.

Now, when you read Revelation chapter two, you notice that this first church was very good at examining doctrine and ministries to validate their authenticity. They were also quite diligent, laboring with perseverance for the Lord. There are many such ministries today which work to defend the faith against myriad heresies. We need them and appreciate them.

Nevertheless (Jesus also said) I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

In the midst of the garden of Eden stood two trees. The tree of life was there along with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As you recall, it was the ability to discern good AND evil that was the bait Satan used on us and it worked. Unfortunately, man has the sinful propensity ever since to see evil everywhere and to focus on it. When that is the case, the inward desire for love, for life, for the very goodness of God wanes. That's why Jesus told this church to overcome in this way – to put their first love back in focus as the main thing. And you know their first love.

So, this overcoming is keeping the heart set on Christ and a deep love relationship with Him.

Next, here's Smyrna. Jesus says:

He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

This was/is the persecuted church and thus applies to all who suffer for the cause of Christ. Jesus has no criticism of this church but only empathy and encouragement. These folks suffer physically, endure poverty and even die for our Lord. The things they must endure, Jesus says, are not sent by Him but by Satan and his followers, but neither are they necessarily eliminated by

Christ. He simply says not to fear them and adds, *Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

Oh, how we want and even expect Jesus to deliver us from all our trials. Why, He even taught us to pray to Father God to lead us not unto temptation but deliver us from evil. And though we can doubt that He has answered those prayers, I'm absolutely convinced that when we get to heaven, one of the things we'll come to understand is just how much evil and temptation He did protect us from. Nevertheless, this world is a battleground and we must continually realize that we are in a war. We often forget or dispel that notion and wonder why, oh why, has this or that befallen me.

This overcoming is holding on to your faith through all the circumstances of this life.

Then, there's Pergamos to whom Jesus says:

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

This church, like those of Smyrna, faithfully hold on to their faith even in extreme trial and Jesus commends them for that. They also hold, though, to two specific false doctrines – Balaam's and the Nicolaetan's. Balaam sold his services to the guy with the gold, he was a 'for-profit prophet'. The name Nicolaetan is oddly linked to the word overcome in the Greek – both are based upon the same root, 'nike' – yeah, like the shoe. It means to be victorious or to rule over. Nicolaetan means one who rules over the people. So together, these false doctrines spell money and power (or notoriety). They also spell trouble with a capital T.

Of course, most of you remember that Jesus specifically told us to give, not to hoard or even focus on acquiring stuff – He said, *So likewise, whosoever he be among you that forsakes not all that he has, he cannot be my disciple.* (Luke 14:33). He also commanded us to serve, just as He did, rather than seeking the so called 'high seat of popularity and leadership' over other Christians. (See Mat 20:27; 23:11; Mk 9:35; 10:44; 2 Cor 4:5; Gal 5:13)

So, Jesus' promise to these overcomers addresses these two problems. In "hidden manna" is a reference to the beautiful treasures buried in the Word of God – that is, true doctrine revealed and confirmed. The "white stone" is referring to 'tesserae'. These were white stones given to those who were victorious in the public games and indicated that they were to be supported by the public for life. They also gave the holders admittance to special events such as feasts or banquets. But the most remarkable of these were the *Tesserae hospitales*, which were given as badges of *friendship* and *alliance*, and on which some name was engraved, as a testimony that a contract of friendship had been made.

So, this overcoming deals with searching out the truth of God's word and expecting Him to feed your soul. In addition, it's about serving. When you are truly a servant of God and to

your brethren, you can be tempted to think of your self as a “nobody”. After all, you’re not in the limelight, others are taking the stage and getting the recognitions. Others have the big names everyone knows. But here Jesus says, “Overcome through serving and I’ll give you a special name and with it a special character. I’ll take care of you forever and admit you to My special events. Best of all, you and I will be special friends throughout eternity.”

And now, here’s Thyatira. Jesus says:

And he who overcomes, and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations -

‘He shall rule them with a rod of iron;

They shall be dashed to pieces like the potter’s vessels’

- as I also have received from My Father;

and I will give him the morning star.

This church is comprised of those who had/have a real handle on works, love, faith and patience but especially works. Lots and lots of good works. Yet, there’s that “Nevertheless” in the passage which Jesus adds and with it He exposes a most serious problem. In fact, it’s one so serious that if not repented of, He says these folks could find themselves in the midst of the Great Tribulation. The culprit is one called Jezebel. Her devilish poisons focus around teaching the believers in this church to commit sexual crimes against the Lord.

The name Jezebel had a powerful association. If we called someone a “Judas” or a “Hitler” it would mean something strong. It’s also a strong thing to call this woman Jezebel. “She was one of the most evil characters of the Old Testament, who attempted to combine the worship of Israel with the worship of the idol Baal . . . Jezebel herself had a most unenviable record of evil.”

(Guzik, Walvoord)

Mixture of religions or the worship of false deities in place of, or along side of, God Almighty is always referred to in scripture as the equivalent of spiritual adultery before Him. Now, this will be especially prevalent during the coming Tribulation time where I’m convinced Christianity will be mixed with Islam and myriad other religions and will perhaps even be promoted by Rome. But to all believers, the message is to never mix your faith in Christ with any other, not with Mammon (materialism), not with new age theism, not with your own self exaltation or pet philosophies, not with politics or patriotism, no other god period.

So, this overcoming is an uncompromising one – no mixture but rather pure religion and undefiled. And it hits all of us squarely in the heart, for we all have the ‘natural disposition’ to join our material, political and philosophical preferences with our faith in Jesus Christ. Of course, the Word itself deals with material, political and philosophical issues, but we can

sometimes assume that our interpretive ‘tangents’ are really on the straight and narrow. All the while, they may simply be a mixture of our own making.

For these overcomers, the rewards are two-fold. The first is the power to help rule over the nations. This makes sense for there will be no compromise in this rule, no mixed motives or secret agendas. Those who overcome the problem of spiritual compromise are the ones Jesus wants to rule with Him. Second, He promises them the “morning star”. What’s this? Later in the book of Revelation, it is written, *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.* This is the promise is Jesus Himself. No priest or prophet standing between the believers and their Savior – these overcomers get the ultimate reward anyone can have.

Next, there’s Sardis. Jesus says to them:

He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life; but I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.

Names are always important in the Bible. Naming was the first job of mankind back in Eden. But this church is a misnomer. Its name says it’s alive, but Jesus says it’s dead. So, what do you say to a dead person? What critique is there? Not much. Christ simply says to strengthen what little is left that’s not yet dead and repent. Repent of what? Well, He says to remember what they’ve heard and to hold fast to it. The clear implication is that these people just don’t believe what they’ve heard anymore. At least, their faith has all but disappeared – faith in the Word of God, faith in the risen Savior, faith in His second coming. As a result, they are no longer watching for the Lord. Are you like that? Are you watching?

Sardis was also a city well known for its softness and luxury. It had a well-deserved reputation for apathy and immorality. In Sardis there was a large, stately temple to the mother goddess, Cybele. From the ruins of that temple we can see that its main columns were 60 feet high and more than 6 feet in diameter. This mother goddess was honored - “worshipped” - will all kinds of sexual immorality and impurity.

The combination of easy money and a loose moral environment made the people of Sardis notoriously soft and pleasure loving. “The great characteristic of Sardis was that, even on pagan lips, Sardis was a name of contempt. Its people were notoriously loose-living, notoriously pleasure-and luxury loving. Sardis was a city of decadence.” (Guzik, Barclay)

Whew! This group is in real danger. Jesus clearly says that there’s a dire possibility that He will blot their names from the Book of Life if they do not overcome. *The risen Christ is saying that, if we wish to remain on the roll of the citizens of God, we must keep our faith flamingly alive.*” (Barclay)

If their names are in the Book of Life, it's because they, at some time, had saving faith in Christ. **Therefore, this overcoming has to do with stoking the fire of faith.** How do you do that, and conversely, what is it that tends to quench faith?

There's a clue in the passage itself. Jesus says to them, *I have not found your works perfect before God.* That is, their works are incomplete in God's eyes. Either they are missing closure so to speak in their works or they are missing a vital quality about them. This means that this church has given up walking the walk, or else they are just pretending -- doing what they're doing without the heart attitude that makes their works those of which God approves.

There's no better way to fan the flames of personal faith in Jesus than to get back into a purely motivated, obedient continuation of living out the gospel. The key is to finish what God has given you to do, to walk, to be, with a sincere, humble repentance. Dump whatever has gotten in the way both inwardly and outwardly. Whatever has bummed you, embittered you or bound you is not worth losing a place in the Book of Life. It's quite sobering to read Jesus saying that there are *a few even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.* Clean garments speak of sincere faith in Christ.

There is a Book of Life, and there are five different references to people being blotted out of the Book of Life (Ex 32:32,33; Psa 69:28; Rev 3:5; Rev 22:19). This means that the idea of being blotted out of the Book of Life should be taken seriously. Perhaps it is only a symbol, and that person's name was never there to begin with. Even if that is the case, the Lord still wants us to take it seriously, because there are some who by every human appearance are saved, yet will not be in heaven. (Guzik)

His reward to these overcomers is three-fold – a white garment which speaks of true righteousness (as opposed to self righteousness), inclusion in the Book of Life and His confession of His true relationship with them before God the Father and the heavenly host.

Then there's Philadelphia. The Lord says:
He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.

Philadelphia is given an open door both to missions and to heaven itself. Their commendation is that they have held to God's Word, have not denied His name – which means they have lived in such a way that people see God's nature (i.e. name) in them, and they have a little strength – that is, they depend upon God's strength. *“The church of Philadelphia is commended for keeping the Word of the Lord and not denying His Name. Success in Christian work is not to be measured by any other standard of achievement. It is not rise in ecclesiastical*

position. It is not the number of new buildings which have been built through a man's ministry. It is not the crowds that flock to listen to any human voice. All of these things are frequently used as yardsticks of success, but they are earthly and not heavenly measures." (Barnhouse)

Now, Philadelphia is known as the faithful church, but even they have an overcoming to do. Jesus tells them, *Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.* What they have is that they're doing it the simple, right way – no fanfare, no spectacle if you would. **Their overcoming has to do with the need to 'keep on keeping on'**. They're running a good race, and nothing can prevent them from finishing except themselves.

The promise to them reflects the stability or faithful continuance in their 'race' that Jesus desires. As a pillar in the presence of God, throughout eternity they will no more be far from the Lord. And to boot, these overcomers will have three new names/natures – that of Father God, that of heaven itself and that of Jesus Christ. Wow!

Lastly, there's Laodicea to whom Jesus says:

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

Now, no one wants to be a part of Laodicea. This is the lukewarm, self-satisfied assembly who has left Jesus outside. Yet, because they are a church, it is reasonable to assume that at some point, Jesus was inside. Their condition, however, has become so repulsive to the Lord, He says *because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.* And yet, there He is at their door, knocking! He is certainly unlike anyone I know. His patience and grace are just unfathomable.

Laodiceans are in 'la-la land'. They're completely unaware of their condition. Jesus says to them, you do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Remember, these are not unbelievers but pastors and pewsters. However, Jesus knows what they need to wake them up – tribulation, trials, persecution. There's fire in their future. Did you think His knock at their door would be a gentle rap? No way. He adds, *I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see.*

The church in Smyrna thought they were poor while in truth they were really rich (Rev 2:9), but the church of the Laodiceans believe they are rich when they are really poor. What's the difference? Persecution.

The church of Laodicea needs to have their lukewarm faith put into the fire. Peter wrote, *That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:*

Now, Jesus will appear two times in the near future – at the rapture and at His second coming. In between, is what is known as the fiery tribulation time. It is in this time that Laodiceans will finally see their true condition, their utter need for Jesus. It is in this kind of situation that they will welcome Him back into their lives. In Revelation chapter seven, those who come out of the tribulation, having been killed for their faith in Christ, are given white garments.

But this isn't constrained to the tribulation period, is it? Even now, if God has allowed difficulty into your life and you wonder why, it could be that He's knocking on your own door. Listen. Do you hear the voice of His Spirit? Let him back in. He'll do the rest.

So, this overcoming is singular in nature, and uniquely, Jesus says that it is the same type of overcoming He did Himself. You see, in heaven Jesus was, in truth, rich and in need of nothing, but He chose to obey His Father's will and trust Him even in the terrible trials He suffered. Look at Revelation chapter seven again. Many of those people in white robes surrounding the Lamb are from Laodicea. They will share the throne of the Lamb! Fortunately, vomit is not the end of the story but rather victory. Jesus knows how to wake up His church. Being 'left behind' is not a condemnation. It's not about rejection but rather repentance, revival and resurrection. Hallelujah!

In conclusion, to all of us as believers, Jesus says, *These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace. In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.* To which John the apostle adds, *You are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

Take a sec and look again at all the churches. Notice how all the admonitions to overcome involve faith - simple, sincere, uncluttered faith in Jesus Christ as our risen Savior and Lord. That's because, *whosoever is born of God overcomes the world: and this is the victory that overcomes the world, [even] our **faith**. Who is he that overcomes the world, but he that **believes** that Jesus is the Son of God?* (See John 16:33; 1 John 4:4; 5:4,5)



He was despised and afflicted...

Breakpoint and Beyond

Revelation 4

We'll pick up our study on the final events of this age in Revelation chapter four. Briefly, in chapter one, the apostle John saw the glorified Lord Jesus, and in chapters two and three, he learned of the seven churches which not only existed in John's day but have played out as an accurate picture of the subsequent historical eras up unto our present day. In speaking to each of them, Jesus made clear that they all had/have a need to overcome, and He said that anyone who "has an ear to hear" should take heed. Thus, in speaking to them He speaks to all of us who believe.

Additionally, in chapter one verse nineteen we have the table of contents for the whole book of Revelation. It says, "*Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this.*" This is Jesus speaking to John. The *things which you have seen* refers to the resurrected, glorified Lord of Heaven and Earth, Jesus Christ (chapter one). The *things which are* refers to the seven churches and the church age they cover (chapters two and three). The *things which will take place after this* is our breakpoint.

After what things? Well, the church age of course. The Greek expression is 'metatauta' and, not coincidentally, it is also how we begin chapter four:

After these things (metatauta) I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven.

After that which typifies the church age, the first thing the apostle sees is an open door in heaven. You Bible students know that Jesus referred to Himself as the Door and as it is open, the sense is that the way into heaven is open through Him. There's a welcoming and receptivity. Looking back into chapter three, we see that one group of believers who seem to be around during the last days, Philadelphia, has the promise from Jesus - *See, I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it.* Many believe this to be an open door, so to speak, for missions, and I can agree, but that is based more upon an extrabiblical historical perspective rather than a purely scriptural interpretation.

If we let the Bible 'interpret itself' if you would, I'm inclined to believe that this is really saying that these last days believers who chapter three says 'have a little strength' and 'hold on to His Word' (including His promise to return) are those who will experience, as John did, the next part of the revelation:

And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, "Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this." Immediately I was in the Spirit;

This is the rapture. It is prefaced by a trumpet and it is instantaneous just as with the other scriptures that describe it. After this, the earthly witness of the mostly gentile church is over – the baton will be passed, if you would, to another group. After this breakpoint and beyond, that church is seen in heaven, but the whole church is as yet incomplete.

John continues to record his experience:

...and behold, a throne set in heaven, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald.

It's a good thing John was in the Spirit for the Bible says no man can see God and live. Even in the Spirit, John's attempt to describe the appearance of our Lord is brief. He's clearly overwhelmed and at a loss for appropriate descriptors. But he tries. What he's attempting to convey seems to be purity, brilliance and beauty. Each of these stones were found in the breastplate which the high priest wore. As such, they represented the tribes of Israel, however, we cannot be certain about which stone and which tribe go together. I like what David Guzik has to say about this scene – *"Around this setting of all sovereignty, power, authority and glory - this setting of the throne of God - God has placed a reminder of His own promise to never destroy the earth again with water, a promise that directs His sovereignty, so that it is not capricious or against His promises. A throne says, "I can do whatever I want, because I rule." A promise says, "I will fulfill this word to you, and I cannot do otherwise." A rainbow around the throne is a remarkable thing, showing that God will always limit Himself by His own promises."*

John continues to describe the throne room of heaven:

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices.

Now, elders represent the people of God, especially in the Old Testament. The 24 courses of the priesthood (1 Chronicles 24) represented all the priests, while the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles represent all the faithful. Exactly who these elders are we are not told, and that's certainly for our good. You see, all eyes are upon Someone else.

Both angels and saints are pictured in the Bible as clothed in white garments which represent righteousness. However, angels are never pictured in scripture with crowns. Therefore, I believe

the picture here is of redeemed, glorified man sitting enthroned with Jesus. On lesser thrones, to be sure, but thrones none the less. This agrees with the scriptures that proclaim we are joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17), and we will reign with Him (2 Timothy 2:12).

Next, we read:

Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Seven in the Bible speaks of completion or perfection. As with the Father and the Son, there is nothing lacking to His Spirit. His being, His ministry, His fruit, everything about Him is perfect.

In addition, *Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal.* Which communicates a sense of perfect peace.

After this, John continues by describing four fantastic beings:

And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying:

*“ Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!”*

Each of these creatures are full of eyes, that is, they are all-seeing. All failure to truly worship is rooted in a lack of seeing and understanding. In addition, they have six wings – six is the number of man in the Bible. Also, they each have a unique characteristic; one is like a lion, one is like a calf, one has a face like a man, and one is like a flying eagle. Thus, as we consider them, we recognize that one aspect of Christ’s ministry toward mankind is pictured in scripture by each. He is known as the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” – powerful and kingly; He is the burnt offering calf – wholly devoted to Father God and atoning for our sins; He came to earth as the “Son of Man” presenting the character or face of God to man, experiencing all our temptations, knowing our grief and sorrows; He has borne His people on eagle’s wings in delivering them from bondage and preserving them in trial.

Together, the creatures ceaselessly praise God Almighty and in doing so, they represent the response that resounds from all creation because of His mercy and goodness toward us. And, clearly, this response is contagious, if you would, for...

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

“ You are worthy, O Lord,

To receive glory and honor and power;

For You created all things,

And by Your will they exist and were created.”

These crowns which are cast before the throne are the *stephanos*, the crowns of *victory*, not royalty. They are the crowns of achievement that a winning athlete would receive at the ancient Olympic Games. The twenty-four elders - representing all the redeemed of God - throw every achievement reward they have back before God because they know and thus proclaim that **He** is worthy . . . to receive glory and honor and power.

In other words, as we consider these creatures, the expression of God to man in the person of Jesus Christ, as we consider His power and strength, His devotion to the Father and His sacrifice for us, His touchability, His leaving of heaven's perfection to come to us here in this dark, diseased world, and His care, protection and provision throughout our hardships – if we are believers - born again in Him, like the twenty-four, we will naturally and ceaselessly praise Him in response. He created all things, all things. Whether seen or unseen, they exist and were created by His will.

This, then, is the first 'act' of the 'great beyond'. It is the first scene for the church in heaven and of course it's all about God, His Son and His Spirit.

Tragedy and Triumph

Revelation 5

The Bible says that in heaven, God will wipe every tear away, and John the apostle, while viewing the throne room in heaven, is about to weep profusely. That's because a cataclysmic tragedy is presented to him.

*And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. Then I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?" And **no one** in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll, or to look at it.*

So I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open and read the scroll, or to look at it.

As John is watching, a scroll is in God's possession. What could possibly be in this scroll that's so confidential and so important? No one in the created order, seen or unseen, can open it or even look upon it. As he describes it, there are seven seals upon it and writing both inside and on the outside of it.

Some have suggested that this is the title deed to planet earth and initially that sounds good, but there's a problem with that – the earth is already the Lord's forever. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." For this reason, I think there's a better explanation.

In the book of Leviticus 25:25 – 31, we find a very interesting law laid down by God pertaining to redemption. In short, if someone loses possession of his land, he can redeem it from the new owner at the appropriate price. If he that lost the property is too poor to redeem it, he must wait till the year of Jubilee at which time it will once again become his possession. However, there's a different rule for houses in walled cities. If someone loses possession of this type of property (i.e. man made) and cannot redeem it within the allotted time (one year) because of poverty or indebtedness, that property forever becomes the property of the new owner. It can never be redeemed again.

All that is to say that the land, the earth, is redeemable, but that which pertains to man can only be redeemed by the appropriate price within the specified time.

Back in the garden of Eden, mankind 'sold' his property to Satan. In willful rebellion against God, he effectively sold his soul and became the servant of sin. From that point, Satan had certain property rights and only a very specific price and time of redemption could apply to that property. The price of redemption was one sinless man, an Adam for an Adam, so to speak. The

time limit or ‘deadline’ on the redemption was seemingly set by God in Daniel chapter nine. For more on this, see our lesson entitled, “This Your Day” in which we showed that the period concluded on the Friday following the exact day prophesied that He would enter Jerusalem, hailed as the King, the Son of David.

When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, one of the temptations included this man-made property. In Luke’s account, *The devil led Him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to Him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours."* (Luke 4:5-7) Jesus did not contest this point, He simply refused to worship him.

The next concept we should consider pertaining to the heavenly scroll is that of inheritance. God has an inheritance to pass along. In Deut 4, Moses says to the people of Israel, *But as for you, the LORD took you and brought you out of the iron-smelting furnace, out of Egypt, to be the people of his inheritance, as you now are.* And in Deut 9, Moses speaking to God says, *But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm.* That is, God’s people are His inheritance.

Both property documents (as in Jeremiah 25) and inheritances were typically sealed, and if they became encumbered by some debt or obligation, the price to satisfy that debt was often written on the outside.

Therefore, I submit that this scroll in the hand of God represents the encumbered inheritance of God’s people (the Hebrews) and all the kingdoms of man whom God would redeem from Satan for the price of one sinless man. Of course, John wept bitterly, for when he learned that no one was found worthy to take and open the scroll, it meant that this inheritance would forever become the property of Satan – eternally unredeemable.

But one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to lose its seven seals.” The mighty Lion of Judah was found worthy – the resurrected, glorified Son of God, Jesus Christ. He paid the debt we all owed/owe. It’s wholly a past tense situation for the honest believer. For everyone else, the debt, though paid by Christ, is as yet fully burdensome because of disbelief.

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. When John heard of a mighty Lion, he surely did not expect to see a mutilated Lamb. It would seem that His position -- that is,

the Lamb's -- as being in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures, places Him squarely in the same location as Father God and, of course, this makes sense for He is God the Son. But He also has seven horns and seven eyes -- which signify omnipotence and omniscience -- that are the seven Spirits of God or the manifestation (to every tribe, tongue and nation) of the Holy Spirit to each of the seven churches. So, there on the throne, in effect, you have God the Father, God the Son and God the Spirit in perfect unity.

Then He came and took the scroll out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. You know, He didn't have to take that scroll. He was found worthy to do so, but He didn't have to do it. After all, what it represents is a corrupted, rebellious group. Remember, as we covered in our last lesson, the church, at this point, is already in heaven – because of that, this scroll represents the encumbered inheritance of those who have as yet rejected salvation by grace, who stubbornly hold on to their spiritual indebtedness.

But He took the scroll because He is committed to His people and though it will take a hellish tribulation to bring them all to Him, as lost sheep to their Shepherd, He will do it.

Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. So, we have 28 instances of prayer and worship surrounding the Lamb. Interestingly enough the curtains of the tabernacle which surrounded the myriad types and symbols of Jesus including the altar of incense, the altar of sacrifice and the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies were each 28 cubits long – perhaps another foreshadow of the heavenly realm. By the way, the saints here are not of Roman Catholic origin but rather those who are saved by faith and set apart for God. In the OT prophecy, they represent Hebrew believers like Daniel or father Abraham. In the NT, the word can also refer to gentile believers.

And they sang a new song, saying:

“ You are worthy to take the scroll,

And to open its seals;

For You were slain,

And have redeemed us to God by Your blood

Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,

And have made us kings and priests to our God;

And we shall reign on the earth.”

It's interesting that this tribute is called “a new song”. Seven times, the scriptures tell us to

sing or be filled with a new song. Here in heaven, this continues. The redeemed church sings this new song, and later in chapter fourteen, the 144,000 redeemed of Israel sing their own new song. Now, the lyrics are as ageless as God's plan of redemption for Jesus is the Lamb who was slain from before the foundations of the earth. Nevertheless, it's a new song; this word for new means fresh, and it is indeed fresh praise that comes forth from the hearts of the redeemed. In heaven, this sense of His worthiness is ever fresh and alive. The message doesn't change, it is the sense of its truth and profundity that are ever new.

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, 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 who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”*

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't want to be a 'worship nerd' in heaven. I don't want to be attributing these awesome things to Jesus only because everyone else is. It's not at all that I have any doubt as to His worthiness, I just want to be as sincere as possible. For that reason, I've spent considerable time meditating on this passage and affirming in my own heart why He is worthy of each thing. (See: Power to the Lord, Wisdom's Cry, Wising Up, Muchness, Priceless Love, Pitch Black and His Desire, Our Delight at www.heavenlyminded.com)

Notice how many creatures are around the throne! Angels, elders, and the living ones – more than 100,000,000. The implication is that it's an innumerable host.

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, I heard saying:

*“ Blessing and honor and glory and power
Be to Him who sits on the throne,
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”*

At this point, every other created being chimes in, and together they all praise both Father God and the Lamb.

And so, what we can look forward to is that the curse upon creation will be removed – in Christ. As Paul wrote of Father God, *...having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.* (Eph 1:9,10) Man redeemed, creation restored, reconciliation universal – all in Jesus Christ. *For it pleased the Father that in Him **all the***

*fullness should dwell, and by Him to **reconcile all things** to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Col 1:19,20)*

Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. These four apparently have awesome authority for in confirming the desire of all creation toward the One on the throne and toward the Lamb, they say, “So be it!” and with this the first act, so to speak, in the throne room of heaven concludes. As for this praise, the audience is not the host of creation but the One. ‘So be it’, is in effect, His acceptance. In worshipful appreciation, those who represent all redeemed believers bow before Him. What a glorious, glorious triumph!



Unsealed – Graves and Grace

Revelation 6

Many people like to call the entire Tribulation period the wrath of God and though that's a fair appraisal of the tone and tenor of the times, a more accurate characterization concerning the forthcoming seals in this chapter would be the wages of sin. They will be followed by trumpet warnings from the Lord and finally the bowls of God's wrath. I think you'll see why.

As we progress, you'll note that it is the four living creatures that are associated with the going forth of the four horsemen. This is important, for the living creatures, as we've pointed out before, represent the expression of God's nature in and through Christ. Now the tribulation time, though it afflicts a sin-filled, Christ-rejecting world, is targeted specifically at the Hebrew people. They rejected their own Savior and as Jesus foretold, during the Tribulation, many of them will buy into the idea that the antichrist is their messiah.

So, as these four horsemen go forth, they represent the antitheses of the living creatures or the opposite of Christ. The Hebrew people and the unbelieving world, having rejected Christ's payment for sin -- which we saw in the previous chapter made Him worthy to open these seals -- have only one recourse and that is to 'pay' for their sins themselves; and it won't be pretty. When I say pay for their sins, I don't mean atone for them but rather reap their wages or consequences. You know the Bible says, *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Rom 6:23) It's simply one or the other. Either you accept that Christ paid the debt for your sins or you will pay the penalty yourself. What God is doing in the Tribulation is helping both Jew and gentile to discern exactly that. Let's begin:

Now I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals; and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see." And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

As we can tell from the way the other living creatures are mentioned in the following verses, this creature is indeed the first one and is mentioned as such in chapter four – that is, he is the Lion. His thundering or roaring (both words are related) command can mean either "come" or "go forth" and is augmented with the word "see" or literally to discern.

Though the "going forth" aspect of the words can be applied to the rider, I believe the command as a whole is spoken to both John and the 'target' people on earth, the Hebrews. It is they who need to discern who is going forth. Now, this rider is NOT Jesus Christ. He's riding a

white horse, yes, but that is simply because he is imitating Christ; he is the antichrist. When Jesus does come to conquer, see chapter 19:11-16, He is clearly identified as the One who is “Faithful and True” as opposed to being nameless and is called the “Word of God” as well as the “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. In addition, He comes with the saints, and He conquers with the sword not the bow.

Now this word for bow in the Greek is interesting for it comes from a root meaning to “bring forth” as when a tree brings forth fruit or a pregnant woman brings forth a baby. I believe this is implying that the power of the antichrist to conquer is rooted in his authority to bring forth what is naturally in man – that is, the sinful human nature. By deceptions, lies, signs and wonders, he will exalt that nature and himself as its epitome. We will see shortly how that turns out.

Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The sword He conquers with is the truth of His word. *For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* (Heb 4:12) On the other hand, this ape or imitator who goes forth here will conquer, as we said, with lies and deception. Of him, the scriptures say:

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thes 2:3,4,9-12)

You could say, the antichrist will ‘bring forth’ the natural man which is dead in sin, but to the contrary, Jesus, the true and only Christ, implants His Spirit in us to give us life. Thus, the first living creature and the first rider are polar opposites.

When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come and see.” Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword.

The second living creature is the calf or bullock. This is the animal we find in the law as being used for the peace offering. As such, he typifies the gentle submitted nature of Christ who said, *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest*

unto your souls. (Mat 11:29) It is Jesus who has made peace between God and us as believers through His own blood.

Completely contrary to this, the second rider takes peace from the earth so that people start killing, or more literally butchering, each other. Additionally, it is fascinating that a “great sword” was given to him. The word for this sword in the original language, machaira, is a large curved knife which we would call a scimitar. It is significant that the scimitar has been the symbol of Islam for many centuries. Many Islamic traditions adopted scimitars as attested by their symbolic occurrence such as on the coat of arms of Saudi Arabia. According to legend, Muhammad’s sword was a scimitar that came from his share of the spoils after the Battle of Bakr. Muhammad’s scimitar was named Dhu ‘l-Fiqar which means “cutter”. The curved scimitar was the battle standard for the Muslim armies. It later changed into the crescent and has been the universal symbol of Islam.

For this and other reasons, I’m convinced that Islam will play a very important role in the time of Tribulation.

When He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a black horse, and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.”

The third living creature has the face of a man. Of course, this is also Jesus Who came to us as “the Son of Man”. The invisible God gave Himself a human face so to speak through Jesus. Remember when Jesus said to His disciples, *“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.” Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father;”*

In Jesus, we witnessed the giving nature of God. Throughout His entire ministry, we read of Him giving out, healing, helping, serving, teaching, loving. Yet, contrary to this, the third rider has the opposite nature, which is to take, take, take. He charges effectively a whole day’s wage for a loaf of bread and hoards the delicacies. As a merchant, he oppresses people and reminds us of the other scriptures that tell us the antichrist and his false prophet will use economic control to force people to accept their mark or number thus damning them to hell.

When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see.” So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death,

and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.

The fourth living creature is he who appears as a flying eagle. It is he who is associated with the going forth of the fourth rider. When God's people were delivered from destruction, it was Christ who bore them up on eagle's wings. *And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. (Ex 19:3,4)*

For the LORD's portion is His people;

Jacob is the place of His inheritance....

As an eagle stirs up its nest,

Hovers over its young,

Spreading out its wings, taking them up,

Carrying them on its wings,

So, the LORD alone led him,... (Deut 32:9,11,12a)

Thus, while the Lord, as a flying eagle, delivered His people from eternal slavery and death, this fourth rider delivers his people to eternal slavery and death. And so, we have the last in this series of opposites which go forth unto the earth.

In short, the judgment seems to play out like this -- the antichrist, the rider of the white horse, will go forth deceiving and corrupting men's souls. He will conquer by playing upon men's sin nature. Following him, widespread war will break out as men butcher and destroy each other insanely. Following that, those remaining on earth will experience terrible economic oppression and starvation. Finally, additional massive death will sweep the planet via violence, disease and nature itself. Consequently, earth will be like hell, the antithesis of heaven.

Many people though will discern the dreadful difference and come to faith in Christ because of it – including, specific to this prophecy, many Hebrew people.

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.

For several reasons, I'm inclined to regard these souls as being faithful children of Israel. First, there is an altar involved. This speaks to the altar of incense or the altar of sacrifice both of

which are distinctly Hebrew. Secondly, these souls want vengeance which contrasts with the command of Jesus to His church to “love your enemies” and to forgive. Thirdly, these souls are told to wait on their fellow servants (gentile believers) and on their brethren (fellow Hebrew believers). All of them are martyrs for there will be no ‘secret saints’ during the terrible days of Tribulation.

I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place.

You can’t help but get the impression that large scale nuclear war will take place. Earthquakes, the skies being darkened with nuclear fall-out and fire raining down on earth – the atmosphere itself recedes or literally separates somehow while geologic cataclysms level mountains and islands. Here, man reaps what he has sown, so to speak, in his fetish for weapons of warfare and the environmental damage he’s brought on the earth. Clearly, this all comes about in the midst of, or as a result of, the four horsemen and their powers.

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

Consequently, everyone is freaked out! The judgments coming upon a rebellious mankind are so severe and so widespread that people seem to prefer being buried alive rather than face what they perceive to be the wrath of the Lamb. However, recall that these are people who have held on to their stubborn willful hatred of Christ throughout all these disasters. They refuse to accept their own accountability for what they are experiencing and thus blame all of it on the Lamb – it’s His wrath they say. As a consequence, I don’t accept their perception of these events as being accurate any more than I’d accept their perception of the Lamb. I wouldn’t be surprised if later we learn that this attitude was fostered by the antichrist himself in order to alienate people from Christ.

As a matter of fact, all ten mentions of such wrath specify it as the “wrath of God”, never the Lamb. (See Jn 3:36, Rom 1:18, Col 3:6, Rev 11:18; 14:10,19; 15:1,7; 16:1 and 19:15.) The

work and nature of the Lamb are to deliver from God's wrath (See Rom 5:9 and 1 Thes 5:9).

The only time we see Jesus wrathful is in Rev 19:15 where He is treading out the winepress of His Father's wrath in going to Armageddon.

The irony is that God has given man, up to this point, exactly what he wanted. Rebellious man has always craved a sin filled world. In rejecting the grace of God in Jesus Christ, mankind opted for the continuing burden of sin and death. The wages of sin that man is receiving in the release of these seals is simply a law of creation – you sow, you reap. But additionally, because of the mercy of God, this time is also a wake-up call for man to discern the 180-degree difference between the true expression of the nature of God in Christ and the false expression of Satan and his lies. With the rapture of the church God could simply have wrapped things up, but His love and compassion are actually a part of the unsealing of the scroll. We'll see later that, as always, God knows what He's doing – many, many people will turn to Him during this terrible time.



A Happy Troop of Warriors

Revelation 7

If you enjoy reading novels, you know that a common writing technique is to bounce the readers around between competing storylines or vantage points and thus keep their interest. As effective as that is in keeping a reader engaged, God doesn't share the same concern in recording the scripture for us. Entertainment value is not His priority. Thus, when you have a situation in which He wants to communicate what's happening in say two events that are chronologically overlapping, He seems to simply put them in a sequence that shows the most obvious linkage between cause and effect of the events.

Such is the case, I believe, in considering chapters six and seven of Revelation. The first half or so of this chapter could have preceded chapter six in the scripture and indeed does so I think in actuality, but if it were presented that way, like a modern novel, it would be less likely to be understood as being tightly linked to the second half as a cause and effect. I'll try to explain, and you can decide for yourself.

In the previous chapter, we witnessed the going forth of four riders on horses of four different colors – white, black, red and pale or grey. These four riders or messengers were given power to bring forth the deception and destruction of the antichrist conquest of our planet. Just before that, in chapter four, we read of the rapture of the church and their consequent worship of the Lamb around the throne.

It is important to understand that when the church leaves this planet, God is still committed to providing a witness to the world of His truth. As long as there are those who He knows can be saved, He extends His hand to them, so to speak, in truth, grace and mercy. In fact, this is a principle you can follow throughout history from Adam to Abel to Seth to Enoch to Noah to Shem to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob... all the way to John the Baptist, then Jesus, then the church. God is faithful to provide a witness.

As we will see, this chapter wonderfully explains just how that witness will continue in absence of the mostly gentile church.

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree.

I am personally persuaded that the "four winds of the earth" here refer to the four horsemen of Revelation six after the pattern of Zechariah 6:1-8. In that passage, four chariots with horses of the same colors as in Revelation 6:1-8 go out to all the earth and are called *the "four spirits of*

heaven". *Spirits* in that passage is the translation of the Hebrew word *ruach*, which can also be translated *winds*.

Next, recall that in our studies of Daniel, we saw that the prophetic imagery of earth and sea can portray the land of Israel and the gentile nations. In addition, there are other scriptures which speak of trees as symbolic of men in general. So, this blowing upon the earth, sea or any tree could very well point to the unleashing of the destructive powers of these antichrist messengers upon the whole world of men as well as nature. That is consistent with the situation in Revelation six.

Then 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 granted to harm the earth and the sea,...

This word for harm above means to do wickedly or sinfully to and comes from the word which means one who deals fraudulently with others, who is deceitful. This also, is consistent with the mission of the four riders/messengers of chapter six.

...saying, "Do not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed:

As for this sealing, all we have to do is look at John 6:27, Rom 4:11, 2 Cor 1:22, Eph 1:13 or Eph 4:30 to see that these servants are being filled with the Holy Spirit – indeed, they are getting saved and filled for service to God Almighty. They are in no way related to any cult nor are they representative of the mostly gentile church. That is plain heresy and/or substitutionalism. Don't you believe it! They are who they are – from the tribes of Israel. Now, twelve thousand may be significant for when it is mentioned in other scriptures pertaining to men (see Num 31:5, Judges 21:10 or 2 Sam 17:1) it is speaking of men being sent to do battle.

*of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Asher twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Levi twelve thousand were sealed;*

*of the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Zebulon twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand were sealed;
of the tribe of Benjamin twelve thousand were sealed.*

Now, there are many variations of the list of Jacob's children in the Bible, but I believe that every listing has its purpose. God simply doesn't do things randomly or haphazardly -- your own DNA for example. We may not know enough to understand the purpose of each listing but in this case, I'll submit something for your consideration.

Dan and Ephraim are both missing from this list and it may have something to do with their tribal affiliation with idolatry in the past. In any event, the names as presented here, I think can be understood to give us a message about them and God's plan. Let's examine their names:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Judah	Praise
Reuben	Look at or perceive Son
Gad	Troop or army, from word for invade or attack
Asher	Happy or blessed, from word meaning to go on, advance, make progress
Naphtali	Wrestling or fighting
Manasseh	To forget or causing to forget
Simeon	Heard, from word meaning to hear, listen, obey
Levi	Joined to
Issachar	There is recompense, from word meaning to lift or carry
Zebulon	Exalted or honored
Joseph	Jehovah will add or increase
Benjamin	Son of/at right hand (like Jesus, see Mat 25:34 and 26:64)

Admittedly, taking some modest liberty, I've strung these meanings together:

Praise God! They look at and perceive the Son. As a consequence, a troop or army is formed. Happy and blessed, they advance in order to wrestle with the enemy, to fight the 'good fight'. For God has caused them to forget their past and instead to hear Him, to listen and obey Him. They are no longer separated from Him by sin but joined to Him in faith. Their labor and warfare has recompense, that is, reward, and they will be carried to and honored in heaven for Jehovah will add, by them, sons at His right hand.

This message is completely consistent with the rest of scripture. The 144,000 saved and filled men of Israel will indeed go out like an army of evangelists, doing battle in the spirit and will

lead an enormous number of people to Jesus Christ even as the antichrist is spewing forth his lies like a flood. Even as catastrophe after catastrophe is coming upon the world, these Hebrew 'Billy Grahams' will faithfully proclaim the gospel and thus be God's witness to the world.

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

*" Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom,
Thanksgiving and honor and power and might,
Be to our God forever and ever.
Amen."*

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?"

And I said to him, "Sir, you know."

So, he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

There you have it. As a direct result of the sealing of the 144,000, there appear in heaven an innumerable company of people from all the nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. All of them are in white robes which the Bible says, shows that they are righteous before God – they are saved by the blood of the Lamb during the great tribulation. This mighty harvest moves all the angels of heaven, the church and the four living creatures to fall and worship God intensely.

Therefore, they are before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

As you can see, these redeemed are not treated like second class citizens of heaven. Father God Himself will dwell among them and Jesus will care for them, and as a result they will never hunger or thirst again nor suffer the intense heat of the sun as during the tribulation. They will be the privileged ones who serve the Lord in His dwelling place.

So, what are these tears? They certainly are not tears of regret or condemnation. *This passage does not have the idea that in heaven, we will weep over our wasted life or unconfessed sin, ... That idea may be a powerful, guilt-inducing motivator, but it has nothing to do with the meaning of this verse. "The point is that the grief and tears of the past, speaking of their trials in the tribulation, will be over when they get to heaven . . . God will wipe away all tears resulting from their suffering on earth."* (Guzik/Walvoord)

And so, their suffering is over, the race is run, the prize is in hand, the future is beautiful and has no end, and it was all worth it!

Shots Across the Bow

Revelation 8

As the apostle John observed the four living creatures in the throne room of heaven, he noted, “...they do not rest day or night, saying:

“ *Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God Almighty,
Who was and is and is to come!*”

Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying:

“ *You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.*” (Rev 4:8-11)

It is clear then that heaven is continually filled with the worshipful adoration of God. Nevertheless, chapter eight seems to present a contradiction of sorts:

When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Of course, it could be that this silence interrupts the worship of heaven and is a reverential prelude to what comes next, but that doesn't explain the very specific span of time. Most commentators treat this very lightly, but I'll offer a suggestion that makes sense to me and sheds, perhaps, a new light on the text.

The first four seals that were opened resulted in a going forth of four riders that deceived and destroyed many people on earth. Then, with the fifth and sixth seals we witnessed the souls of the saints waiting upon God's judgment and then a seemingly catastrophic and perhaps nuclear war. It is quite possible that these events will occur in a fairly rapid fashion after the church has been raptured.

In any event, we know as well that during the first three and a half years of the seven year long tribulation, the antichrist will be promoting his devilish propaganda consummating in the placing of the “abomination of desolation” in the new Jewish temple and proclaiming that he is God. Daniel the prophet recorded:

The king (the antichrist) will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time

of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place. He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. (Dan 11:36,37)

And John recorded concerning the antichrist:

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. (Rev 13:5,6)

Now, back to our first verse. "...silence in heaven..." can, and I believe should have been, translated as "...silence by heaven...". In other words, while the antichrist is blaspheming God and saying unheard of things against Him, he will seemingly get away with it. Heaven will be silent for a period of time – a specific period of time – *about half an hour*.

This word for hour is translated as such the majority of the times we find it in the scripture and is the underpinning of our own English word, but it most literally means, "a certain definite time or season fixed by natural law and returning with the revolving year". In other words, it doesn't have to mean a literal hour.

If it is symbolic and we search the Bible in order to interpret it, we can turn to Rev 17:12 which reads:

*The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for **one hour** will receive authority as kings along with the beast.*

Many of you already recognize these ten kings as also being represented in the ten toes of Daniel's prophetic image in chapter two of his book. Here in Rev 17, an angel is explaining to John the meaning of the ten horns on the beast seen in this same chapter. These ten kings will reign with the antichrist during the tribulation time – a seven-year period also known as the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy in Dan 9. Even now, I submit, they are standing in the wings, waiting.

So, if the tribulation is prophetically symbolized as being "one hour", then about half an hour would be about three and a half years or about 42 months. During this time, God lets the AC just mouth off but only until the midst of the "week". In the midst of the week or seven year period, the AC will stand in the temple of God proclaiming that he is God and then, I think, heaven will answer with trumpet judgments that are both disciplines and final warnings to the world saying, "wake up!"

We should also note that this contrasts with the ministry of Christ Who for the same period of time glorified God in all that He said and did. While the antichrist will glorify himself, Jesus was glorified by God. While the AC will "exalt himself", Jesus was meek and humble. To the

ones who do not buy into “the lie” permeating the tribulation time, the “beast” will truly be a 180-degree opposite to the divine ministry of Christ.

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

Trumpets throughout scripture were used as alarms, both for gathering the people together and for war. As such, we can see that each of these trumpet judgments are not yet coming from an ‘angry God’ but are a call to the people of earth to reject the devil’s lies and gather to their true Savior, then as a consequence, to do battle with Satan. God’s wrath is on the way, but these are still warnings.

In addition, I’ll suggest that at this point, our heavenly Father is beginning to fulfill the petitions of those dear saints we saw under the altar in chapter six. There, they prayed, “*How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*” With the trumpets, we will see the judgment they asked for and with the coming bowls, we’ll see the vengeance of wrath.

Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and threw it to the earth. And there were noises, thunderings, lightnings, and an earthquake. This action sets the tone for all that follows – virtually every trumpet and bowl after this will rain something terrible down on earth directly from heaven. The silence is over. As God has said to other wicked men:

Behold, it is written before Me:

*I will not **keep** silence, but will repay—*

Even repay into their bosom—

(Isaiah 65:6)

So, the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound. Here comes heaven’s answer to the pompous boasting, lies, slanders and willful rebellion of depraved mankind:

The first angel sounded: And hail and fire followed, mingled with blood, and they were thrown to the earth. And a third of the trees were burned up, and all green grass was burned up. As these judgments are thrown down from heaven, you Bible readers will flash back to the book of Exodus. There, the seventh judgment upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians

was hail and fire as well. Bible students know that Egypt is often a type or picture of the world in scripture and just as those judgments came upon them so that God's people would be released to worship and be free, so these trumpet judgments are intended to produce a similar outcome spiritually. We may recall as well that despite the warnings of Moses (who **may be** around during the tribulation also), Pharaoh continued to be hard hearted against the Lord; so will the godless in our days also be.

Then the second angel sounded: And something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea, and a third of the sea became blood. And a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. John uses the wording, “**like** a great mountain” so this could represent a large fiery mass such as a meteor. The sea is probably the Mediterranean as that was the sea to the Hebrews – that, or the Red Sea. Based upon the various components of this passage such as living creatures and ships, it doesn't make sense to spiritualize this passage.

