

The Revelation of Jesus Christ to the Apostle John

Notes and Commentary

By Jim Wilsford



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Email: jwilsford@sc.rr.com

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Introduction to the Revelation

The Theme: "I am the Alpha and the Omega"

The key to understanding the theme of *Revelation* is in God's statement in chapter 1:8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega;" says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." God repeated this theme at the end of *Revelation* in chapter 21:6: "He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.'" In Rev 22:13-15, Jesus, the Lord, takes the *alpha and omega* characteristic unto himself, promising the tree of life and entrance through the heavenly city to the truly *blessed*. The evil and pleasure-seekers remain outside. He said, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."

This theme of *Revelation* is God's emphatic declaration, supported by the all-powerful images and figures of the book, that He and Jesus, the Lord, the only begotten son, are the Alpha and Omega, and no other. The book is not a symbolical assertion of the iniquities of the Romans as the oppressors of the early church, although that was bad, indeed. Nor is the book about the destruction of Jerusalem and a coming of the Lord at that time. Nor is it about the Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church, the barbaric hordes, or the Muslims. The connection that institutions and governments have to the content of *Revelation* is one where the people who compose them are defiant, evil, immoral, and rebellious, or submissive, good, moral, and obedient, as the case may be.

This great theme centers on the power and eternal nature of an almighty God and His only begotten son as their power is arrayed against the heavenly hosts of wickedness—a theme so powerful that it dwarfs nations, philosophic arguments, and theological speculations. Since there are so many digressions and interpretations from the real theme of *Revelation*, time, and space will not allow their refutation or, indeed, their reiteration. The text that follows may allude to some of these in passing, but the text claims no fairness or justice in the treatment of these many viewpoints. Instead, the text will make the case for an interpretation based on the theme that God and Jesus, the Lord, are the Alpha and the Omega. A consistency of treatment of the symbolism will emerge, clarifying what many efforts have obscured, forcing *Revelation* into preconceived notions, ideas, and temporal events and happenings in the history of the past and the future of man. It is with an open mind that we now "hear the words of this prophecy."

Special and insightful clarifications come from paying close attention to the apostle Paul's interaction with the philosophies of the age, especially those that he confronted in Athens, recorded in Acts 17. Paul found Athens full of idols, which was