Then the third angel sounded: And a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water. The name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the water, because it was made bitter. This again could be a meteor or something God makes uniquely for this situation. Wormwood is a very bitter or poisonous substance.

Then the fourth angel sounded: And a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them were darkened. A third of the day did not shine, and likewise the night. Jesus said: *the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light* (Matthew 24:29). This could be nuclear fallout in the sky or the result of all the burning vegetation. We recently had a lightning storm initiate literally thousands of fires here in northern California and the sky was a mess for weeks. You could hardly breathe at times. As with the other three trumpets, I don't think it makes sense to consider these as symbolic but rather literal events.

Whether that be the case or not, since the limits of the judgments will be so specific, it could be that in smiting a third of the above elements of nature, God will also be sending a message to consider another important “third” such as the third day, the day His Son rose from the dead. Or He could be prompting His people to consider His promise in Zechariah:

*I will bring the one-third through the fire,
Will refine them as silver is refined,*

And test them as gold is tested.

They will call on My name,

And I will answer them.

I will say, 'This is My people';

And each one will say, 'The LORD is my God.' (Zech 13:8,9)

“The first four trumpets also reveal the *mercy* of God’s judgment; these are partial judgments striking only one-third and are meant to warn and lead a rebellious world to repentance before the final curtain. For now, God *s pares* more than He *smites*.” -- Guzik

And I looked, and I heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!" One third of mankind will die in the next three judgments, but again, these woes are words of warning. They are ‘shots across the bow’ so to speak. God is saying, “Stop your insane course! Turn around! Come to Me and I will receive you.” There still seems to be a short time left for the willfully rebellious to repent. To do so will likely mean death but how much better an eternity of life and love in heaven than the torturous isolation and suffering of hell forever!

A Pathetic Insanity

Revelation 9

Just when the people going through the Tribulation think it can't get any worse, it will. It looks like the first four trumpet warnings come one upon the heels of another, but the next three bring with them an entirely new dimension of trouble.

Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit, and smoke arose out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace. So, the sun and the air were darkened because of the smoke of the pit. The fifth trumpet warning from God begins a series of three “woes”. They are separated out possibly because they seem to represent a change from physical catastrophes to spiritually, even demonically driven ones. In this instance, a star which here is referred to as “him” is clearly a symbol for a spiritual being. He is given a key to open the abussos, the bottomless pit. Note that the star is a fallen one – the Greek tense is called the “perfect” and reflects an action that happened and was completed in the past. Now, Jesus said He saw Satan fall from heaven. Without going into too much detail, it is evident that at some time in the past Satan was cast down from his exalted position in heaven and wound up on earth. Some attribute the desolation they say is evident in Genesis 1:2 to this event. It also seems that since he presented himself before God in the book of Job, that he still has access to heaven. That, however, we know will change when, after a conflict with Michael and the holy angels of heaven (see Rev 12:7-9), he and his horde will be banished altogether from the heavenly scene. So, this fallen star could be Satan or it could be another chief demon who was cast out with him.

The bottomless pit is thought to be the deepest, darkest pit of hell. Jude writes that the demonic angels who crossed over from the spiritual realm to the physical to pollute the human race genetically in the days of Noah before the flood are imprisoned in chains of darkness. This could be them. As they emerge, the smoke of their darkness precedes them.

David Guzik notes, “[Their] offence was connected with some kind of *sexual* sin, such as the sexual union between rebellious angelic beings (the *sons of God* in Genesis 6:2) and the human beings (the *daughters of men* in Genesis 6:2). We know that there was some sexual aspect to this sin because Jude tells us in the following verse, Jude 1:7: *as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh.* The words *in a similar manner to these* refers back to the angels of Jude 1:6, and the words *gone after strange flesh* refers to their unnatural sexual union.”

“We know some things about this unnatural sexual union from Genesis 6. We know that this unnatural union produced unnatural offspring. The unnatural union corrupted the genetic pool of mankind, so God had to find Noah, a man *perfect in his generations* (Genesis 6:9) - that is, “pure in his genetics.” This unnatural union prompted an incredibly drastic judgment of God - a global flood, wiping out all of mankind except for eight people.”

Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days' men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. These demonic creatures are apparently given physical bodies like locusts and the power to inflict a seriously painful suffering upon men. They are restricted in their power such that they cannot touch anyone who is saved, i.e. sealed with the seal of God. However, their torturous ways will drive other men insane wherein they will seek to die but will not yet be able to. You may remember from the book of Exodus that the plague of locusts there did not come upon God's people either, only on the Egyptians.

The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon. Notice the word “like” before each description. What we're seeing is not that these creatures have literal gold crowns or men's faces and such, but that they have a resemblance to these things. They have crowns but not of real gold. Their faces resemble men, but their hair is apparently long like a woman's and their teeth appear like lions' fangs. I'm personally persuaded that this gruesome imagery, whether symbolic or literal, can only be demonic.

They are given power for a period of five months which is the same length of time that the judgment flood in Noah's day covered the earth – 150 days – that's no accident. In addition, their leader is named in both Hebrew and Greek as “Destroyer” or “Destruction”. I think we're

given his name in both languages to indicate that he will lead this terrible woe upon both Hebrews and gentiles alike. Only the saved will be spared.

One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things.

Then 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 who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." The golden altar would be the altar of incense if the typology is consistent with the tabernacle and the temple. Each of the four horns on those altars were 'anointed' with the blood of the sacrifice. As such, we may have represented here the prayers of God's people that have been 'covered by the blood' of Christ so to speak. Horns, in the Bible, represent power and so we see that indeed, such prayers are enormously powerful in heaven. How often have we all prayed, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Little may we have known that this series of cataclysms is part of what it would take to fulfill those prayers.

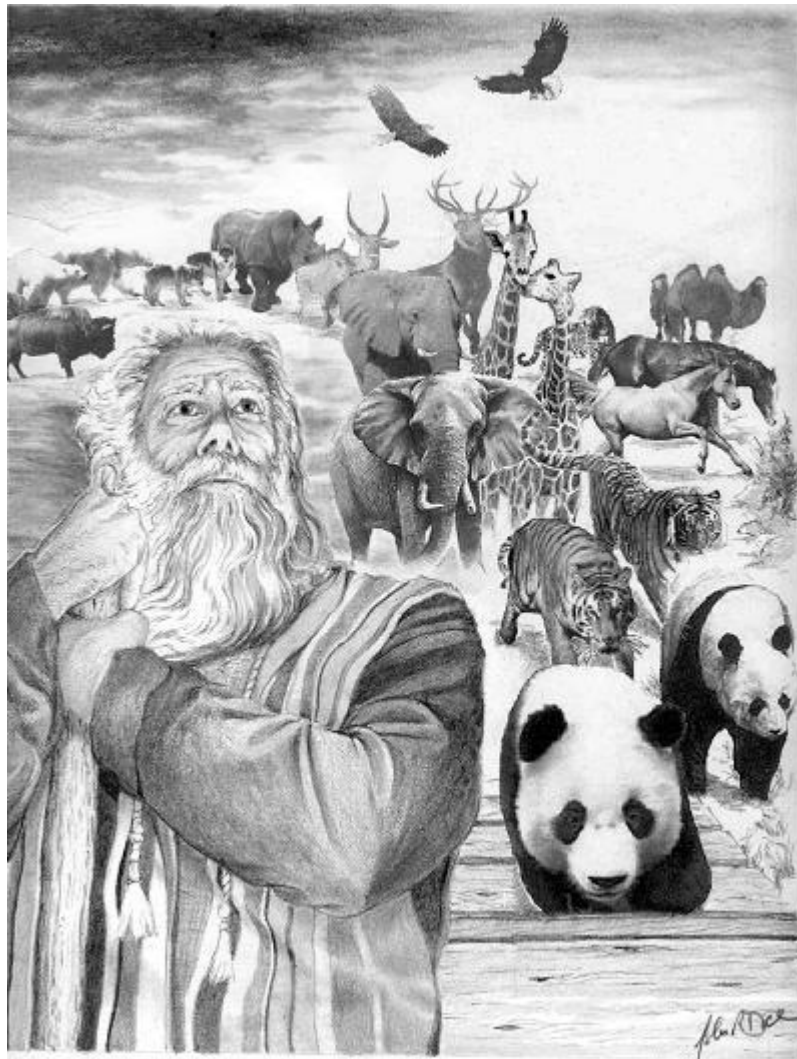
So, the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them. Now, both the US Census Bureau and the UN estimates of world population for the time at which John was writing were at or below this number of 200,000,000. Can you imagine John's eyes blinking in amazement – so much so that he clarifies and confirms, "**I heard** the number of them." That would be like one of us saying that we foresaw an army of some seven to eight billion.

This event alone will result in two to three billion deaths on planet earth. The four angels who are released to do this unimaginable damage were prepared for the specific time. In other words, this is not a reaction to the antichrist's persecution or some last-minute decision to punish mankind. God has known from before the beginning of our creation what would happen to our relationship with Him and what would be necessary to finish His universal reconciliation. It is not 'sweetness and light' so to speak; it is unfathomable catastrophe and destruction.

And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses were like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm. Now, if the colors on the breastplates of these soldiers are representative of national colors, they may be from Ecuador or Romania (I'm kidding) or we

may think of China (Red flag), the UN, NATO, EU or WEU (Blue flags) and the Vatican (Yellow and White flag). Clearly, that is speculation but each of these entities does seem to have a part to play in the final days. We should note that their means of transportation is also their means of destruction and to John they appeared hideous.

But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. This boggles the mind, doesn't it? Nevertheless, it reveals the nature of evil. The demons knew who Christ was when He came to save us and yet they only sought to expose Him, retreat from His presence or to incite the people to kill Him. In like manner, rebellious mankind is, at this point, unable to repent. They cannot think rationally or see clearly. The disease of sin has fully engulfed them. God is demonstrating this powerful lesson to the whole universe of concerned beings. Evil is not even a 'valid alternative' to Good; it is a pathetic insanity.



Wrapping Up!

Revelation 10

This chapter is a huge ‘milestone’ in the Revelation. As we’ve seen, every chapter is packed with action and amazing things. But, even as (along with the apostle John) our heads are spinning from it all, this portion should grab our attention afresh.

Chronologically, we are ending up the trumpet warnings to a sinful, rebellious world and about to enter fully into the period of God’s wrathful bowl judgments. How long these bowl judgments will last is uncertain, but this prelude is, in a very important way, both the end and the beginning.

John the Baptist was the end of the Old Testament while Jesus’ earthly ministry and sacrifice presented a new beginning (which at the same time was a fulfillment of what was spoken before by God to man). In a similar manner, the apostle John is going to receive in this chapter a message that signifies the end of an even greater epic. It, too, will lead into an even more magnificent work of Christ. Let’s begin:

I saw still another mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. And a rainbow was on his head, his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire. With the way John words this, “still another”, you sense his awe at all these powerful beings engaged in this ‘final act’, so to speak. Though there is imagery here to remind us of Christ, I’m inclined to see this being as what it says he is – a mighty angel. When we are presented with Jesus in other places in the book of Revelation, it is clear that it is Him, whether He’s the Lion or the Lamb or the Word of God or the King of Kings, etc. There’s no ambiguity of significance. The word “another” also indicates quite clearly that this is a mighty angel “like the others”. The fact that he does share likeness with the risen Christ speaks to our own expectations as believers for the promise of God is:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom 8:28,29)

He had a little book open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roars. In his hand is a scroll or book, and it is distinguished as being both little and open. In the Greek, it is specifically the diminutive of the word used for the sealed scroll which the Lamb previously took and opened, so it is not one and

the same. In almost all instances in the Bible though, both the diminutive and the root word refer to the Word of God.

Now, as he stands with his right foot on the sea and left foot on the land, we recall the imagery of Daniel in which we saw the representations of the gentile nations and the land of Israel respectively. With this in mind, it is probable that the message of this ‘little book’ speaks to both groups of people.

When a lion roars, those within earshot cannot ignore it. It startles and grips your attention. The Greek word for roar is related to the one for thunder and we know how thunder can have the same effect.

When he cried out, seven thunders uttered their voices. When God dealt with a hard-hearted Pharaoh, He used thunder together with hail and fire. A shocked king told Moses, “*Entreat the LORD, that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail, and I will let you go...*” to which Moses replied, “*...the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that you may know how that the earth is the LORD'S.*” (Exo 9) It is the first mention of thunder in the scripture and is linked to God’s judgment.

The first time, God spoke to a hard-hearted Israel, it was also with thunder:
And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that were in the camp trembled. (Ex 19)

Job records:
Have you an arm like God? or can you thunder with a voice like Him? (Job 40)

And the Psalms say:
The LORD also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hail and coals of fire. (Psa 18)

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thunders: the LORD is upon many waters. (Psa 29)

These and other scriptures lead us to understand that with the seven thunders God is again speaking to a rebellious, hard-hearted world, both Hebrew and gentile. I believe these seven thunders are the seven Spirits of God we saw in chapters one, three, four and five. Cumulatively, they are the Holy Spirit of God.

Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them.” There are two different views on this event, and both have merit.

First, keeping in mind that nothing happens by accident here, we know that the seven trumpets were indeed intended to sound, but their message is sealed. From this, we can deduce that God wants us to know that there is more to come, more that we aren't yet meant to know. He's not 'teasing' us with a mystery – that's not His way. He simply wants us to know to expect more.

Second, and perhaps more obvious, the seven Spirits are henceforth silent. You could say that from this point on during the Tribulation, the Holy Spirit is done speaking to the rebellious world. He thunders one last time in complete unison and it's over. It is sealed and unrecorded. He was 'silent' as well for 100's of years before Christ's first coming up until John the Baptist. His ministry to protect and preserve the redeemed remnant of Israel will continue. There will be "thunderings" in future chapters, but they are not specific to these Spirits.

In fulfillment of Christ's prophecy, "*And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*" (Mat 24:14) one last time an angel will circle the planet with the gospel message (later in chapter fourteen), but there is no indication that anyone beyond this point gets saved.

This parallels, as Jesus said it would, the days of Noah, for Noah, by the power of God's Spirit, preached to a rebellious world up until God said, "Come into the ark." As such, he foreshadowed the redeemed remnant of Israel who will be called out of "Babylon" (see Rev 18:4) into a wilderness and be preserved in the midst of God's horrendous worldwide judgment.

The angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised up his hand to heaven and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are in it, the earth and the things that are in it, and the sea and the things that are in it, that there should be delay no longer, but in the days of the sounding of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, the mystery of God would be finished, as He declared to His servants the prophets. It's a wrap. No more delay. In these days in which the seventh trumpet angel is about to sound, the mystery of God will be complete. By the wording above, we are to understand that these "days" include some events that are about to transpire in the next few chapters, but what is this mystery?

Let's look at what the scripture tells us in the following four passages:

*And He [Jesus] said unto them [His disciples], Unto you it is given to know the **mystery** of the kingdom of God: (Mk 4:11)*

*...by revelation He made known to me the **mystery** ...which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power.*

*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the **mystery**, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ. (Eph 3)*

*Even the **mystery** which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints: (Col 1:26)*

*And without controversy great is the **mystery** of godliness:*

God was manifested in the flesh,

Justified in the Spirit,

Seen by angels,

Preached among the Gentiles,

Believed on in the world,

***Received up in glory.** (1 Tim 3:16)*

The mystery of God is His redemption of mankind, both Hebrew and gentile. All whom He knew, from before the beginning of the world, who would receive His gracious salvation are about to be taken to safety either in heaven or in an earthly wilderness. No more thunders speaking to a devil-controlled world – after these days, there will only be wrathful outpourings.

Then the voice which I heard from heaven spoke to me again and said, “Go, take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the earth.”

So, I went to the angel and said to him, “Give me the little book.”

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

Then I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. But when I had eaten it, my stomach became bitter. And he said to me, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings.” I’m inclined to believe that this little book is the very book we are studying. This is for several reasons:

- It is given to and consumed by John, and it is sent by an angel. This coincides with how he opens the book in chapter one:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, (Rev 1:1)

- It is open, not sealed. This coincides with how the book ends:

And he said to me, “Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. (Rev 22:10)

- “Little book” comes from the word that is used nearly always for a book of the scriptures.

- As with other scriptures about the Word of God, it is sweet to the taste:

How sweet are thy words unto my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! (Psa 119:103)

More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. (Psa 19:10)

Moreover, he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So, I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness. (Eze 3:1-3)

- But it is bitter inwardly. The first use of bitter in the scriptures is with Esau when he wept bitterly because he had forever lost the blessing.

Hebrews records:

For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears. (Heb 12:17)

The awesome promises of heaven which we read about in Revelation are indeed sweet but the outpourings that fall upon a world for which no place of repentance is found is terribly bitter.

Finally, John is told that he must prophecy again, and this word for “again” is quite specific – it means a repetition of what has gone before. It is not simply a continuation but a repetition of something which has preceded.

Now, here’s a thought – the chapter that immediately follows this will deal with two prophets that witness to the world during the tribulation. Names like Moses, Elijah and Enoch are most often considered when this event is presented, but it **may be** that one of those two is John.

- First, one of the powers of the two prophets will be to destroy their adversaries with fire from their mouths. Recall, it was John and his brother James who wanted to call down fire from heaven to devour Jesus’ adversaries in Luke 9.
- Second, they are specifically given power to prophesy and John, in this Rev 10 passage is given the little book and told that he must prophecy **again**.
- Third, John is told that his prophesying will be to *peoples, nations, tongues, and kings* and in the next chapter, after the two witnesses are killed, it is the *peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations* who celebrate.
- Fourth, in Revelation 4, John is told to “Come up here.” In like manner, after three and a half days of lying dead in the street, these two prophets are resurrected and told to, “Come up here.” Of course, we cannot say for certain, but we will know for sure someday soon. On the near horizon, God’s mighty angel will proclaim, “No more delay!” Praise God!

His Reign and Wrath

Revelation 11

Chapter eleven of the Revelation begins a critical bridge from the era in which God's mystery accomplished the salvation of mankind, by the working of His Spirit and the testimony of His saints, unto the time of the full measure of God's wrath. Previously, we read that in the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the mystery will be complete. God uses chapters 11 through 14 to wrap up for us several key elements that, as a consequence, conclude 'in these days of the seventh trumpet'.

Here, in chapter eleven, we deal with the first four -- we see the temple, the city, the testimony and the ark.

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, "Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there." John is given a measuring device that resembles a shepherd's staff or rod. The word for rod, by the way, comes from the word "to smite".

He is told to measure three things, the temple, the altar and those who worship there. The temple is not the same one Ezekiel was told to measure for that is certainly the millennial temple. This is the temple that we believe the antichrist will enable the Hebrews to build. The altar is probably referring to the altar of sacrifice where the burnt offerings will once again be made. The people who worship there are God's people -- blind, stubborn and without understanding -- but nevertheless, His people. These are the same people who will be inclined to believe that the antichrist is their messiah. They are the epitome of delusional rebellion against God. They, more than anyone, are in desperate need of a waking up. They need someone to jolt them, to speak the truth whether they like it or not.

This angel may be the same one who gave John the little book in the previous chapter or he may be another, but I like the simple statement "the angel stood" for it indicates that what he's directing the apostle to do is important. You might say that this is the last boundary God will establish on the planet before His wrath. In the beginning, He walked with Adam in the garden for the earth was new and 'clean'; but when man sinned, He withdrew to a more distant posture. Later, He chose Abram and 'traveled' with him, leading him to the promised land. After this, He came to Moses and freed the children of Israel from bondage and brought them to this same land which He reserved for Himself giving them specific boundaries. When they rebelled against Him, He ultimately withdrew, and they went into captivity.

Now, in measuring the tribulation temple, it's like the last 'line in the sand'. It is the last boundary of God's patience. He even allows the outer court to be given away.

"But leave out the court, which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months." Some archeologists have stated that the original placement of the temple on the mount could actually accommodate the Muslim mosque of Omar if the temple compound did not include the former Court of the Gentiles. This may be what the angel is referring to when he tells John not to measure it.

Satan first polluted the paradise of God. He then, in the days of Noah, polluted the earth including man's own gene pool. After the flood, he polluted man's religion (which we'll get to in chapter 17). After God gave it to the Hebrews, Satan polluted the promised land, and he will thence pollute the holy city. His people will trample it underfoot for three and a half years. Now, you might think, 'this is not the only time Jerusalem has been trodden under foot' and you'd be right. This, however, is not mere destruction as was brought to her by the Babylonians and Romans (under God's direction). This is even more than that – this is the desecration of Satan attempting to take and convert what is God's to become his own. It is absolute pollution.

Thus, along with the temple, it will be the final toxic stench, the 'last straw', the end.

And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth." I'm inclined to believe that this period of time will cover most of the last half of the tribulation. Some people think these two will be Moses and Elijah based upon the up-coming signs they'll perform. Others say Enoch will be one of them based upon the fact that he and Elijah were the only two people who haven't died a natural death. In one of our previous letters, I suggested that John the Apostle may be included. Regardless, these two aren't stand-ins or last-minute appointees. They have been prepared for this duty. They have been standing in the presence of God which is an enormous honor.

These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. We have to go back to Zechariah chapter four to learn about these olive trees. There, the prophet was given a vision including them. Here's what he inquired and learned:

Then I [Zechariah] answered and said to him [the angel], "What are these two olive trees—at the right of the lampstand and at its left?" And I further answered and said to him, "What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?"

Then he answered me and said, "Do you not know what these are?"

And I said, "No, my lord."

So, he said, "These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth."
(Zech 4:11-14)

The two anointed ones in Hebrew is literally the "two sons of oil". They are in such close association with the oil, that is, the Holy Spirit, they are the 'sons of oil'.

Now, earlier in the Revelation, we learned of seven lampstands before Jesus which He said were the seven churches. You see, lampstands are for shining forth light. The light the churches are supposed to shine forth is the truth of the gospel. As both the olive trees and the lampstands, these two tribulation witnesses are constantly supplied with oil and constantly displaying the light.

You may recall that it was James and John who approached Jesus (with their mother) and wanted to be those who would be on the right hand and on the left of Jesus in His kingdom:

They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory."

But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?"

They said to Him, "We are able."

So Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink the cup that I drink, and with the baptism I am baptized with you will be baptized; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared." (Mark 10:37-40)

The cup Jesus spoke of is His obedience to God's will leading all the way to the cross. His baptism is that of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said both of these disciples would know the 'drinking and dunking' so to speak. But He also said that they didn't have a clue about what they were asking for.

Like Jesus, His two witnesses will be totally anointed by the Holy Spirit and will be faithful in their ministry unto death.

Now, in Zechariah's vision, there was only one lampstand whereas in John's vision there are two. I suggest that as the seven churches in Revelation chapter one are lampstands, it would seem that the lampstands are representative of God's witness to the dark world. It could be that the OT prophet saw only one because at the time there was only one corporate witness – the Hebrew people. John may have seen two because of the additional witness to the world of the mostly gentile church. Could it be that one of these two tribulation witnesses will represent the Hebrew people and the other, the church? We'll see.

And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. The word for harm here is “to act unjustly or wickedly, to sin” as well as “to hurt”. Note also that word “wants”. That means if anyone even intends or seriously considers acting unjustly or wickedly towards these two, he’s going to ‘crash and burn’. Like Jesus, they will evidently have such discernment that they will be able to know what others are thinking. The word for fire is simply fire -- makes sense since they are lampstands.

These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. Although their powers resemble those of Moses and Elijah, I think it is more relevant that they are able to plague the earth “as often as they desire”. It seems that they are given a ‘free hand’ in issuing these plagues and that would be more in line with the time of God’s wrath. That is, their testimonies will challenge the antichrist’s claim to fame – that he is god. People with any sense will wonder, ‘If so-and-so says he’s god, why can’t he stop these two guys from wreaking havoc on us??’ Unfortunately, we’ll see that the whole world will have lost its senses.

When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. For three and a half years, these two witnesses will plague the world of Satan-worshipping idiots, perhaps in defense of the remnant of saved Hebrews still on the planet. But when you’re done, you’re done. And you’re done when you’ve finished your testimony.

When they finish, a senior demon (perhaps Satan) is allowed to kill their bodies and they will lie in the street of Jerusalem. Note that the city is called Sodom and Egypt. Sodom was the place of absolute perversion, and Egypt was the place of captivity. This means that Jerusalem has become the prison pit of perversity under Satan. How tragic and ironic that is when you see what comes next:

Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow their dead bodies to be put into graves. And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. Senseless people around the world will celebrate that their ‘god’ has finally overcome and liquidated the two menaces. They will gloat

as their bodies lie unceremoniously in the street. They will party and presume they have proven the resilience and ultimate power of man. But just as the band really starts getting hot...

Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them. Like Jesus, they are resurrected and ascend into heaven. Before the cameras can cut to commercial, they stand up on their feet and rise into the clouds. As a result, knees are knocking hard in Jerusalem and around the world.

The second woe is past. Behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Recall that the second woe is coincident with the sixth trumpet warning from God. It began with the death of a third of mankind by an enormous demonically empowered army. It included the conclusion of the mystery of God and the powerful testimony of the two witnesses. The last woe will be the last trumpet which is about to sound.

Don't get confused by the sequence of events or chronology. The actual end of the second woe does not have to precede the beginning of the third. God simply describes it in its entirety before moving on to the next. As a fine but important point of grammar, that word for "past" is in the aorist tense in the Greek. The aorist tense is characterized by its emphasis on punctiliar action; that is, the concept of the verb is considered without regard for past, present, or future time.

Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

*" We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty,
The One who is and who was and who is to come,
Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.
The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come,
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints,
And those who fear Your name, small and great,
And should destroy those who destroy the earth."*

Here is the point at which the Almighty, having taken power or authority over mankind because of the sacrifice on Calvary, begins to exercise His right to reign. You may have thought

this would begin after the coming battle of Armageddon, but actually His rule over our desperate planet begins here in heaven at the sound of the seventh trumpet. Notice that the acclamation is not that the world has become His but rather that the kingdoms of this world have become His. This is what we witnessed as the Lamb took possession of the sealed scroll in chapter five. The world itself already belongs to Him.

With this trumpet the seven bowls of God's wrath will be poured out. And, God is ready to judge the dead with a focus upon rewarding His servants, the prophets and the saints (Hebrew believers), as well as the gentile believers – those who fear Your name, small and great. Finally, if the typology follows that of the prophet Daniel, He is ready to destroy those who destroy His special land – Israel.

Then the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail. We noted earlier that as Satan polluted the garden of Eden, the land of Israel, the city of Jerusalem and finally the temple, there remained only one last place that displayed the fellowship of God with man, one place that recognized the Creator's work to save us and love us, just one 'paradise' left. That is the Ark of the Covenant. Here we see that God has removed it to heaven. Perhaps this is the spiritual original of which the earthly was a copy. Regardless, by displaying it at this point, God is manifesting that He has preserved the symbol of His perfect redeemed relationship with us. Satan cannot spoil it.

The ark was where the High Priest alone could worship during the Old Testament and that only on the day of Atonement. It rested within the Holy of Holies surrounded by a thick curtain. The ark in the days of David, you recall, was thought to be the very presence of God but it was really a hugely important symbol of a future event.

The ark was a box, covered with gold which contained three things – the tablets of the Ten Commandments, the rod of Aaron which budded miraculously and a container of manna. All three of these things clearly point to Jesus Christ who fulfilled perfectly God's law, rose miraculously from the dead to new life, Who also descended from heaven, like manna, and Whose 'body' provided our nourishment during the wilderness wanderings of this earthly life.

On top of the ark were two cherubim facing each other. It was at that specific place that Moses spoke to God. It was called the Mercy Seat. That's where God met with man. It pictured the very same thing in a garden tomb. There, where they laid the body of our crucified Lord, dear Mary Magdalene came to worship and pray and what did she find? Two angels, one at the head and one at the feet of where the Lord had lain – for He had risen! This was the fulfillment of the

Mercy Seat – the real deal. In Jesus Christ, God met with man and re-established His gracious loving relationship with us.

Note finally, that in this last verse of our chapter it says that this wonderful symbol of God's mercy and love is **seen** in His temple. That's because, with Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, the way is open. There is no more veil of separation. Those who believe may come freely into fellowship with the Almighty God.

War in Heaven, War on Earth

Revelation 12

The seventh trumpet has just sounded and in response the elders representing all the redeemed worship God and proclaim that His reign over the kingdoms of man has begun. The very first thing we see after this is the ark of the covenant in the heavenly temple. This can tell us that the most important aspect of the Lord's reign over man is what is symbolized by the ark – man's gracious redemption in Christ, the empty tomb, the communion of God with man, etc. The King's first act is that which is most pressing upon His mind. Even as He is about to pour His wrath upon a reprobate planet, He is mindful of His covenant with the redeemed.

In this chapter and the following two, we are given both background and insight into the consummation of several tumultuous events raging upon earth and in heaven. The seventh trumpet signals their climax and conclusion. Exactly when they began, we are not told, but this is where they wind up because from this point on, the devil's destruction and delusion are being dealt with – the King has taken His authority over man's kingdoms and has begun to reign.

Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. To understand who this woman is, we must turn to the book of Genesis, to the second prophetic dream of Joseph when he was still with his family in Canaan. In chapter 37, it is recorded, Then he dreamed still another dream and told it to his brothers, and said, "Look, I have dreamed another dream. And this time, the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me." So he told it to his father and his brothers; and his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed: Shall your mother and I and your brothers indeed come to bow down to the earth before you?"

Jacob recognized the symbols of Joseph's dream as representing the family of Israel. Thus, this woman would likewise represent this same family who is often referred to in scripture as Father God's wife. This is not Mary the mother of Jesus; remember, John starts off saying that this is a sign. However, she is certainly a part of the group.

God, through His people, His wife, has brought forth a Child – Jesus, His Son.

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. We'll see momentarily that this dragon is Satan. Again, John says this is a sign so what we're looking at is a picture of the nature of this horrible

being. I'll suggest that as the serpents in the wilderness which bit the Hebrews and killed them were fiery, so is devil. Those serpents were symbolic of sin, and it was only when the victims turned their attention to the bronze serpent on the pole (the image of Christ on the cross) that they would be healed. Satan is the fullness of this plague; he is the epitome of sin. He is red because he is stained with the blood of all mankind to whom he has brought delusion, destruction and death.

In addition, he has seven heads (with seven diadems) and ten horns. There will ultimately be seven devilish empires that reign over the Hebrews – The Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Greeks, the Romans and the antichrist. Recall from our studies in Daniel chapter seven that these ten horns are those ten kings that will turn their kingdoms over to the antichrist and reign with him during the tribulation. This sign shows us that it is the devil who has been allowed by God to abusively reign over them at certain times.

His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. We know from Job that the stars are pictures of the angelic host. Herein, we see that in his rebellion against God, he drew a third of the angels of heaven into his sinful ways and cast them down. The Greek word here for “threw” is interesting because it means “to throw or let go of a thing without caring where it falls”. Satan has loyalty to no one. He doesn't care about those he perverts whether it's men or angels. His demons ended up on earth as a base of operations so to speak but, along with the dragon, have had access to the heavens as we'll soon see.

And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. Perhaps, you remember from the gospel accounts of Christ's birth how that Herod wanted to know the moment He was born so that he could slay Him.

She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. In this, we see clearly that the male Child is Jesus Christ. Psalm 2 and Revelation 19 both show that He will use this rod of iron.

Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days.

Flashing forward from the resurrection of Jesus and His ascension to God's throne until the time of the tribulation, here, the redeemed of Israel flee into the wilderness where God will provide for them for three and a half years. This will likely start at the mid point of the tribulation when

the antichrist places the abomination of desolation in the temple, declares that he is god and begins to radically persecute “the woman”.

We can get some additional insight into this event from the book of Mark. In chapter 13, His disciples asked Jesus about the sign of His second coming and part of His answer was:

For in those days there will be tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of creation which God created until this time, nor ever shall be.

But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels and gather together His elect (chosen ones) from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven. (Mark 13:19,24-27)

This says that when Jesus returns in glory at the conclusion of the tribulation, He will gather together His faithful ones who are both in heaven (the faithful from throughout the ages, the church who was raptured prior to the tribulation, those who got saved and were martyred during the tribulation) and on earth. But keep in mind that this is prophecy directed at the Hebrews. We must be careful that we don't make the mental 'slip' of letting the disastrous doctrine of substitutionalism slither in. When we keep our focus primarily upon Israel, prophecy makes much more sense.

With that in mind, consider that phrase “farthest part of earth”. What does the “earth” (ge in the Greek) usually refer to in prophecy? It is the same symbolism as in the book of Daniel – it's Israel. At the end of the tribulation, the only believers that will be left on earth will be the ‘remnant’ of Israel.

Now we just learned that these Hebrews will be taken to their wilderness shelter on eagle's wings. Letting the Bible ‘interpret itself’, we are reminded of God's words to the children of Israel under Moses' leadership:

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

Where were they brought? Into the wilderness of Sinai where God miraculously cared for them. Lo and behold, the farthest part of the nation of Israel today includes much of this same wilderness. I'll suggest that it will be somewhere in this area that God will again shelter and miraculously care for His people through the worst times of the tribulation.

And war broke out in heaven: Michael and his angels fought with the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So, the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who

deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. Now it would appear from scripture that Satan was fallen from his lofty position in heaven long before this for he was clearly filled with sin and engaged with destroying man even back at the beginning in the garden of Eden. Job records that Satan came before God and when asked about his activities, said that he had been walking to and fro on the earth. So, although this planet became his perdition home, he has still had “a place” in or access to heaven and has used it to continue his crimes against God and all creation. But now that ends. He and his demonic horde are defeated by the archangel Michael and his army of angels once and for all, and as a result, they are cast to the earth, the implication being that they are confined here as well. Satan is no match for Michael let alone Jesus. Jude records that they also struggled over the body of Moses.

There are actually four times in the Bible that Satan falls:

- From glorified to profane (Eze 28:14-16)
- From having access to heaven (Job 1:12, Zech 3:1) to restriction to the earth (Rev 12)
- From the earth to bondage in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years (Rev 20)
- From the pit to the lake of fire (Rev 20)

This battle occurs at the mid-point of the seven-year period, as described by Daniel. *At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered.* (Dan 12:1)

Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, “Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. The word for devil is derived from the verb which means defaming or slandering. Finally, the incessant accusations are silenced. You’d think that Satan would have given up after realizing his demise at Calvary. But, he’s not rational, he is completely insane. Consumed by the fire of sin, he just doesn’t get it, and consequently, he persists defaming you and me. Day and night, he has continued; on and on and on.

And we give him plenty of ammunition, don’t we? But the issue was forever settled at the cross. Satan’s rambling accusations ever since are only an annoyance to the Lord and the heavenly host. But unfortunately, that’s not always the case on planet earth. We and the world too often take heed to his slandering while God calls on believers to overcome.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. There are three components to our victory over Satan and his lies –

- through faith in the finished work of the cross, that is, the blood of the Lamb
- through the honest recollection of God’s faithfulness in their lives, that is, their testimonies
- through the sincere desire for heaven, for the promised new life in eternity, so much so that death is only the doorway to the Lord’s embrace.

Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Heaven is elated, but...

Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time. This is the third and final woe – not only will the following period be one of God’s wrath but also the devil’s. People left on earth who are not among the protected remnant of Israel are going to get it from both sides so to speak. There’ll be no where to turn. And Satan knows the Word; he realizes that his time is short. ‘If I’m going down, I’m gonna take you all with me,’ is his attitude.

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. Again, this is midway into the tribulation. It is why Jesus said to the Jews, *Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let him who is on the housetop not go down to take anything out of his house. And let him who is in the field not go back to get his clothes. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! And pray that your flight may not be in winter or on the Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.* (Mat 24:15-21)

Whenever we read of eagle’s wings, it speaks of God’s miraculous provision for His people. In Egypt, He split the Red Sea and carried them “on eagle’s wings” throughout their wilderness wanderings. (Deut 32:11) No one knows for sure where this last days hiding place is and that’s a good thing. When the time comes, they will know where to go. It is a place that God has reserved and prepared.

At the end of the tribulation, when Christ returns with his saints, it looks like He will provide a way for the last of the remnant who have apparently stuck it out in Jerusalem to get to the safety of this place. Zechariah wrote:

And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives,

Which faces Jerusalem on the east.

And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two,

From east to west,

Making a very large valley;

Half of the mountain shall move toward the north

And half of it toward the south.

Then you shall flee through My mountain valley,

For the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. (Zech 14:4,5)

Azal is a Hebrew name which means “a place He has reserved”. I’m inclined to believe that it will be the same place the “woman” has been taken to and nourished for the three and a half years.

So, the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Unlike the torrents of living water that spring forth from the innermost part of the sincere believer, this unholy quaff will come out of the mouth of the serpent. As such it surely pictures a flood of lies and deceit. People will believe the most outrageous lies.

We are also reminded of the days of Noah and the literal flood that swept the world. Like Noah and his family, the remnant of Hebrew believers will find safety in a place prepared for them.

As with other passages we’ve studied in Revelation and in Daniel, “the earth” likely pictures the land of Israel. It could be that the believers who remain in Jerusalem, perhaps as a resistance to the rule of the AC, counter the lies of the dragon with their own truth. It could be that the rest of the Hebrews in Israel, though unsaved, remain loyal to their brethren and effectively counteract the lies spewing forth from the one they thought was their messiah.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. Just as Pharaoh of old was frustrated in his attempts to crush the Hebrew nation, so a last days pharaoh (under the dragon’s control) will be “provoked to rage”. While the same types of judgments are

raining down on him and planet earth as did upon ancient Egypt, he will, over the next three and a half years or so, seek to destroy any and all who believe both Hebrew and gentile.

This protégé of the dragon is the “son of perdition” also known as “the beast” and we’ll learn more about him in the next chapter.

He's Just a Man

Revelation 13

There are two entities in this chapter which God wants us to know about. They are both termed beasts as descriptors of their nature. From the time he knew of our creation, Satan has desired to destroy mankind for we were made in the image of God. We are triune beings composed of spirit, soul and flesh. As such we are representative of the triune 'nature' of the Lord – Father, Son and Spirit.

The devil's own unholy trinity is displayed in this chapter as the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. We can also look at them as the counterpoints (though NOT equals) to Jesus and John the Baptist. In either case, we're dealing with evil counterfeits and herein, God will expose them, for their end is an eternal lake of fire.

Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sands of the sea. John's position upon these sands may be a reminder that the focus of this terrible time is indeed upon those people. The sea, as we covered in other chapters, is representative of the gentile nations as it is in Daniel's prophecies as well.

Now previously, we witnessed a dragon having a similar description, but this creature, though similar, is distinct. This "beast" arises out of the sea or the gentile nations. Having seven heads and ten horns reminds us of the dragon and it should for we will learn soon that it is the dragon (Satan) who gives this beast his power. As with the dragon, the seven heads point to the seven empires that have ruled or will rule over the Hebrews – the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Medo-Persians, the Romans and the antichrist. Each of these kingdoms were antichrist (that is, in place of Christ) in the sense that the true ruler of the Hebrews is Jesus Christ. Thus, the seven heads tell us that the antichrist will carry on the tradition of devilish oppression over God's people regardless of his initial promises.

The beast also has ten horns and I'm convinced they are upon one head – the last one. They are the ten kings (note the crowns) who will give their power to the beast and will rule with him during the tribulation period. (See also Dan 7:20-24)

There is also a blasphemous name upon the heads. We don't know for certain what name this is, but we do know that it is repugnant to God. In the Bible, names are frequently symbolic of

the nature of the person or thing. From this, it is clear that all the antichrist kingdoms that have ruled over His people throughout history have been blasphemous to God.

Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like the feet of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority. In our lesson from Daniel seven, we learned that the imagery of the leopard, the bear and the lion probably refer to entities contemporary with the beast, specifically, the United Nations, Russia and the ‘de-winged’ US. Therein, I suggested that the removal of the wings from the lion could refer to the rapture of the church.

If that is the case, the quartet seen in Dan 7 will likely, after the rapture, coalesce into some kind of conglomerate power with the antichrist in charge. As we consider this beast, we know it is a man, but it is also, in a sense, his kingdom. It is like a leopard (the UN) indicating a global or at the very least a multinational scope of power. His feet or means of transportation is like a bear (Russia) and this could refer to Russia’s enormous supply of oil and gas which Europe is increasingly dependent upon. His mouth is like that of a lion. This could mean that the beast is loud and confident and/or that he, as the ‘mouthpiece’ of his empire, is from the country which the de-winged lion represents.

Satan gives him his power, his throne and great authority. Now, it is only by God’s permission that Satan has ever done this throughout history with any kingdom, but when he (the devil) tried to tempt Jesus in the wilderness, one of his claims was that all the kingdoms of man had been given to him and he in turn gave them to whomever he wished. Jesus did not contest this.

Power is the word “dunamis” and means the power resident within someone; throne is the word “tronos” and means his position, in this case at the ‘top of the food chain’ so to speak; great authority is “megas exousia” and means his great ruling authority. It implies that, like Nebuchadnezzar, he may have absolute dictatorial power, ultimately not being subject to any law but his own.

And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded and his deadly wound was healed. And all the world marveled and followed the beast. That little “as if” could mean that it is all an act. In any event, recall that the heads represent the myriad kingdoms that have each risen up out of the sea, (that is, the gentiles) over the sand of the sea, Abraham’s descendants. This beast embodies all seven; that is, he is of the same spirit. Here, one of the heads has previously suffered a mortal wound. I’ll suggest that this could picture that the antichrist and/or his empire itself, the last head, will suffer a mortal blow somehow and yet arise ‘from the ashes’. Remember that according to Daniel’s vision of Dan 2, the Hebrew people will be, at this time,

jointly ruling over Jerusalem with the revived Roman empire (the clay mixed with the iron). As such, the antichrist at the top of this revived entity will have reason to defend Israel or at least to appear to do so.

This has intrigued me for the first word for wounded means “slaughtered, butchered, put to death by violence”. It is not a wounding that was accidental or just happened to become life threatening. It is a slaughtering, violent, intentional thing. With this in mind, I’ve often wondered if the antichrist might somehow maneuver to take credit for the miraculous deliverance that God will provide Israel when Russia and her Muslim allies attack as described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Let me explain.

In that passage, God makes it clear that as a result of His divine intervention against Gog, Israel will once again turn to Him. However, it may be inappropriate to interpret “Israel” too broadly. You see, there are and will be two Israels –

- the redeemed and the stiff-necked
- the ‘sand of the sea’ and the ‘earth’
- the children of faithful Abraham and the unbelieving children of the flesh.

Paul wrote, “...they are not all Israel who are of Israel; Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children...They which are the children of the flesh are not the children of God.” (Rom 9:6-8) and, “Know therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” (Gal 3:7)

It may be that the AC will deceive the world and especially the carnal Hebrews into thinking that he, upon interjecting himself and/or his forces on behalf of Israel, has suffered a deadly blow (to himself or to the empire) but will ‘miraculously’ arise and assume the credit for saving them. After this war, with Russia and her Magog allies humbled, she could certainly be forced to provide his empire with all the oil and gas needed.

In addition, “all the world” can be misleading unless you realize that the word for “world” is the same word for earth and as such is consistently representative of the land of Israel. Recall that John, as a believer, is standing with the “sand of the sea”. What this could be saying is that all those of Israel who are not saved will marvel; they’ll be in awe of the one who has apparently rescued them from annihilation. Finally, they will ardently follow him as their messiah. At the same time, Eze 38 and 39 make it clear that in the eyes of “many nations” and of the spirit-filled Israelis (the true Israel), God will rightly be glorified.

Now although it’s possible, I don’t think this “deadly wound” refers to an isolated assassination attempt because of what we read in the next verse:

So, they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" As we suggested above, the result of this supposed resurrection is that the reprobate Jews will begin to worship Satan and his protégé, the antichrist, just as Jesus predicted when He said, *"I am come in my Father's name, and you receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him you will receive."* (John 5:43) Note, however, that their praise of the beast is directly attached to his apparent military prowess. They clearly consider him a military genius. I don't see how a survived assassination attempt would provide this kind of regard. If, however, the carnal, delusional Jews (those who were not sealed and saved in chapter seven) mistakenly think he is responsible for wiping out the overwhelming armies of Gog...that, I can see causing this awe and the lauding of his military capabilities.

Whether it happens in this way or not, Satan and his antichrist will indeed be adored by many, especially the deceived of Israel.

Recall that Jesus is called the "last Adam" in reference to the first Adam in the garden of Eden. That relationship is based upon them being the only two men to live on this planet in a sinless state. As the counterpoint to Christ, the antichrist, has a first and last relationship as well. Nimrod was the first conqueror and gatherer of men against God. He helped found the anti-gospel, false religion of Babylon. (More on that in chapter 17.) The antichrist is thus the last Nimrod for he does the same thing.

And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. I'm inclined to believe this is speaking of the first three and a half years of the tribulation, the period when heaven is silent (see chapter eight). During that time, the AC uses his masterful oratory skills to wow everyone and to make increasingly blasphemous claims. This verbal tirade against all things right and good will come to a crescendo when the AC 'crosses the final line' and proclaims to the world that he is divine.

Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. This will be the midpoint of the tribulation when he stands in the temple of God and claims he is god. (See 2 Thes 2:4) He will put in place the abomination of desolation which we'll consider more in a moment. This brings us up to the days of the trumpet warnings, the seventh of which is the beginning of the outpouring of the vials of God's wrath.

It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him,

whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. These saints are specifically Hebrew believers but probably include gentile Christians who get saved during this time as well. We also have confirmed here that Satan, who we know has given the AC great authority, will be holding back nothing – in the spiritual realm, he'll give the beast authority over the whole world. At the same time, in the political realm, this probably shows that the nations of the world, perhaps through the UN, will also give authority to him to rule over them. Everyone on the planet apart from the persecuted saints will just adore this guy.

If anyone has an ear, let him hear. He who leads into captivity shall go into captivity; he who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints. This is the great admonition to everyone concerning this supposed savior. Though he will for a time seem to be exceedingly successful in capturing and killing the remnant of believers of the outlawed faith in Jesus Christ, he's going to go down. His day is coming, and in fact, this is what will give hope and thus patience to the saints.

Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. This is our second beast. He arises out of the earth – that is, unbelieving, carnal Israel. He has two horns like a lamb which to some seems to indicate that he will be an imitation Christian. Some have suggested that this could be an apostate pope. Since the lamb is used extensively in Hebrew worship, it could also mean that he's a religious Hebrew with a wicked heart. He will definitely be the 'religious' promoter of the first beast.

And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. Unlike the Holy Spirit of God, this counterfeit counterpart is not omnipresent. He has a limitation to his authority – it is only in the presence of the AC who is specifically empowered (probably possessed) by Satan that he can use this authority. His power or authority is not his own but derived from the first beast, the antichrist.

He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. His parlor tricks will deceive those on earth, but he can only do them in proximity to the beast. Remember, Satan is not God's counterpart. He's only an angel and a fallen one at that. There are limits to his power.

This false prophet spreads the word that everyone should make an idol in the image of the beast to celebrate that he was wounded by the sword and yet lived. Again, this whole resurrection thing may be contrived. Note, though that the word for sword here is what we would call a scimitar. This could again, refer to the AC supposedly defending the Jews against Gog and the Muslims hordes for a scimitar is and has been a common weapon and emblem for the Islamic people.

It does seem, however, that the Islamic practice of beheading is utilized by the AC during his rule so it may be that after the war an ‘olive branch’ of reconciliation to the Muslims will lead to their involvement in his persecution of the believers.

He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed. The Greek word for breath is pneuma which indeed usually means breath (and sometimes spirit) but would be better translated here as “animation”. In Rev 9:20 it says that the deluded people of the world will continue to worship demons and idols that cannot see or hear or walk – it specifically omits speak because this idol can do that. But this will be no voluntary religion. Like Nebuchadnezzar with his own golden idol, everyone will have to bow or be killed. Even now, university of Arizona scientists have achieved the technical breakthroughs necessary to create 3D holograms so the technology will certainly be available to create this talking animated idol.

He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Much speculation has surrounded the recent creation of the embedded RFID-style chip. The Greek word used here for “mark” means something imprinted or engraved. Like firmware, these chips are indeed imprinted with specific information. They even contain small transmitters which allow for tracking of the chip. Here is a description taken from Hoovers of one of the companies involved with this technology:

Digital Angel (formerly known as Applied Digital Solutions) can get under your skin. The company is best known for its VeriChip technology -- computer chips that can be embedded under the skin and read by a remote sensor to check vital signs and diagnose medical problems. Its VeriChip subsidiary markets the technology for medical use in humans. VeriChip won FDA approval for its product in 2004. It acquired wireless identification product provider eXI Wireless in 2005. Digital Angel gets about two-thirds of its sales in North America.

Of course, another possibility is a tattooed name or number. Whatever the case, everyone, without exception is going to be forced to take this mark or find themselves excommunicated from the economic system. There are three imprinting possibilities mentioned – a mark, the beast’s name and the number of the beast’s name. Perhaps these will represent echelons of privilege in the beast’s kingdom.

Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666. Let’s try to set aside all the nonsense we’ve all heard associated with this verse and take a sober look at it. First of all, the information given is clearly not to be dismissed for the Spirit expressly says, “Here is wisdom.” The Bible says that the beginning of wisdom is the fear of God, so if you’re a believer, you should take special note – this is important.

“Understanding” is defined as “the capacity for spiritual truth, the higher powers of the soul, the faculty of perceiving divine things, of recognizing goodness and of hating evil.” Does that sound like the spiritual lame brains who will be following the AC?? Of course not. This admonition is given to born again believers in Christ.

In ancient times, people would count with small pebbles. The word “calculate” or ‘count’ is derived from the word for these stones. The Greek Lexicon defines it as:

- 1) to count with pebbles, to compute, calculate, reckon
- 2) to give one's vote by casting a pebble into the urn
- 3) to decide by voting

Herein, the Lord tells His people to count or calculate the number of the beast specifically because it is the number of a man. Now, the antichrist will be promoted as god, but his number is that of a man. Why would the Lord tell his people to count or calculate this number and then just give it? Clearly, there is something to be gained in the process.

Many have looked to the system of Hebrew numerics wherein each letter and annotation of the words has a number associated with it. The inherent difficulty with this is that there are many interpretations of these values, many approaches, and as a consequence, many claims that some significant so and so is the AC. The problem is compounded when the name is not of Hebrew origin. That seems to me like a recipe for personal interpretation and error and indeed, it has been.

1 Kings 10:14 says that Solomon received yearly six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold. Perhaps this suggests that the Antichrist, like Solomon, is a good man who becomes corrupted. Keep in mind, though, that we are told to calculate the number. In other words, we’re not told to simply look for 666 but rather to expect that we’ll have to somehow count or calculate it.

It is the number of a man. If, at the point of his open blasphemies, the AC's number is already commonly known as 666, then giving us the number doesn't make as much sense – there's no reason to calculate it. If, however, calculating this 'number of his name' before it is known openly, using 666 as the answer, leads to identifying a specific person, then it does make sense. If that be the case, the believers would then be assured that although this man comes to exhibit seemingly supernatural powers or even claims to be from another world, he's just a man. He is not divine. Like King Cyrus of old (see Isa 44:28, 45:1) God has foretold his appearance.

You see, his supposed divinity will be the major delusion of the world during this time. Thus, armed with the truth, God's people will be able to stand strong in face of the flood of lies that will come.

Because the definition of this calculating involves voting, I think it is quite possible that the AC will arise to power by way of election. However, this number does not refer to the number of votes or electoral supporters or such – remember, it is “the number [that when calculated is the same as or equal to] of his name”. It may be that a voting process which uses a number, that when calculated is equal to his name, will emerge.

2 Thes 2 makes it clear that it won't be until after the Holy Spirit (and presumably, the church) is taken out of the way that the AC will be revealed. I have my suspicions as to who this man may be, but the people who will really need to calculate his number are those who, in those last terrible days during the tribulation, will be faced with amazing, deceptive displays of Satanic power.

The irony in this is poignant. Consider, as we wrap up this lesson, the following passage from the Gospel of John:

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, “Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?”

The Jews answered Him, saying, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.” (John 10:31-33) The Jews of old were blind to the truly divine power of Jesus and incensed that the people considered Him as divine. In contrast, the modern carnal Jews will be impressed with the Satanic power of the AC and incensed when people fail to think of him as divine. As Jesus said, men love darkness rather than light. Be strong in your faith, brethren. Don't be taken in. That AC -- he's just a man!

Closing the Door

Revelation 14

Since the beginning, God has been faithful to provide to man a witness to the truth. It began with Adam, then Seth, then Enoch, then Noah, then Shem, then Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, then the twelve tribes of Israel, then the prophets, then the greatest prophet – John the Baptist, then Jesus, then the church. In Revelation 4, we saw the rapture of the church pictured in John being caught up to heaven and no sooner than that has happened, the 144,000 Hebrew witnesses are sealed and sent out.

All the way through the wages of sin, which were unsealed from the scroll by the Lamb, through the warning trumpets and woes, these sold out, on-fire men of Israel have delivered the truth of God to a Christ-rejecting, sin-filled world. And there have been many who listened and received the gracious gift of salvation. Most of them, at this point, are in heaven, robed in righteousness and praising God for His patience and mercy.

In the course of this faithful witness, we must wonder, did any give up? Have any turned back? God is wrapping things up. He's about to deliver His wrath, and His Word says that He has not appointed believers to be under it.

During the tribulation, the antichrist and his forces have hunted down believers to destroy them. How many of these radical Jesus-freaks may have found it easier to surrender, to take the mark? How many stayed the course and gave their all – their lives?

Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. I am fully convinced that this is the heavenly Mount Zion in the heavenly Jerusalem mentioned in Galatians (Gal 4:26). And look! It's all 144,000 with the Lamb! Not 100,000; not even 143,999. All God's witnesses have been faithful unto death! You might wonder, 'I thought they were sealed. What gives?' But God never promised them protection from the antichrist with their sealing – it was only implied that they would enjoy protection from God's judgments. And as with the two witnesses, when your testimony is done, you're done.

How inspiring to see this faithfulness in the midst of such apostasy and rebellion. No wonder the halls of heaven are filled with thankful saints praising God for sending these people out during the tribulation.

And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. This is probably the voice of God as when Ezekiel wrote, *And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice was like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory.* (Eze 43:2) And as God spoke of Himself to Job, *Have you an arm like God? Or can you thunder with a voice like His?* (Job 40:9) So there's something special happening. What's He saying?

And I heard the sound of harpists playing their harps. These harps are instruments of praise given to the 24 elders and all believers redeemed from the earth. However, at this point, it would seem that only the 144,000 are using them. What are they playing?

They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth. It seems that the Lord has taught them a new song, one just for them and now they are singing it together before the King of kings and His court.

These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God. What an awesome tribute to these faithful ones. The saying that they are not "defiled with women" is probably not in reference to simply being single and celibate for the word for defile means polluted and is always tied to a sinful condition. The lexicon defines these virgins as:

"men who have abstained from all uncleanness and whoredom attendant on idolatry, and so have kept their chastity"

So, they are most likely chaste with respect to the more important spiritual definition. That is, they didn't give in and listen to the lies of the devil. They were faithful to follow the Lord's leading during the most trying of times on earth and in heaven they are rewarded with the appropriate gift – to follow the Lamb throughout eternity.

And they are said to be "firstfruits" to God and to the Lamb – that means they are just the beginning – there are many more to come as we'll see shortly. Also, unlike the supposed 'divine one' below, the antichrist who is continually deceitful, they were/are faithful to proclaim the truth including the grace of God in Christ which covers even them for they "are without fault" and such grace is the only way that's possible.

Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people—saying with a loud voice, “Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water.” As we began this lesson, we noted the absolute faithfulness of God to provide a witness to the world. In this passage, it would seem that the 144,000 have all finished their testimonies and thus, as a final exhortation, He gives this evil-embracing world one last salvo of truth, one last witness. Recall, Jesus said, *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.* (Mat 24:14)

And another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.” Babylon has been a source of some confusion to Bible students and it shouldn't be. The name itself means confusion. Babylon is a condition. In this case, the condition of the entire planet – planet Babylon. It is and always has been the congregation of the rebellious against God. Don't let that word translated as city throw you – it simply means a dwelling and originally meant fullness or throng. Here, it is a planet full of evil hearted people. It is Satan's supreme 'creation' against God. Remember, these three angelic messengers are circling the globe with their witnesses, circling Babylon.

And it's fallen – fallen, fallen. The description is repeated for emphasis. A principle party to this, the spiritual force behind this worldwide condition, is pictured as a woman, one that has finally proselytized the whole earth to a wicked false religion. It's a religion that began with the tower of Babel and Nimrod. We'll address it more in chapter 17.

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, “If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.” This witness could be no more dire or sobering. Hell is a real place and its torments are not only terrible but eternal. For the people who have gotten saved during this horrendous time, life will be hellish, and they will be continually presented with the temptation to give in to the lie. The good news is that their time of suffering is limited. It will end soon for God is about to bring them home.

Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Jesus said, *“In your patience possess ye your souls.”* (Luk 21:19) and James wrote, *But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.* (James 1:4) Patient waiting upon the Lord will be THE most important aspect of the Christian life for these people in this time. Keeping the faith and keeping the commandments.

Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”

This isn't saying that only those who die in the Lord as martyrs from this point on are blessed. All God's faithful are blessed in heaven and especially those who have died in the Lord throughout all history. Here, God is saying that He is about to take His saints home through death. It will be a harvest, for just as he took Lamech and Methuselah home right before the flood of Noah, he will take these believers home as well. They will not see his wrath. The only believers that will be left on 'Babylon' are the remnant, who like Noah in the ark, will be protected by the Lord, and in this case, in a wilderness refuge. Just as there came a time for the Lord to shut the door of the ark, so God's witness is about to end. All that can be saved are saved, all who would listen have listened.

Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat One like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, “Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.” So, He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped. Here it is – the last great harvest of redeemed souls from the earth. It is Jesus Himself, appearing as the Son of Man (i.e. His earthly form) Who upon getting the message from the temple (i.e. Father God) that it is time to reap, thrusts His sickle into the earth and it is harvested. Every redeemed soul apart from the remnant is taken to heaven, ensconced and safe from what is to come.

Then 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, who had power over fire, and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.” Did you notice that three times this particular sickle is termed “sharp”? Christ's harvest of the redeemed is a merciful, even gentle

deal. He takes His redeemed home in love and joyous expectation. But this harvest is different and requires a “sharp” or “quick” tool to execute.

The “clusters of the vine of the earth” I’m inclined to believe are the wicked, carnal people of Israel but probably includes the rebellious of all planet Babylon as well. And “fully ripe” is not ripe in a good sense. This ancient Greek word has a negative sense, “to become dry or withered.” The idea is of something that is *over-ripe*.

And note that it is the angel who has power (authority) over fire who passes the directions on. This is likely the “fourth angel” in chapter 16 who it says, *poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire.*

Indeed, this part of the tribulation will be a fiery time. Isaiah wrote:
For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many. (Isa 66:15,16)

Zephaniah added:

Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land. (Zeph 1:18)

Of course, you may wonder about the remnant of believers who are in a wilderness refuge. How will they endure this fiery trial?

If we think back to Daniel’s time, we’ll recall a story that was not only miraculous but prophetic. It’s the three children of Israel who having refused to worship the golden idol of Babylon’s King Nebuchadnezzar were thrown into the fiery furnace which had been heated up to seven times its normal temp. Upon them, the fire had no effect. Daniel three records:

And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them.

Notice first that Daniel, who pictures in many ways the church, is never present in this story – that’s because the church will not be in the furnace of the tribulation. However, the faithful remnant of Israel will be. Yet, the fire will not touch them.

Zechariah wrote:

And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God. (Zech 13:9)

So, the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood came out of the winepress, up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs. Modern vintners employ crushing machines that are quite sanitary, but this process will be a bloody mess. The imagery is shocking – there's a stomping on these rebellious people with one intention – to crush them. Now, why do you suppose this is done “outside the city”? I submit that it is the direct response to what these people, or should I say their forefathers, did to God's Son outside the city. Jesus was crucified on Golgotha, outside Jerusalem. This was in fulfillment of the picture embedded in the practice God gave the ancient Jews of taking the goat, upon which the sins of the people were symbolically placed, outside the camp to kill it.

This event may be referring to the consequences of the war of Armageddon which we will come to later in our studies or more likely to the whole period of the upcoming outpouring of His vials of wrath. Whatever the case, the blood of this crushing judgment will flow deep and long. It will run for some 200 miles which is the length of modern Israel from its northern most point to the mid point of its southern border. In other words, all of Israel will be deep in bloody destruction.

The door of the tribulation ‘ark’ has been shut. The floods of judgment are coming. Only the remnant has a safe place to hide.

Unapproachable

Revelation 15

It was a beautiful sunny day and I took my friend Shane up to the top of Sentinel Dome in Yosemite National Park. There, you can get a 360-degree view of the top of the world that staggers the mind to take it in. Shane is a reserved guy and a big guy too, but he looked around and literally started tearing up. He couldn't believe how beautiful it was.

We usually think of the wrath of God in terms of destructive horror. Most people would rather discuss some other topic. But here in this short chapter is a look at God's wrath from a heavenly perspective. You may find it surprising.

*Then I saw another **sign** in heaven, great and **marvelous**: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is **complete**. As with the woman clothed with the sun in chapter twelve, we are told this is a sign. Before He pours out His wrath, God wants us to understand two things about it. This sign is intended to teach us something very important and fundamental. First, it is "great and marvelous". That word marvelous means wonderful and always applies to something positive. It's a deep admiration.*

You see, this outpouring of wrath that's about to come is not a last-minute reaction to the arrogance of the devil and his antichrist world. It cannot be compared to the wrath of man which is irrational and without purpose. Man's wrath is driven by sin, and its expression is always in some form of sin. In fact, the wrath that is displayed in heaven at this time is an expression as far beyond man's ability to comprehend as is eternal love or the waters of life.

From heaven's perspective, this wrath is great and wonderful. That's because it will produce wonderfully positive eternal consequences. There is no sin in it, only justice and purpose. God's children will never in all eternity experience His wrath. In fact, that brings us to point number two. This sign shows us that in the seven last plagues, God's wrath is complete. There's no hang over, no lasting grudge – there's simply no sin in it. Throughout scripture, seven is the number of completion and that is true here as well. With those lessons in mind, God then shows us what has become of those people he just brought home in His final 'harvest'.

*And I saw something like a **sea of glass** mingled with **fire**, and those who **have** the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, **standing** on the sea of glass, having harps of God. It's important to notice the present tense of the victorious – they have the victory or are victorious. Heaven is the eternal 'now'. Therefore, these people*

don't live in some past accomplishment. They no longer dream of some future victory. They have it, and it is ever present.

Each of the four things they overcome requires a unique victory – the victory over the beast is one of holding to the truth in spite of amazing deception. The power of the beast was in his ability, given by Satan, to deceive. The victory over his image is one of rejecting the worship of a false god in spite of the vast majority giving in. The image of the beast caused all who would not worship the beast to be killed. The victory over his mark is one of enduring terrible hardship. Any who would not take the mark could not buy or sell; they were locked out of the economic system. The victory over the number of his name is one of a fearless understanding that the beast is just a man. By calculating his number, they came to know that and feared only God.

But what is this sea of glass? Why is it mingled with fire? Saints in the fire...hmm...sure! Daniel chapter three. When King Nebuchadnezzar threw the three Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, into the burning fiery furnace it was stoked to seven times its normal heat. They, like these tribulation saints, refused to worship a false idol. And they had stood alone for, you know the story, when the music played, everyone else bowed down to the golden idol. But once in the fire, they were quite content, for in the fire with them was none other than the Son of Man, Jesus. Nebuchadnezzar had to command them to come out. They were in no hurry to leave – they were at peace, perfect peace, and the flames could not hurt them.

In like manner, these tribulation saints are at peace, perfect peace. The once raging sea is now like transparent glass. It's mixed with fire, but they aren't swimming in it or drowning under it. Rather, they are symbolically standing upon it and are content in the presence of the Lord. Just as Jesus walked upon the sea of Galilee by faith, so these saints learned to walk. Now, the flames have no power to hurt them. That gives them reason to recall God's faithfulness and sing His praise.

*They sing the song of **Moses**, the servant of God, and the song of the **Lamb**, saying:*

*“Great and **marvelous** are Your works,*

Lord God Almighty!

***Just and true** are Your ways,*

O King of the saints!

*Who shall not **fear You**, O Lord, and glorify **Your** name?*

For You alone are holy.

*For all nations shall come and **worship** before **You**,*

For Your judgments have been manifested.”

Two songs are in their heart – the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb; the servant and the

Son. Clearly, these are Hebrew believers. Who else would sing the song of Moses? It may be the one recorded in Deut 32. But the song of the Lamb? That's a new one and I can't wait to hear it! On the other hand, it could be that what they are singing may indeed be both the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb.

Moses (they have come to understand) took them to Jesus. The law was a schoolmaster, a tutor to show them that they couldn't save themselves. And Jesus took them to heaven. His awesome gracious sacrifice upon the cross of Calvary opened the way, removed the veil from before the holy of holies and gave them access into the presence of God.

Note that they agree with John that the judgments of God are both great and marvelous or rather **wonderful**. Unlike the AC, His ways are just and true.

*After these things I looked, and behold, the **temple** of the **tabernacle** of the **testimony** in heaven was opened.* Did you ever see one of those Russian toys that open up to reveal another similar toy inside? Then you open that one and yet another is revealed, and another. In like manner, we are shown a temple within a tabernacle within a testimony. The word here for temple specifically applies to the holy place and holy of holies, the core inner sanctum. The tabernacle is the tent like covering of this holy place, and the testimony is the outward expression of all that which is within. This very place was pictured in the OT tabernacle which God specifically showed Moses how to make. He told him to make all the things associated with it "according to pattern", that is, His design. In short, (and in general) the holy place and holy of holies portray the divine ministry and nature of Christ, the tent covering them portrays His earthly ministry, and the curtains surrounding it all portray the two groups of believers – Hebrew and gentile.

From Abraham to Christ was approximately 2000 years and so also with this present 'church' age – a perfect balance if you would. It's no accident that the entire church, Jew and gentile believers in Christ, is called the **dwelling place** of God. In fact, the curtain wall of the original tabernacle was a beautiful type and symbol of this. In Exodus 26:1-8, we see that the tabernacle's walls were made of ten curtains – grouped specifically in two sets of five each (five is the number of grace in the Bible!). The two groups of five were then joined together by 50 gold clasps. Now, 50 is the number of jubilee in scripture (refer to Lev 25:10) and when you read about it you recognize that of course, Jesus Christ is our Jubilee. And so, pictured in the design of the curtain walls of God's dwelling are those saved by grace and joined together in Christ – Jew and gentile believers.

This is the same pattern we see in the throne room itself with the Lamb in the midst of the throne (as the holy of holies was in the midst of the tabernacle), surrounded by the four living creatures who illustrate the earthly expressions of Christ (as the altars and other furniture of the

tabernacle express Christ), surrounded by the 24 elders who represent all believers (like the curtains surrounding the tabernacle).

*And out of the **temple** came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in **pure bright linen**, and having their chests girded with **golden bands**.* Three things are important here – first, the seven angels come out of the holy place. They come directly from the presence of God Almighty. These plagues come straight from Him and His holiness. Second, these angels are clothed in pure bright linen indicating their righteousness and purity. Third, they are girded with golden bands just as we saw Jesus in chapter one. Gold is associated with the highest authority and pure faith in the Bible. The fact that these bands girded their chests may indicate that their hearts are pure and submitted to the Highest authority. In other words, there can be no question as to where these plagues come from.

Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. This is a subtle but important event. You cannot by default, associate plagues with God's wrath. They are indeed separate. Many plagues have come upon mankind throughout history, most of them the result of man's own doings. Here we learn that the plagues sent out from God are now combined with His wrath. I'm inclined to believe that it is the lion-like "living creature" who gives them this component. And it's the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. It's like we are being reminded that this is the eternal One; this is the same God Who made all things, Who sent His only Son to die for all mankind, Who is full of grace and mercy and love. This event is unlike any before, but yes, it is Him.

*The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no **one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.*** God's glory and power now produces a smoke that fills the heavenly holy place and makes it impossible to enter. His glory and power are ever a part of Who He is, yet at this point, they make Him **unapproachable**. I submit that it is because He is here unleashing them to accomplish His pure purpose. The expression of this power and glory are beyond even heaven's ability to bear. This fully distinguishes these plagues from any and all that have ever gone before. This tells us that there is no room for repentance at this point. God is unapproachable even in heaven. Though the remnant of Israel will yet be protected, no one on earth will be getting saved – like Pharaoh of old, all other hearts are hardened.

The hour has come. In response to absolute evil, God's wrath will begin the cleansing of His creation.

When All Is Said and Done

Revelation 16

Now that God has caught us up with the relevant background -- the two witnesses, the faithful 144,000, the beasts, the harvests, the woman and her persecution by the dragon, the little book and Satan getting cast out of heaven – we’re better prepared to appreciate what the Lord has done over many millennia to give mankind opportunity to repent from his stubborn adherence to following the devil’s advice. The seventh trumpet has sounded; it is the final woe. It is God’s wrath.

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.” So, the first went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Each of these bowls are significant in three ways – what they are, who they target and their inherent message.

This first bowl produces a “foul and loathsome sore”. The word for “foul” is equally “evil” or “pernicious”. “Loathsome” is a word in Greek that involves hard labor and peril. So, these pus oozing sores will not go away and if not attended to continually pose a serious threat to the victim.

The targets of this bowl are two – those who took the mark and those who worship the image. With this bowl, God goes right to the heart of the satanic rebellion. He afflicts the worshippers. Those who have taken the mark have in effect sold their souls to Satan to live comfortably in his system and those who actually worship the image of the beast are diseased in their minds. The message is not complicated; they are themselves foul and loathsome sores upon the earth and their condition will only get worse.

Then the second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it became blood as of a dead man; and every living creature in the sea died. The judgment is dead man’s blood. The target is the sea which represents the gentile nations. The message is simple. “You’re all dead men. There’s no life in you.”

Then the third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying:

“You are righteous, O Lord,

The One who is and who was and who is to be,

Because You have judged these things.

For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets,

And You have given them blood to drink.

For it is their just due.”

And I heard another from the altar saying, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.” The judgment is blood. The target is all drinkable water and the message is given by the angel of the waters. Another angel from the altar echoes that this action is ‘true to its core’ and absolutely just. This is likely the answer to those saints, under the altar in heaven, who in Revelation six cried out to the Lord, *“How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”* To these saints it was said to wait a little while longer until the number of those who could be saved was complete and at this point, that is indeed the case. The message to the world of sinful man is simple - they have caused God’s earth to drink the blood of his own people and thus they shall drink blood as well.

Then the fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and they did not repent and give Him glory. Isaiah could very well have been referring to this when he prophesied,

There will be on every high mountain

And on every high hill

Rivers and streams of waters, (that is, waters of affliction as in Isa 30:20 or bowls of wrath)

In the day of the great slaughter, (Gog/Magog and/or Armageddon)

When the towers fall. (World Trade towers?)

Moreover the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun,

*And the light of the **sun** will be **sevenfold**,*

As the light of seven days,

In the day that the LORD binds up the bruise of His people

And heals the stroke of their wound. (Isa 30:25,26)

The judgment is intense heat from the sun. The target is all unsaved mankind. The message is simple – here’s a small sample of the fiery hell to which you are headed. And, as we would expect from such a group which is so deceived and dedicated to Satan and at such enmity against God, they continue to blaspheme the name of the Lord.

Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became

full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores and did not repent of their deeds. The judgment is deep darkness and pain (or a painful sense of loss, i.e. poverty). The target is the throne of the beast and consequently, his kingdom. The message is simple – here’s another sample of the hell to which you’re headed.

Jesus referred to hell as “outer darkness” in Mat 25:30. The apostle Peter wrote: *For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them **down to hell** and delivered them into **chains of darkness**, to be reserved for judgment; ... then the Lord knows how to ... reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.* (2 Pet 2:4,9-11)

Hell is hot. Hell is dark. Hell is full of an irrepressible sense of pain and loss. As we’ve written previously, the beast may come to power by being elected, but just as with Hitler, he will soon take and expand absolute control, creating a kingdom with himself upon a throne.

The very first recorded act of God on this planet dealt with darkness and light. Much like that first chaotic void, this time of tribulation will be utterly dark. As with the darkness Moses witnessed in Egypt, it may be thick enough to feel.

The psalmist prophesied concerning the wicked, perhaps of these days, *They do not know, nor do they understand; they walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are unstable.* (Psa 82:5)

Isaiah the prophet spoke of this when he said, *To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*

They will pass through it hard-pressed and hungry; and it shall happen, when they are hungry, that they will be enraged and curse their king and their God and look upward. Then they will look to the earth, and see trouble (tribulation) and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness. (Isa 8:20-22)

And he added,

For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth,

And deep darkness the (unrepentant) people;

But the LORD will arise over you, (His remnant)

And His glory will be seen upon you. (Isa 60:2)

Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared. And I saw three unclean spirits

like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. The judgment is interesting in that it is not an immediate cataclysm. Rather, God makes the trek westward easier for the armies of the east. Perhaps they will come initially to fight against the beast but ultimately, they will try to oppose the return of Christ. The psalmist prophesied of this when he wrote,

*Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us.”
He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:*

The unholy ‘trinity’ has frogs come out of their mouths which, we are told, are demonic spirits that perform miraculous parlor tricks and thus endeavor to gather the leaders of both carnal Israel (the earth) and the gentile nations (the whole world). This judgment is the preparation for the most horrific battle ever to take place on planet Babylon – the Battle of Armageddon. The target is the Euphrates river which is the eastern boundary of the land given to Abram by God (Gen 15:18). It is the river that ran through the ancient city of Babylon, giving it life. It is the place where the four terrible angels of Revelation nine were unleashed to kill a third of mankind with a demonically influenced army. That unleashing, the result of the sixth trumpet, may be synchronous with this event but I’m inclined to view them as separate. The message is simple – get ready to fight.

“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.” This short comment is injected for the sake of the elect, the saved remnant of Israel, who observing these dire events are likely going to need to be encouraged that the end is very near. Note that the Lord says, “keeps his garments” which clearly speaks of their ‘robes of righteousness’ as seen in other parts of this book (see also Gal

3:27). That is, they are already saved and righteous – God says, hold on to your faith.

And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon. This likely refers to the area around the city of Megiddo called the valley of Esdraelon. Today, Megiddo is a hill or mound made of 26 layers of the ruins of ancient cities in a strategic location at the head of a pass through the Carmel Ridge, which overlooks the Valley of Jezreel from the west. Because of its strategic location at the crossroads of several major routes, Megiddo and its environs have witnessed several major battles throughout history.

“During the past 4000 years, at least 34 bloody conflicts have already been fought at the ancient site of Megiddo and adjacent areas of the Jezreel Valley. Egyptians, Canaanites, Israelites, Midianites, Amalekites, Philistines, Hasmonaeans, Greeks, Romans, Muslims, Crusaders, Mamlukes, Mongols, French, Ottomans, British, Australians, Germans, Arabs and Israelis have all fought and died here. The names of the warring generals and leaders reverberate throughout history: Thutmose III, Deborah and Barak, Sisera, Gideon, Saul and Jonathan, Shishak, Jehu, Joram, Jezebel, Josiah, Antiochus, Ptolemy, Vespasian, Saladin, Napoleon, and Allenby, to name but a few of the most famous. Throughout history Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley have been Ground Zero for battles that determined the very course of civilization.” – Eric H. Cline, Assistant Professor of Archaeology and Ancient History, The George Washington University

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, “It is done!” And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth. As this last bowl of wrath is poured out, a mighty voice from the holy of holies thunders the same thing Jesus whispered (or so I imagine) from the cross, “It is done!” For that reason, I think it is Jesus again who says this. What will follow is probably the result of this thundering voice. An earthquake shook Jerusalem the first time it was spoken as well. However, this quake is greater than anything that ever shook the earth since the creation of man.

Now the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. The great city is Jerusalem and is distinguished from the cities of the gentiles. The former is divided, the latter are decimated. Great Babylon is planet Babylon for the world is now

entirely the congregation of the rebellious against God (save the Hebrew remnant). We'll talk more about the cup 'she' holds next chapter.

Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great. The earthquake is so strong that it literally levels the geography of the planet possibly by massive shifts in the tectonic plates. This is accompanied by ice balls weighing about 75 lbs.

The judgment is a shaking and leveling of every exalted place together with the destruction of frozen boulders of ice-water. The target is Babylon. The message is simple – it is done!

Throughout scripture, we find God dealing with erring mankind, particularly Israel, sometimes gently and sometimes with rigor, but always with mercy and ultimately with forgiveness. That's because God is gracious. He has reached out to man for so long that it is difficult to see Him dealing with the planet as He does in this chapter. But God is also just. At this point, each of the messages given by way of the judgments are no longer spoken to those who may be saved somehow. The messages are simple and are given as a witness to the entire cosmos, to all of creation. God is Who He is. All who could be saved have been; that is part of what Jesus meant when at the conclusion He thundered for a second time, "It is done!"

'Pious' Prostitution

Revelation 17

After the six trumpets, the Lord provided us with some background information that covered the history of important elements of mankind's situation spanning time from various points 'way back' up unto their culmination "in the days of the seventh trumpet". In like manner, having shown us the wrath of God mixed with the seven last bowl judgments, He again provides us the important background that is about to conclude coincident with the last bowl. Likewise, this imagery requires understanding a story that covers a great deal of time.

Because it begins so far back, we will look to archeological evidence as supplementary to the scripture. Of course, our standard and last word is always the Bible.

It would seem that the beginning of this story is shortly after Noah and his family began repopulating the earth after the great flood. It was in Mesopotamia that the first cities were built, and the first of these was quite naturally named after the very first city built by man before the flood---Enoch. Due to linguistic permutations, this name has come down to us as Erech or Uruk in Sumeria.

Cush was the grandson of Noah, being the son of Ham. The Bible tells us:

Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore, it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city). (Gen 10:8-12)

That word "mighty" is an intensive form of the word which means to prevail or conquer. Some authorities assert that Nimrod came to Sumeria from Ethiopia, but whatever the case, he became the first major conqueror. Also, that word for "before" as in "before the Lord" means facing but comes from the word meaning to turn away or turn against and thus would be better understood to mean "against the Lord".

According to Jewish legend, the great success that attended all of Nimrod's undertakings produced a sinister effect. Men no longer trusted in God, but rather in their own prowess and ability, an attitude to which Nimrod tried to convert the whole world.

In the midst of the tumult of war Nimrod met Semiramis -- tradition states that she was an inn/brothel keeper and a prostitute in the city of Erech. The name Semiramis is a later, Hellenized form of the Sumerian name "Sammur-amat", or "gift of the sea" (which may indicate how Nimrod arrived in Sumeria.) The first part, "sammur", when translated into Hebrew

becomes "Shinar" (the Bible's name for lower Mesopotamia), and is the word from which we derive "Sumeria". This one woman had such a lasting impression upon world history that not only do we call by her name the land from which civilization flowed, but the Bible itself says that it was "the Land of Shinar," or Semiramis.

Nimrod took her as his wife. However, not content with that role, she endeavored to expand her power by inventing a false religion with herself not simply Nimrod's queen but the "Queen of Heaven". Some scholars believe the religion she 'created' was based primarily upon a corruption of the primeval astronomy formulated by Noah's righteous ancestors before the flood. In the original, this system was the story of Satan's rebellion and the war in the heavens, his subversion of mankind, the fall of Adam and Eve, the promise of One to come who would suffer and die to relieve man from the curse of sin then be installed as Lord of Creation, and the final re-subjugation of the cosmos to God through Him.

In her corrupted version, the great dragon is depicted as the rightful lord of the universe whose throne has been temporarily usurped by One whom we can recognize as the God of the Bible. The serpent creates man in his present miserable state but promises that a child would one day be born of a divine mother---which child would supplant God, become a god himself, and return rulership of the Earth to the serpent. (You can easily see the source of her inspiration!)

Now, Semiramis became pregnant out of wedlock (big surprise) and of course, Nimrod was none too pleased. Though he was part of her phony religion, to preserve her position, his wife co-opted her priesthood into killing Nimrod. This left her as the ruling queen. She named her illegitimate son Damu (from the Sumerian "dam," or blood), which in the later Babylonian language became Dammuzi, in Hebrew Tammuz, and in Greek Adonis. She later had him killed as well to preserve her power, but in order to 'spin' the situation she 'enhanced' her already polluted version of the truth.

She claimed that she had actually conceived miraculously. Consequently, the son, named Tammuz, was considered a divine savior. Many ancient artifacts remain with the familiar motif of the mother Semiramis holding the savior-infant Tammuz, which predate Christianity. It was also said that Tammuz was killed by a wild beast and then miraculously brought back to life. Baal was the Canaanite name for the Babylonian Tammuz.

One well known scholar documented how Semiramis developed in her system a celibate Priesthood which was answerable to her and the High Priest, Nimrod, who was known by the title of 'Pontiff' or Pontifex Maximus meaning 'bridge-maker'. This High Priest was supposedly the 'BRIDGE' between this life and the life to come (which of course was before she had him brutally murdered). He was also known as the 'fish god' Dagon and this is why a fish-mitre hat was worn by the High Priest. It was in the shape of a fish's open mouth. He also tells us the

regular priests wore black robes, which was the color of Satanism and the occult (Fausset's Bible Ency.p291). In addition, he documents that Nimrod had a council of 12 priests to assist him in the temporal and political affairs of running the empire.

They were called "Cardinals" and they were dressed in scarlet & red robes. (see *The Two Babylons* by A. Hislop)

This version of 'the truth' permeated virtually every culture throughout history. The holy scriptures condemn it in Eze 8:14, Jer 7:18 and 44:17-19. From Babylon it spread to Phoenicia under the name of Ashteroth and Tammuz. From Phoenicia, it traveled to Pergamos in Asia Minor. It may very well be the reason for John's admonition to the church at Pergamos in chapter two of Revelation: *"I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is . . ."* (Rev. 2:13). In Egypt the mother-child cult was known as Isis and Horus. In Greece it became Aphrodite and Eros. In Rome this pair was worshiped as Venus and Cupid.

When Attalus, the Pontiff and King of Pergamos, died in B.C. 133, he bequeathed the Headship of the "Babylonian Priesthood" to Rome. When the Etruscans came to Italy from Lydia (the region of Pergamos), they brought with them the Babylonian religion and rites. They set up a Pontiff who was head of the Priesthood. Later the Romans accepted this Pontiff as their civil ruler. Julius Caesar was made Pontiff of the Etruscan Order in B.C. 74. In B.C. 63, he was made "Supreme Pontiff" of the "Babylonian Order," thus becoming heir to the rights and titles of Attalus, Pontiff of Pergamos, who had made Rome his heir by will. Thus, Julius Caesar, the first Roman Emperor became the Head of the "Babylonian Priesthood," and Rome became the successor to the long line of this perverted priesthood. The Emperors of Rome continued to exercise the office of "Supreme Pontiff" until A. D. 376, when the Emperor Gratian, for Christian reasons, refused it. (see Clarence Larkin's *Dispensational Truth*) However, even today, some supposed Christian practices and festivals are highly influenced by this twisted religion. With this bit of background, let's begin our study of the Revelation.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and talked with me, saying to me, "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication." The spiritual personification of the false religious system initiated by the prostitute Semiramis is seen here at the end of the ages sitting upon the people of the nations. She has enticed the kings of the earth to idolatry (spiritual fornication) and has deluded the people with her lies (wine of her fornication).

So, he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness. And I saw a woman sitting on a

scarlet beast which was full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. By now, we should recognize this creature. Because it is scarlet, the beast clearly shares the bloody nature of the dragon. Because she is riding the beast, it is apparent that he will, as “the kings of earth” before him, support her, for a time.

The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication. The rewards of her prostitution are handsome materially. Material prosperity obtained through religion is a key indicator of its falsehood. This flies in the face of contemporary Christianity, but it is the very intoxication that the beast will use. The prophet Daniel wrote of him:

And through his policy (shrewdness or cunning) also he shall cause craft (deceit) to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify [himself] in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand. (Dan 8:25)

That word for peace is better translated prosperity. (BTW, the NKJV is off on this verse.)

The golden cup in her hand is the unholy grail of her demonic communion. An abomination is literally a foul, detestable thing whereas the “filthiness of her fornication” may refer to the excrement of her prostitution. What a detestable quaff!

And on her forehead a name was written:

MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

Her title identifies her as the source of all idolatry and all foul, detestable things (in Israel and the world). Thus, in the end of her reign, the very planet is known by her name.

“Mystery” most often means something hidden and thus secret. Until recently, that’s exactly what this whore has been.

I saw the woman, drunk with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. And when I saw her, I marveled with great amazement. This false religious spiritual force has taken special pleasure in killing both Hebrew and gentile believers.

This vision is too much for John. He has seen the dragon, the beast, the judgments and wrath of God but here he marvels. Why? Possibly it’s because although he expected and could handle the imagery of the previous things, he never imagined the true nature of false religion.

But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. The beast that you saw

was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is. We can surmise that the antichrist will be possessed of Satan and thus his imagery as the beast bears a near perfect resemblance to the dragon. As we look ahead in the Revelation, it is the dragon who, after the 1000-year reign of Christ, will ascend out of the bottomless pit and later be cast into the lake of fire (or perdition).

Indeed, the spirit of this beast is Satan who **was** in heaven but **is no longer** (for he was cast to the earth). Upon Christ's triumphant return, he will be cast into the bottomless pit. He will **ascend** out of it after the millennium and then, after a final conflict with Christ, will be cast into the lake of fire and thus spend eternity in **perdition**.

The marveling of those who are deluded by the beast "that was, and is not, and yet is" probably points back to the supposed resurrection of the antichrist or his government which we examined in chapter thirteen.

Because this passage refers to both entities as seemingly one, we can foresee that indeed the beast will be spiritually possessed by the dragon. It is once again, Satan's vain attempt to imitate God the Father's relationship with God the Son. Recall, Jesus said to his disciples, "I and my Father are One." (John 10:30)

"Here is the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. Some have said that the Greek word for mountain here only refers to a large mountain, but in fact, the Bible uses this word repeatedly to refer to the Mount of Olives which is really a hill. (And it uses it to refer to other hills as well.) Thus, this passage could justifiably be translated seven hills and in fact should have been. In light of what we learned above about the transfer of headship of the Babylonian religion to Rome, I think these seven hills refer to it. It is commonly known as the city built on seven hills. But there's more...

There are also seven kings. This should read "[and they] are also seven kings." The verb form used here is the third person plural present indicative. In other words, these heads have two meanings. First, they refer to the city of Rome and second, they refer to the seven kingdoms that have ruled over the Hebrews as we've mentioned before. With that second meaning in mind, we continue...

Five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. At the time of this prophecy, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece had come and gone as rulers over the children of Israel. Rome was the present power and the

revived Roman empire will be the seventh and technically is already in place in the form of the Mediterranean Union. Therein, the “clay” (the Jewish people) of Daniel’s chapter two image has officially mingled with the “iron” (Rome). When the AC takes over this union, he will make it the seventh kingdom to rule over the Hebrews. This arrangement will continue for only a short time – perhaps only a few years. That’s because...

The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. In the midst of the tribulation, the AC will set up his throne in Jerusalem and while in the temple declare himself to be god – the ‘unquestionable’ ruler of Israel. As such, he himself will be the eighth kingdom, and he will use his position to both corrupt the carnally minded of Israel and attempt to annihilate God’s faithful remnant. “He is of the seven” clearly shows that the spirit that drives him makes him a ‘member of their club’ – ‘antichrists r us’. However, along with the dragon, he will ultimately be cast into the lake of fire as well.

“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful.” We discussed these ten horns in detail in “Little Horn and the Ten”. In brief, these ten horns or ten kings are clearly shown as representing the final hour of the revived Roman Empire both in the ten toes of Daniel chapter two and on the fourth beast of Daniel chapter seven.

What is foretold therein, and this Revelation passage is that there will exist at the end of the age a group of ten kings that will cooperate together but remain dormant until another king arises from outside their sphere. Since it says that they are kings, it would seem that they each have a kingdom of their own. As a group, however, they have no kingdom or literally no authority to rule over their united kingdom until the little horn appears and takes over. He is “diverse” or different from the first ten. “Little” in those passages, probably does not mean lesser in authority or power but rather newer or little in time. It can also mean a power that is diminishing or withering. This little horn will subdue or literally humble three of the ten kings and apparently change the leadership of the group. Unlike the ten horns, this little horn will not simply be a horn, that is, a kingdom power, but a personality, it’s like this little horn will eventually be his own kingdom so to speak – i.e. he probably will rise to power from ‘out of nowhere,’ presumably over another kingdom not included in the ten; but fundamentally his ascendance will really be about himself and his own authority.

Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. The final tribulation where will be useful to the beast for a season but then, since he wants to be god, she will be in the way. At that point the yoke of 'the religion of the past' will be pillaged, burned and discarded by the antichrist's subordinate kings.

But a one world false religion is coming and is already in the works. In fact, the *Catholic Review* commented on this when it recently said, "The unity of religion promoted by the Holy Father Pope John Paul II and approved by His Holiness the Dalai Lama is not a goal to be achieved immediately, but a day may come when the love and compassion which both Buddha and Christ preached so eloquently will unite the world in a common effort to save humanity from senseless destruction, and leading to toward the light in which we all believe." This is only a very small sample of what is going on behind closed doors to unite the religions of the world.

And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." As we've already covered, "great city" is literally "great throng" or multitude. It is the whorish satanic spiritual force and deception of Babylon that has, since its inception, dominated the kingdoms of this world. This chapter marks its end. Praise God!

Forever Lost

Revelation 18

The seventh bowl of wrath has been poured out and the voice from the temple declared, “It is done!” As with chapter 17, God is herein continuing with the background information that runs in parallel with previous chapters but concludes with the seventh bowl judgment. Chapter 17 basically exposed the whore, Babylon the Great, which Satan used to bring together all the rebellious against God into one vile congregation. At this point, it is the entire planet. This chapter will show the consequences of both her seduction and her destruction under God’s wrath.

After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird! Because this messenger has great power and glory, some may think it is Jesus, but the words “another angel” make it clear that it is indeed an angelic messenger for there is no “other” Christ. He is probably one of the seven angels that stand before God like Gabriel. His power and glory are indicators that he has been close to God just as Moses on the mount spending time in the presence of the Lord was radiant with glory when he descended.

His message is twofold. First, he declares emphatically that whorish Babylon is fallen or as the lexicon amplifies, cast down from a state of prosperity. Whenever an attribute is repeated in scripture, it is for emphasis. There’ll be no rising up from this fall. Second, he declares what she has become – the habitation of demons, the prison of every filthy spirit and the cage for every filthy, hateful bird. These are likely three echelons of evil entities; the point being that planet Babylon is a spiritual toxic dump.

But it is this ‘becoming’ that is significant. Of course, it implies a transformation. What this tells us is that Satan has made planet Babylon the gathering place for all evil in existence. This world is NOT a playground but a battleground. As he corrupted angels, he will have corrupted men and indeed the whole of creation on this planet.

For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich through the abundance of her luxury.” To say that there are two Babylons, religious and commercial, is like saying there must be two heavens – a religious heaven and a commercial heaven. That’s

nonsense. Planet Babylon is Satan's answer to God's kingdom. As we said before, it is the result of a whorish spiritual force that gathers and indwells the throng of those rebellious against God. Satan sees himself as the counterpoint to God, the antichrist as his counterpoint to Christ and the false prophet as the counterpoint to the Holy Spirit. Babylon is the counterpoint, in his fiendish mind, to the New Jerusalem. All the devil can do is imitate God by providing 180-degree opposites. This, of course, in no way makes him God's peer. Satan is only an angel and a diminished, fallen one at that. Even Michael the archangel is able to cast him out of heaven.

“Her fornication” is quite simply idolatry, the worship of anything except the truth in Christ. And it is an angry idolatry. This wrath is the unholy counterpoint to God's. God's wrath is pure, and it cleanses, whereas the “wrath of her fornication” is filthy and it corrupts. All nations have imbibed this foul brew. The leaders of men have been intimately entangled with her lies, and the leaders of business have been enriched by the power of her luxury. They have bought in to Satan's ‘anti-gospel’ which says, “You can have it all – just take it. Love yourself and crave things. Lust is good. Self sacrifice is bad. Seek riches. Seek power. Live for now.” On and on it goes, counterpoint by counterpoint, and everyone in Babylon agrees.

And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. Consistently, God speaks to His people as two groups – the Hebrew remnant and the mostly gentile church. Both are His people. First, God showed us the horrible condition of the planet. And now, He reminds us what His command has always been to His people – to “Come out.” As we know from chapters four and five, He gave that command to the church at the rapture. He also executed that command in taking the final harvest of believers in chapter fourteen just before the bowls of the seven last plagues were poured out. Finally, there remains the remnant of Israel.

As you consider the phrase “lest you share in her sins” you sense He's speaking of the remnant since they remain on earth during the tribulation wherein their faith is tested. The phrase “lest you receive of her plagues” is surely a reference to the other groups of believers who have already been taken to heaven either by rapture or by death so they would not see the plagues of God's wrath.

They say that you must bury a corpse at least six feet deep in order to keep animals from smelling it and digging it up. The rottenness of death is a stench like no other. When it says “her sins have reached to heaven” it is not so much that they are piling up, though in a sense they are; rather, the stench of their decay is a kind of cosmic pollution. This also reminds us of man's vain attempt at Babel to build a tower to the heavens.

Render to her just as she rendered to you and repay her double according to her works; in the cup which she has mixed, mix double for her. In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow; for she says in her heart, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow, and will not see sorrow.' Who is God speaking to? His people. But all His people save the remnant are in heaven at this point. How can they render anything back to the whore? When they return with Jesus to the planet to take it by force. That's coming up.

This, then, is a pep talk of sorts. It's taking place in the locker room of heaven if you would and the 'Coach' is telling His team how to play the second half. When we return with Jesus, we will render to her and repay her just as God has commanded.

Her thought, 'I sit as queen, and am no widow...' takes us back to the original perverted mind of Semiramis. It seems that she induced her drug intoxicated priests to kill her husband, King Nimrod, by tearing his body apart while was still alive. Then she took over the rulership of his kingdom as the "queen of heaven". And this mindset has been the attitude of the whore, Babylon, ever since.

Therefore, her plagues will come in one day—death and mourning and famine. And she will be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judges her. Day here means the 'last day' of this present age, the day in which Christ will return from heaven, raise the dead, hold the final judgment, and perfect his kingdom. The lexicon amplifies by saying, "Eastern usage of this term differs from our western usage. Any part of a day is counted as a whole day." What's being said is that her destruction will be in a relatively short span of time compared to the millennia she has built up her domain. Her plagues are the seven bowls of God's wrath that have been poured out culminating in the return of Jesus Christ with his army -- the saints of heaven. Recall, also, as we learned earlier, that the ten kings who have given their power over to the antichrist will, at the convenient time, burn the whore with fire. However, this "utterly burned with fire" may also pertain to the time at the end of the millennium when, after a last rebellious uprising inspired by Satan, God destroys the entire planet with fire. See chapter twenty and 2 Pet 3:7,12.

"The kings of the earth who committed fornication and lived luxuriously with her will weep and lament for her, when they see the smoke of her burning, standing at a distance for fear of her torment, saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! For in one hour your judgment has come.' Now how, you might ask, can anyone stand at a distance from the whole planet? Trust me, you'll see in a minute. What is a bit more important is that we recognize that it is the ultra rich who are weeping for indeed, Babylon the mother of whores, has made all who

worship her materially wealthy. Once again, it is the counterpoint to the true eternal riches the Lord has promised to those who are faithful in Christ.

The contemporary church especially in western society has been completely caught up in material concerns. This is most obvious with the televangelists but is not limited to them. Pastors increasingly look to the church rather than the Lord for their welfare. Some have even developed 'social marketing' schemes to, in essence, fleece the flock under their care. The church budget, though 'sanctified' by prayer is more and more often the 'prudent' guideline of church activities rather than the Lord's Spirit. Trusting obedience, even unto poverty, is unheard of today. Sadly, the modern church is significantly influenced by the 'propaganda' of the whore. Remember from chapter three that the Laodicean church says, "I am rich and increased in goods and in need of nothing."

"And the merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her, for no one buys their merchandise anymore: merchandise of gold and silver, precious stones and pearls, fine linen and purple, silk and scarlet, every kind of citron wood, every kind of object of ivory, every kind of object of most precious wood, bronze, iron, and marble; and cinnamon and incense, fragrant oil and frankincense, wine and oil, fine flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, and bodies and souls of men. You may wonder why the Spirit cares to give us this cargo manifest, so to speak. That is, until you see that it is ordered in degree of value to the 'owner'. Do you see gold and silver at the beginning? As you run down the list, the relative values decrease; and what's at the bottom? The bodies and souls of men. In Satan's whorish kingdom of Babylon, regardless of what the media says, the least valuable items of trade are people. That's because we are made in the image of God. To the devil and his followers, we are worth less than all the rest. Abortion has made that completely obvious, hasn't it?

The fruit that your soul longed for has gone from you, and all the things which are rich and splendid have gone from you, and you shall find them no more at all. We have GOT to get it into our understanding that material prosperity has always been the snare of the devil. By default, we assume it to be the blessing of God and that just ain't necessarily so! Prosperity will be the primary device by which the beast will seduce and destroy both the Hebrews and the nations of the world.

*The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, will stand at a distance for fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, and saying, 'Alas, alas, that great city that was clothed in fine linen, purple, and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls! For in **one***

*hour such great riches came to nothing.’ Every shipmaster, **all who travel by ship**, sailors, and as many as trade on the sea, **stood at a distance** and cried out when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, ‘What is like this great city?’*

“They threw dust on their heads and cried out, weeping and wailing, and saying, ‘Alas, alas, that great city, in which all who had ships on the sea became rich by her wealth! For in one hour she is made desolate.’ In a previous study we noted that from the perspective of prophetic imagery, one hour probably refers to the seven-year period of the tribulation. Recall, the ten kings which support the beast during this time are said to reign with him for one hour. What we’re seeing is that although the beast will likely bring a supernatural economic revival to the world, it will crumble under the wrath of God.

Returning to our question above about standing at a distance, notice that it is those who are at sea who witness this mess from afar. It is they who bemoan Babylon’s devastation from afar.

“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you holy apostles and prophets, for God has avenged you on her!” There are three groups that God has avenged – those in heaven, the apostles and the prophets. Of course, we expect that the latter two are in heaven, but the term heaven probably refers to all who have suffered the affliction of the whore and been faithful to the Lord. Both the New Testament apostles and the Old Testament prophets died as martyrs, at least a large portion of them did.

Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus with violence the great city Babylon shall be thrown down, and shall not be found anymore. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters shall not be heard in you anymore. No craftsman of any craft shall be found in you anymore, and the sound of a millstone shall not be heard in you anymore. The light of a lamp shall not shine in you anymore, and the voice of bridegroom and bride shall not be heard in you anymore. You know what a millstone is used for – it grinds. Babylon has been a grinding force in the life of sincere believers – you can sense it grinding on your soul each and every day. But the most important part of the first sentence is “shall not be found anymore”. What wonderful news for the redeemed. Recall that the angel declared that Babylon had become the abode, the prison and the cage for all things evil. I’m inclined to think that it may indeed be the repository of all sin, even yours and mine. Thus, seeing God cast it into the sea, forever to be lost, is a great comfort.

For your merchants were the great men of the earth, for by your sorcery all the nations were deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets and saints, and of all who were slain on

the earth.” Notice who the “great men of the earth” have been – her merchants. Do you still want to be listed in Fortune magazine’s Top 100 richest? Of course, since Babylon is the congregation of the rebellious against God, the whore would have the blood of everyone who was ever killed on earth, from Abel on including Jesus. No wonder she was described as being drunk with their blood. How glorious, how wonderful, that she is cast so far away from all the created cosmos, both seen and unseen, as to never be found again. I’ve been inclined to picture her and all the demonic horde within her as diminishing in size forever and ever into infinite smallness and complete darkness.

Babylon will be no more.

A Wedding and a War

Revelation 19

In pouring out His wrath contained in the seven bowls mixed with the seven last plagues, God was unapproachable. No one could enter the holy place of the temple in heaven. In this chapter, there are two amazing and long-awaited events that take place. It is a time of celebration and then conflagration. Planet Babylon has been ravaged by the wages of sin unleashed in the seven seals, the warnings of seven trumpet judgments and then by the holy wrath of God.

All of these things took place with the vast majority of heaven looking on, but now the time has come for them to begin participating. What is their reaction?

After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God! For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her." Again, they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" The wretched planet yet remains and the devil with his unholy counterpoint trinity are still defiant. But here is the Lord's wedding gift to His spouse. It is spoken of in the past tense for most of it is done. There remains one final battle before the millennial reign of Jesus – we'll get to that momentarily.

First, make sure you've got your robe -- we've got a wedding to get to!

And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sat on the throne, saying, "Amen! Alleluia!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" Worship of God is spontaneous for the twenty-four and four. It is followed by an invitation to all God's servants and a command to all who fear Him. Where are those who fear Him? I suggest that they are on earth. They are the Hebrew remnant in hiding. Who are they in heaven who do not serve our Lord? No one, of course. Do you suppose that they serve out of fear? Certainly, they have an ever-enlightening awe of Him, but fear only entered into the relationship of God and His creation by way of sin. We saw that demonstrated in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve first sinned. There is no sin in heaven; it has been confined to Babylon. The remnant of Israel, who are still in the flesh must yet deal with the sin nature of man and thus fearing God is right and good. However, I submit the heavenly hosts serve God in ever growing love and admiration.

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." The halls of heaven are thundering with praises at the invitation to do so. Our Lord God is Omnipotent – all powerful. We sometimes wonder about this here on Babylon when the trials and personal tribulations seem to overwhelm us. But God has always been and is and always will be omnipotent. He is also all knowing and all present. Only in heaven will this begin to sink in for us.

That's probably part of what we'll be doing in heaven during the time of the tribulation. Our questions getting answered, our anticipations realized, our fears dispelled, our minds filled with awe – I suspect that this will be part of our preparation as the Bride of Christ.

And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Note that her garments are "granted" – they weren't earned nor are they any kind of entitlement. They are a gift. And still they are her righteous acts. This is the epitome of grace, isn't it? You can see that her wedding gown is clean and bright.

Yet you know you've blown it down below; you've been so dirty down in Babylon. You've truly given your heart to Christ and believed unto salvation. You've washed and washed and washed in the Word of God as you should have. But here, and only here in heaven, you discover and truly realize that every righteous thing you ever did was a gift from God.

And notice that her garment is the righteous acts of the saints. It's not just you, it's the righteous deeds of everyone saved by grace. Here, you thought your garment was all up to you. Though we know the rewards in heaven are individualized, in a wonderful somewhat mysterious way, the covering of the bride is the result of God's graciousness to all His saints. It's by the blood of Christ shed for all.

Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" Who are called? Jesus spoke of this in one of His parables. He spoke of a wedding a king had prepared for his son. He invited many but the ones he invited were not willing to come. In fact, some ignored the invitation and others "seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them". The king was furious and destroyed the murderers. He said, "Those who were invited were not worthy." So, he then sent his servants out to invite as many as they could find, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So, he said to him, "Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding

garment?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, “Bind him hand and foot, take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are called but few are chosen. (Mat 22)

Those who were invited were the Jews of old. The 144,000 anointed Hebrews of chapter seven are probably the group of servants God sent out afterward to invite as many as they could find. You might think of them as the church, but the church is the Bride and then the Wife of Christ. And though the wedding hall was filled, it was absolutely necessary for everyone to have the proper garment – a robe of Christ’s righteousness. Now the wedding was first, then came the wedding feast. Notice that we never see a wedding ceremony. Why is that? I’ll suggest that at this point it has already happened – you see, Jesus pronounced, “I do” to His Bride before His Father on the cross of Calvary. What greater eternal commitment could He make? And in response, each time a new believer says, “I do” by accepting Jesus Christ into his/her heart as Savior and Lord, the wedding ceremony is more complete. At this point, the church is complete, thus the weddings are finished. Our text says that the “marriage has come” and the verb tense indicates it’s complete. Notice also that the Bride is now referred to as the Wife.

In church gatherings throughout the world and throughout the age, many people are present and often times witness to the ceremony in which new members of the Bride say, “I do” and yet they themselves never make that commitment. They think that by just attending the ceremony so to speak that they are “in”. God has allowed everyone to attend the wedding ceremonies including the fakers, but they will be culled out and only the righteous will be called to the marriage supper that follows.

And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God.” John the apostle is aghast and the angel who has shown him all these things knows it. We should note that he did not have to assure John of the verity of what he’d shown him until this point. Why?

It was much easier for John to accept the majesty of Christ, the judgment on a sin filled world and all myriad aspects of the heavenly revelation up till this point. But this – the Bride of Christ, the wedding feast – that’s just too good, too fantastic, too joyful, too, too, too much for him. He needs reassurance. Having gotten that...

And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Two things are important for us here – first, is John’s mistake. He’s worshipping his guide, and he’s corrected for it. Now, John was a good Jewish boy so to speak and an aged apostle. There’s no way he’s going to knowingly make a

mistake like that, but down he goes. Why? I'm convinced that this guide who identifies himself as one of John's brethren – that is, a believer who went to heaven before John – looks so much like Jesus that John is honestly confused. He thinks this is Jesus.

And that's consistent with scripture for the Bible tells us of a wonderful transformation that will take place. Paul wrote:

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Rom 8:28,29)

We're all going to look a lot like Jesus. Hallelujah!

Next, this Christ-like brother tells John that he must worship God because the "testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy". A testimony is what someone says and how they live. And remember, this book is the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Fundamentally, it is all Jesus speaking.

"Spirit" is equally "breath" and "prophecy" is basically "the speaking forth of truth". So, in this, John is being doubly assured that what he has just witnessed is indeed absolutely true for every word and act of Jesus is the breath of truth. And that's why God deserves his worship. Recall, Jesus said, "I am the way, the **truth** and the life." And just in case there's any question remaining in John's mind about it, Jesus will next present Himself with a name that confirms it...

*Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called **Faithful and True**, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.* Unlike the rider on a white horse who was sent out when the first seal was opened in chapter six, this Rider is Faithful and True. This is obviously Jesus.

The antichrist went forth on a white horse to deceive and conquer in wicked rebellion to God and to establish worldwide Babylon. As such, he is the counterpoint and 180 degrees opposite in motive and results to Christ.

His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. How many times had John looked into those eyes and seen pure love and gentle kindness. But this is Christ going to war. And on His head are diadems, crowns of royalty, not the crown of achievement. There are many of them because He is King of kings. We don't know where His name is written, and we don't know what it is. The reason that's significant is that knowing a person's name gives you a type of power over that person. Call out to your friend, "Hey, Joe! Or, "Hey, Sam!" and watch his head turn (providing his name

is Joe or Sam.) This understanding was more pronounced in the Middle East. What this is saying is that no one has any authority over Jesus in this matter – He is absolutely in charge. No one can turn His attention from this invasion.

He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. Keep in mind that this scene is still in heaven. He's about to go out. For that reason, I'm confident that this blood is His own. He Himself is among those whose blood the whore had shed. His blood is what made the garment of His Bride pure and bright. His blood is what has filled heaven with undeserving saints, saved by grace. His blood is why there are armies in heaven ready to follow Him. He is the Word of God.

And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Here is the fulfillment of Enoch's prophecy which Jude recorded:

Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him. (Jude 14,15)

Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. Here is the Messiah that the Hebrews had always looked for. They should have recognized Jesus when He came as a Lamb – their law and sacrifices had portrayed the Savior as such for many hundreds of years – but they did not. They wanted a Lion and here He is on His way to Armageddon. This is the conquering Son of God and His name is clearly written right where everyone He smites can see it -- KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, both small and great." Centered in the area of Megiddo, the war will cover the entire land of Israel, north to south with blood. Guess whose? Birds of carrion have always haunted battlefields and here they will

gather en mass by special invitation. I have seen dozens of vultures circle a dying animal and they have a huge appetite.

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. You have to wonder who in their right mind would try to fight God in war. But these people are not sane. They are all either demon possessed or so deluded by the beast and false prophet that they are no longer even rational. The AC may have even convinced them that Christ and His army are alien invaders.

Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh. Death is too good for the two who are captured. They are cast alive into the lake of fire. This is perdition, a place of eternal torment. Jesus spoke of this when He told His disciples to fear God Who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Forever, the antichrist and the false prophet will be in torment, both body and soul. The rest are mercifully killed and will be judged later at the Great White Throne.

There's one more person of the evil anti-trinity to deal with and that's coming.

The Final Accounting

Revelation 20

Yes, your life has a purpose. The course of it has eternal meaning. Fame or fortune in this doomed world is of no consequence, but in eternity, what you have used your life and gifting for will count more than you could ever imagine. In studying the Revelation, we have covered the entire age of the seven churches and the 70th week of Daniel's extraordinary prophecy – the tribulation. All of that is behind us now, and before us are virtually indescribable events that will propel us into eternity.

Will you live your faith? Will you die for it? Does that matter?

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. It is not Jesus, nor is it even Michael the archangel who is sent to deal with Satan. It is a nameless angel. The point being that Satan is not some super angel. He is roughly chained and cast into the bottomless pit by this nameless agent.

What does sin do to us? It destroys. It rots away the very fabric of our being. The wages of it is death. Do you suppose it is different for Satan? He has been rotting and decaying for who knows how long under its influence. At one point he was “the anointed cherub who covers”. He was “the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (Eze 28:14,12). But his end is pathetic and weak. He is known as the dragon, the serpent of old, the devil and Satan.

Consider this, the dragon is extinct. As a species, we see its creation in Genesis chapter one – the tanniyn, poorly translated as whale or sea creature but better understood as dragon or even dinosaur. The serpent of old is cursed. Old means original and this cursing is in Genesis 3:14. The devil is “the false accuser or slanderer” and Satan means to oppose or attack or accuse. This says it all doesn't it. Ultimately, Satan will be extinct; he is cursed; his slandering, accusations and opposition will be gone forever. Here, he is shut up for 1000 years until his brief release after the millennium.

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Here we have

some non-descript people – they and them – sitting on thrones with the responsibility of judgment being committed to them. Who are they?

Because of what follows in the next verse, they are not likely those who came to faith in Jesus during the tribulation and as a consequence were beheaded. Therefore, it seems that they are those who were saved before the Tribulation.

Paul may have been referring to this when he wrote to the Corinthians, “*Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels?*” (1 Cor 6:2,3) for although we’ve seen the devil, the whore, the antichrist and the false prophet dealt with, there are yet many demons and the hard-hearted who must be judged. Perhaps they among those whose names are not written in the Book of Life.

Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. And now, we see the tribulation saints. They too, are blessed to live and reign with Christ specifically during the millennium.

But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. This verse tells us that there is a first resurrection and a second that comes after the thousand years and is for “the rest of the dead”.

The first resurrection, however, is not a single event. It has three parts. In 1 Cor 15 we read: *But now Christ is risen from the dead and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming.* (v20-23) Bear in mind that this scripture is written specifically to the church, thus “His coming” is not His second coming to the Hebrews.

Part one of the first resurrection is Jesus Himself. Part two is the resurrection of the dead just preceding the rapture when Jesus comes to the clouds to take us home. I Cor 15 continues, *Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.* (v 51,52) And 1 Thes 4 adds, *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with*

a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord. (v15-17)

It is the “dead in Christ” at the time of the rapture who are part two of the first resurrection. Part three would then apply to all those who come to saving faith in Jesus after the rapture during the tribulation.

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with Him a thousand years. Here we learn of a second death. It is called perdition and is forever.

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. Now, why will the Lord allow Satan to deceive the nations again?

The nations will have enjoyed 1000 years of peace, a near perfect environment, excellent health and a righteous government. These people are those who survived the tribulation and their descendants, so you already know their temperament. Under Satan’s rule, they refused to submit to God in spite of all the judgments which befell them. They are not saved by faith, only submitted by force. Their hearts are still as dark as ever and at the first opportunity, they yield to the persuasion of the devil.

There is no substitute for salvation. No amount of coddling in a perfect environment, no societal improvements, no absence of outside evil forces will ever cause a darkened heart to love the light. This is exactly what the millennium will prove to all the cosmos. Its lessons apply to men and demons.

Don’t confuse the gathering of the nations here with the pre-millennial war of Gog/Magog. Though Gog/Magog will be in the lead, that war has very specific allied forces which come against Israel, and the defense which God will provide is also very specific including causing the enemy forces to turn on each other and sending huge earthquakes. This gathering after the millennium is of all nations, and there is actually no war for God simply devours them all with fire out of heaven.

This verse says the numbers of the enemies of Christ are as the “sands of the sea” which we learned earlier not only speaks of enormous quantities but is typical of the faithful seed of Abraham. With all the death and destruction during the tribulation, this indicates that the children of evil propagate quite well but notice there’s no mention whatsoever of anyone getting

saved. The number of the evil hearted becomes as the sands of the sea, but the condition of their souls will not. It will remain yet dark.

They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. In Ezekiel chapters 47 and 48, the boundaries of the camp of Israel during the millennium are given. The camp of the saints is possibly that of the remnant of Israel who “endured unto the end” of the tribulation, or it could be a camp given to the resurrected saints. This final rebellion though is centered around Jerusalem, the beloved city which will be called “The Lord is There”. The breadth of the earth means the wide part of Israel so it seems that they will attack from the east, crossing the Jordan as the host of Israel did under Joshua (but remember, they did it on dry land).

The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Notice that there really is no battle. The armies gather against the Lord and He just BOOM annihilates them. Then the devil is finally finished; he is forever cast into perdition.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. White here is really bright or brilliant so this is God’s brilliant throne. Now, it’s time for a clean slate. The evil and hard-hearted entities have been dealt with but the creation, the heaven (the sky) and the earth are polluted in every way. Apparently, they simply disappear in an atomic fireball and are no more. Peter wrote of this:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet 3:10-13)

And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. Yes, there has always been a great accounting of everyone’s deeds and words. Jesus, while speaking to the scribes and Pharisees

said, *A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.* (Mat 12:35-37)

Words and deeds are all most of these people have to be judged by – they either rejected or were ignorant of grace. Notice I said most. It’s quite interesting that the Book of Life is brought out as well as the books of men’s words and deeds. It is evident from this and the following passage that some of these people are in the Book of Life. Though I can’t be adamant, I think it is possible that this is what was spoken to Daniel who was learning of the conclusion of the tribulation and the promises of God to his people was told:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt....But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days.” (Dan 12:2:13)

Those who had sincere faith in God before the coming of Christ may be the reason the Book of Life is brought out here. It may also apply to those who never had a chance to hear and respond to the gospel. Whatever the case may be, we know that God is just and merciful. Paul wrote, *Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: “The Lord knows those who are His,”* (2 Tim 2:29)

The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. Here is another group of the dead – those in the sea and Death and Hades. The sea may again imply the dead of the gentile nations, or may indicate those who are unknown, or may be a literal reference to those lost at sea. Death is the word defined by the lexicon as follows, “since the nether world, the abode of the dead, was conceived as being very dark, it is equivalent to the region of thickest darkness i.e. figuratively, a region enveloped in the darkness of ignorance and sin.” Hades is another place. In Biblical Greek it is associated with Orcus, the infernal regions, a dark and dismal place in the very depths of the earth, the common receptacle of disembodied spirits. Usually Hades is just the abode of the wicked, Luk 16:23, Rev 20:13, 14; a very uncomfortable place.

Evidently, there is a separate judgment for these people. Perhaps because it is referring to the gentile nations whereas the first group of the dead who seemed to require the Book of Life to be opened may be the Hebrews. After this, Death and Hades themselves are cast into perdition which is called the second death. Recall, those who have had part in the first resurrection have

nothing to fear from perdition, but those who are not found in the Book of Life do indeed. Thus, no one is left outside of perdition who is not found in this ultra important Book.



Heavenly Minded

Revelation 21

There is just one last item on the Lord's agenda for man's reconciliation. The church age has demonstrated the benefits of grace. The righteous have been resurrected or raptured. The Tribulation is over. All evil has been purged from the cosmos having first been confined to planet Babylon then cast into the eternal torment of perdition. The old heaven and earth have vanished. And now...

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also, there was no more sea. It's a brand-new start – the word for “new” here not only means “fresh” but “of a new kind”. So, if you ever gazed over Yosemite Valley and marveled at its beauty – you ain't seen nothin' yet! For one thing, there'll be no more sea. This may be literal, but I'm a bit more inclined to believe that the imagery of Revelation remains consistent and thus, since the sea has represented the gentile nations, this may mean that there will be no more unbelievers, no more rebellious against or ignorant about God.

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. I find it interesting that for the first time in his vision, John writes, “...I, John,...” as opposed to just “...I...”. By emphasizing the fact that John saw God's kingdom descending, this very well could be referring to the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy found in all three synoptic gospels -- *there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God.* (Mat 16:28, Mk 9:1, Luk 9:27) And notice how the holy New Jerusalem is called the “tabernacle of God”. As we examine it in more detail, we'll see that the pattern of the earthly tabernacle did indeed align with the heavenly.

But most important is the amazing pronouncement that “God Himself will be with them and be their God.” With this, we're finally ‘back to Eden’ and even better than Eden. For the Lord, it isn't just forgive and forget but also fellowship forever. Praise God!

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.” This is the

blessed assurance of heaven. And it is the complete opposite of the damned. “no more pain” means “no more pain or great trouble”. Hallelujah!

Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.” This is the Lord’s last command to write. I picture John just in awe, thinking ‘This is too good! I never thought it would be so fantastic!’ And so, it’s like Jesus is saying, “Hey John, write it down. It really is true and trustworthy.”

Next, Jesus will declare that the revelation pertaining to the events of the last days is done. Yet, as He has done before, He will then give us some background information that covers a wide expanse of ‘time’. And here, as heaven is coming to earth, so to speak, it will help us to appreciate this marvelous conclusion. In the following, He will describe for us our eternal home. Are you ready?

And He said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. Since the church will be raptured before the tribulation, I believe that the majority of this book is intended for the Hebrew believers of the last days, else we would only have up to chapter four. That being said, the rest of the book of Revelation, though still focused upon the Hebrew saints, is intended as a blessing for all believers of the age of grace and tribulation.

The first thing Jesus wants us to know is that He is not only the Author but the Perfecter, the Creator and the Completer. And the first thing He wants to do as our glorified Lord is to give us freely the continual refreshment of new life. I submit that although this will be completed in heaven, it is begun even now, in this life – it’s all a matter of whether or not you thirst.

He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. “All things” means all things and so it seems that Jesus is saying that the overcomers will share with Him in His inheritance. What is this overcoming? I think it is sevenfold – we found that out in chapters two and three. Each church was admonished to overcome. Together, we are told to do this by:

- keeping our heart set on Christ and a deep love relationship with Him.
- holding on to our faith through all the circumstances of this life.
- searching out the truth of God’s word, expecting Him to feed our souls, and serving.
- no compromising – no mixture but rather holding to “pure religion and undefiled.”
- stoking the fire of faith

- ‘keep on keeping on’
- choosing to obey the Father’s will and trusting Him even in terrible trials.

Notice also, that He doesn’t say that He will be our God and we will be His servants or acquaintances or guests. We’ll be His sons, His children!

But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” Now, this is one of the reasons John will later be told not to seal the book, meaning that it should be read and understood. The consequences of evil are eternally disastrous. Recall, the new heaven and new earth are completed at this point and these people are already in perdition. So, this isn’t spoken as we look forward but it’s a warning to all people from the time of the recording of this revelation until the Great White Throne judgment.

Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues came to me and talked with me, saying, “Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,

As an encouragement and blessing for all of us as believers, John is now going to get a peak at perfection – the heavenly city as it continues its journey to the new earth.

...having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. Some people think the jasper is a diamond, but whatever it is, it’s a “most precious stone”. This speaks of beauty and purity while the glory of God speaks of brilliance. This is a shining, brilliant, transparent city.

Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. On the breastplate of the High Priest, the gemstones representing the tribes of Israel were arranged in four groups of three. Since there are gates on all sides, the picture is one of easy access. Yet there is a wall and not only a wall but a “great and high” wall which implies protection and security. We’ll see that access is all a matter of ‘family ties’.

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Hmmm. Twelve tribes and twelve apostles joined together and surrounding the “tabernacle of God”. Does that ring a bell? Of course. The earthly tabernacle

was the place of God's presence and it was surrounded by two sets of curtains joined together by 50 gold clasps. We showed in previous letters that these represented exactly what we see here – the church and the believing tribes of Israel surrounding heaven's holy place and joined together in Christ.

And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. The city is laid out as a square; its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed: twelve thousand furlongs. Its length, breadth, and height are equal. Now, this length, breadth and height are about 1377 miles. That makes it about one fifth the size of our moon if it's a cube. The phrase here "laid out as a square" implies a perspective from any vantage point, thus it seems to refer to a cube. If the twelve foundations are evenly spaced, that would represent over 22,750,000 square miles and each of the twelve layers would have its own sky over 100 miles high. It's a big, Big house. But why does God care that we know these dimensions? What's the point?

The city is already built. This isn't a plan or design. The original language specifies 12,000 "stadion", each of which is about 600 feet. However, of note, is that the word stadion also means "a race". Also, the fact that the angel used a gold reed implies that the standard he used to measure is of the highest quality and trustworthy.

Recall that the city is described above as having been *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*. In addition, in chapter 19, we read of the Lamb's Bride, *And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints*. The word "bright" here is specifically, "shining, brilliant and transparent" and "arrayed" is literally to be surrounded with a covering and indeed, can apply to a city.

Now, remember that the apostle Paul likened his ministry unto a race. In 2 Tim 4:7,8 he said, *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness (or righteous acts), which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing*. In Acts 20:24, he used the same word, "course" in the KJV, which is derived from the word meaning to run, specifically "of those who run in a race course". In Heb 12:1 we read, *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us....* Clearly, each believer's life and ministry is a race with a prize going not to the winner but to the finisher.

So as this cube, New Jerusalem, the Bride of the Lamb who is prepared by her adornment, descends out of heaven, a trustworthy measurement reveals that her adornment or the

measurement of what surrounds her is 12,000 “races” or 12,000 “lives of ministry unto the Lord”. But wait, it’s 12,000 on each edge and there are 12 edges on a cube. So, there are 12 times 12,000 or 144,000 ministries which measure out her covering -- the “righteous acts of the saints”.

This should ring a bell for in chapter 14 we rejoiced to see in heaven, standing with Christ all 144,000 Hebrew saints who gave their all for the Lord during the tribulation and evidently led a huge number of people to saving faith in Jesus as a result. I suggest that the measurements we’re given here are a testimony to their races – they finished them and like Paul, they finished them in faithfulness. As a result, their righteous acts are forever part of the shining, brilliant, transparent adornment of the Bride.

Then he measured its wall: one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel. The construction of its wall was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass. We can’t be sure whether this measurement is the height or the thickness of the wall. Since this angel seems to be the same size as a man, that would make it about 216 feet. Gold, in the Bible, speaks of faith and royalty whereas “clear glass” would indicate purity. Unlike the city or throng of Babyon, this gathering is of those whose royal hearts are full of faith and purity.

The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones: the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. We can clearly link in the original languages eight of the twelve gems listed here with those on the breastplate of the Hebrew High Priest which represented the twelve tribes of Israel. Considering that the names of the twelve tribes are on the gates, I’m very much inclined to believe that the four remaining gems are also a match with those in the breastplate.

The High Priest, who represented Jesus Christ, wore the breastplate as a symbol that the twelve tribes were always on the heart of the Lord. It was, however, called the breastplate of judgment. But in Isa 59:17 and Eph 6:14, the breastplate donned by the Lord and by believers is called the breastplate of righteousness. This is a fitting picture in two ways – first, the judgment upon Christ for our sins made the church righteous in Him. Next, in the tribulation, the judgments of God upon Israel will bring forth a turning to the Lord and thus His covering of righteousness as well. I think that is why these same gems adorn the wall. They will serve as a continual

reminder that God's ways are always right, His judgments always just. Those who enter will consider that they do so because of God's faithfulness to His people.

The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. This is one of the clearest and most powerful pictures in Revelation. How do you enter the heavenly city? You must pass through a pearl. This completes the picture of the surrounding wall of heaven – whereas the gemstones speak of the pressure and heat of judgment bringing forth righteousness in the Hebrew saints, the pearls speak of the righteousness obtained purely by grace. I'll explain. You see, to enter you won't pass through a wall, you'll pass through a gate. Even though righteousness came to the Jews by way of the shock treatment, the judgments of the tribulation, even they have to enter heaven by grace. Righteousness is a 'boundary' requirement, but grace is the point of entry. The church was made righteous and enters heaven by the gracious blood of Christ which covers all our sins. It took the judgments of the tribulation to drive the Jews to seek righteousness. They too enter only by this precious blood.

But what is a pearl anyway? It is a piece of dirt, a piece of grit, that has been covered and covered and covered and so on with countless layers of beautiful nacre. That's exactly like those who accept Jesus' sacrifice on Calvary. We are dirty, gritty, full of sin and our own ways, and we need a Savior. His grace covers and covers and covers our lives as often as needed and as a result, we are beautiful in His sight. Those who enter heaven by way of a pearly gate will be forever reminded of this wonderful truth.

But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light. "Temple" here means the holy places of the temple so of course, with God Almighty and the Lamb present, they are the holy places. The word for "glory" can and usually does mean a shining, but it also means a judgment or opinion. As such, it is saying that not only does the shining brilliance of God illuminate heaven but the judgments (in the sense of teachings) of God bring wisdom to those in heaven as well.

And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light, ... Though it is in the Greek, "walk" alludes to the Hebrew notion of how you conduct your life. And Who is "its light"? The Lamb! The word "light" is actually "lamp" or "candle" – that which gives forth light having been set upon a lampstand, a prominent place. You see, *there is only one Name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved* – Jesus Christ. Ever since His resurrection, the

gospel has been taken to the whole world and those “nations” or literally ethnic peoples who have turned to it have indeed conducted their lives, crafted their laws, by its light.

...and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Again, this is background. Who are the spiritual leaders (kings) of Israel (the earth)? To answer that, we must note that the verb tense here for “bring” is in the present active. In other words, it was happening at the time the Revelation was given. The only leaders bringing people to heaven up until that time were the Apostles and disciples of Christ, the vast majority of whom were indeed Jewish.

Bringing people? Yes. Here’s what “glory” can be translated as - *the glorious condition of blessedness unto which it is appointed and promised that true Christians shall enter.* And honor? It is literally *a valuing by which the price is fixed.* Makes sense since Jesus paid that price for us with His life and receives the value of all the souls saved in return.

Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). Because of Calvary, the gates are always open. That’s why Paul said, *We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.* He knew that to die while saved only meant immediate entrance into Christ’s presence. (2 Cor 5:8)

And they shall bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it. The “nations” are the gentiles, and combined with the future tense in the verb, this seems to be saying that “they” – believers in general -- will first bring the gentiles to salvation. That has proven out historically. Nevertheless, we know from our studies in Revelation that God is definitely NOT done until all the redeemed remnant of Israel are gathered to Himself as well. Paul wrote of the Jews, *Now if their fall is riches for the world and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!...For if their casting away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?* (Rom 11:12,15)

But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Though God has provided salvation, entry into heaven, to those who accept Jesus and walk in His light, He does not permit anyone else access. If you are in the Book of Life, “Come in!” If not, don’t you think it’s time to give your heart to Him??

Three Quickly's

Revelation 22

The first five verses of this chapter probably belong with those in chapter 21. They continue the background information on the heavenly city that the Lord knew would be a blessing and encouragement to all believers throughout the church age and in the tribulation. After that, the Lord will wrap up the Revelation with some words on His coming and a stern warning concerning this book.

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. As beautiful as this river is, it's not just for looking at. It's not protected by heavenly environmentalists and there are no "No Trespassing" signs. I think this verse is literal, but it also speaks powerfully of the torrential outflow of the pure essence of life coming from the Father and the Son to all in heaven. And this is an important aspect of eternal life – it is not simply a one-time gift, but rather it is the result of a continual outpouring from its source. God made us eternal beings, but the quality of eternal "life" is another matter. Many will spend eternity in perdition -- the torment of fire, eternal isolation and darkness. But God's gracious eternal supply to His children is a quality of existence that defies description for its beauty, joy, love and so on.

In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. The wording here is somewhat mysterious; at least the translation is. I don't think it should read "street" because the Greek word really just means a "broad place" and since we've just learned of the river of water of life, it is probably better understood to be the breadth of this river or the breadth in which it flows. The fact that it is a broad place would indicate that God's not being 'stingy' in pouring out this essence of life.

It's not clear whether there are one or twelve trees, but perhaps in heaven that's not a difficulty. The Godhead is three in one; the Holy Spirit appears in this book as seven in one; the Bride of Christ is called a great multitude that no man could number and is yet one; maybe the tree of life is twelve in one. Whatever the case is, we see that the yield is twelve separate types of 'life-fruit' each and every month. Now, we know of nine aspects to the fruit of the Spirit; perhaps there are twelve aspects to the life-fruit.

King David wrote prophetically of himself and of Christ:

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices;

My flesh also will rest in hope.

For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, (the grave, hell)

Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

You will show me the path of life;

In Your presence is fullness of joy;

At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psa 16:9-11)

“Life” in this passage also means a fresh flowing river – perhaps a reference to this river of the water of life providing fullness of joy and beautiful, pleasing things forever.

Now, it seems that the fruit is available to all in heaven (and those who are even now heavenly minded) whereas the leaves of the trees are for the service of or to the nations. Since the nations usually speaks of the gentiles, and since we learned in the previous chapter that in the new heaven and new earth there will be no more unbelievers, this must apply to us even now and perhaps throughout the millennium. If we consider the symbolism of the fig tree, we recall that Adam and Eve first vainly tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. The Lord graciously replaced them with the covering of animal skins (probably lambs’). We also recall that it was Jesus, Who coming to a fig tree (symbolic of Israel) and finding leaves but no fruit on it, cursed it and it withered. The fig tree has always been a type and symbol of the nation of Israel, its fruit representing those truly faithful to the Lord; as for its leaves, I suggest they are symbols of the law – a showy but ineffective covering for sinful man.

So, as the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing (or more literally, the service) of the gentiles, it could be that this is a picture of the living Word of God being the basis for law and moral conduct among the gentile nations. Of course, this has indeed been the case as the gospel spread for some 1900 years now since John received the Revelation. But Daniel 7:25 tells us of the antichrist, *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.* So, look out!

Also, you can’t help but think of the beauty of ending the Revelation and thus the Bible with the promise of access to this awesome tree. At man’s beginning, we lost this access because of sin. In fact, cherubim and a flaming sword guarded the way to it. But because of the Savior’s taking on Himself all of our sins, we who believe have access to it again. It is the perfect ending and at the same time an outstanding new beginning.

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. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.

This is a wonderful promise, for not only will heaven be filled with all manner of life and joy and

beauty but also a perfect sense of purpose. Do you suppose the activity of the cosmos, both seen and unseen, is limited to our tiny speck of a planet?? There will be countless blessings to bestow and meaningful things to be accomplished, and as we do them, we will become more and more like our Lord. Paul wrote, *For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.* (1 Cor 13:12) And, *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image (likeness) from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.* (2 Cor 3:18)

There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever. Beyond the millennial reign of Christ and on into eternity, God will use His children in a royal capacity – not for power because He doesn't need it; He's all powerful. Not for glory or fame; He doesn't need them either; He doesn't need any of the things we in this life have come to expect of a king. His entire motive and character are as beautifully different from sinful man as...well, as these verses show:

*For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD.
“ For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts. (Isa 55:8,9)*

*Then he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.” And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place.
“Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”* The prophets have always been charged to speak the words that are faithful and true to the world. That's why John is told that it is the “Lord God of the holy prophets” Who has shown him these things.

The vision begins with the letters to the seven churches representing the church age; thus, the words “shortly take place” are obviously true.

The Greek word for “quickly” has no exact match in English and many have erred thinking it implies “soon”. It is better understood to mean “suddenly” and “imminently”. Indeed, Paul also wrote that His coming for the church would be “in the blink of an eye”.

The messenger here says that he who “attends to carefully” (keeps) what has been said in the Revelation will be blessed. Unfortunately, throughout the last 1900 years comparatively few have. In fact, it has been considered by many to be uninspired or too mysterious to understand, and the wildest theories possible have emerged from confused minds who did not let the Bible

interpret itself. But the largest portion of the book, chapters 6 – 20, apply mostly to the Hebrew believers, and thus they will yet have opportunity for this blessing as the days of the tribulation and millennium approach.

Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." Oh John, there you go again. However, I'm sure I'd have done the same thing.

Again, probably because of the extreme likeness of the angelic messenger to Jesus, John mistakenly begins to worship him. In clarifying his identity to the apostle, he explains that he is of his brethren (possibly a former Hebrew) the prophets (perhaps an OT prophet or even a NT believer like Stephen who spoke the truth) "and of those who attend carefully to the words of this book". This latter phrase indicates to me that indeed, he is a former Hebrew, for they are the ones who, unlike the church, will pay very careful attention to the Revelation during the tribulation.

And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand. He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still." As you can see, this is not really a sealed or mysterious book if you look to other scripture to understand it. It has always been open. Chapters two and three needed to be heard and received by the believers immediately; thus, the statement "the time is at hand". But this "time" also speaks of a period or measure of time – probably, the church age and the tribulation. At the conclusion of this period, we've seen in our studies, all who can be saved will have been. The wicked, at that point, cannot and will not change. And so, it is quite apparent that the finality of the last part -- "he who is unjust, let him be unjust still" and so on -- speaks of the time of God's bowls of wrath and that which follows, for the word "still" in the Greek means, "of a thing which went on formerly, whereas now a different state of things exists or has begun to exist".

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." When the Lord repeats something, it is for emphasis. Clearly, He wants us to truly understand that His appearing will be a sudden event. I think this will be the case with both the rapture and

for His subsequent coming to earth to finally deal with the devil and his horde. That's because this word "reward" has a positive sense and a negative one in the form of punishment.

Also, the word "give" means "to pay off, discharge what is due such as a debt or wages". Thus, it also has a positive and negative sense when you consider the spiritual implications.

An exhaustive study of the Greek would likely reveal some unique qualities between the three Self descriptions which are given, but I'm inclined to see them all as pointing to the unity of the trinity itself. That's because all that Christ has communicated with us, all that He rewards, both positive and negative, comes from all three persons of the Godhead. They are in perfect agreement.

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. Here is Christ's final descriptive comment concerning heaven and it is applicable to the time up until the point where this 'background' was presented to us -- the new heaven and the new earth. After the Great White Throne judgment, we know that all the vile creatures listed as being outside the city are cast into perdition, forever gone.

Thus, our background is complete. His blessing stated here is to those who DO His commandments, not just hear or even study but put them into practice. He makes it clear that they who do so can enter but only through the gates – the pearls. It's only by grace. The walls are beautiful to be sure. They represent the righteous acts of the saints. But no one will enter heaven by the walls, only the gates. Jesus said, *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.* (John 10:1)

And no one, no matter how 'good' or wise or mighty they may appear, will ever enter apart from the salvation that is found solely by sincere faith in the shed blood of Christ and His resurrection to the right hand of God Almighty.

"I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star." Notice that He says, "the churches". Clearly, He's addressing all seven of the gentile congregations throughout the church age. However, the word for church, as many of you know, is ekklesia which can mean "the assembly of the Israelites" as well as "an assembly of Christians gathered for worship", so I'm convinced this book is intended for both groups. His title as the "Root and the Offspring of David" is

powerful reminder to the Hebrews from scripture that He is the fulfillment of the “Root” in Isa 11:10:

*And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious.*

And the fulfillment of the “Offspring of David” in 2 Sam 7:12-14:

When your days are fulfilled and you (David) rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son.

As for the Bright and Morning Star, it was the enigmatic prophet Balaam, overruled and overpowered by the Spirit of God, who foretold the truth about the Messiah when the children of Israel were about to enter the earthly Promised Land:

*I see Him, but not now;
I behold Him, but not near;
A Star (the bright and morning Star) shall come out of Jacob;
A Scepter (the King of kings) shall rise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,
And destroy all the sons of tumult (the forces of antichrist). (Num24:17)*

And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” There’s a beautiful invitation and response here. “The Spirit and the Bride” is the church on earth. Together, they say, “Come!” in two ‘directions’. They speak to the world to come to the kingdom of God by putting faith in Jesus Christ, and they speak to the Lord Himself that He would return for His Bride.

The response they get is from two directions as well. Those on earth who respond to the gospel join in and as a part of the Bride say, “Come!” In addition, the Lord, calling from the clouds of heaven, will one day soon say, “Come up here!”

And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. That word “let” means that the choice is yours. It’s not mandated nor is it forbidden. Will you choose life? Do you thirst for it? Moses said to the children of Israel, *I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God,*

that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days; (Deut 30:19)

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. There is perhaps no greater warning to those who will study and teach the Word of God and specifically, this book of Revelation. The words of this prophecy stand. No one is to add more prophecy to it or omit any words from it. It stands as is. Those who would comment on it or teach from it must be clear with the readers/hearers that the prophecy alone is God's Word – commentary may make it more understandable in the contemporary language and times, but it in no way should ever add or subtract from it. Am I clear?!

*He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. For the third and final time, the Lord tells us that His coming will be with suddenness. He even amplifies it by prefacing with "Surely" which the lexicon says is a "strong affirmation". What more can He say to cause us to 'get it' – that we must be ready. There will be no alarm or early warning system in place. You won't have five minutes to 'make things right'. You won't be able to repent and get saved before 'the blink of an eye' is done. Humble your stubborn heart now even if it means going against the grain; even if it means humiliation, persecution or death. Life is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.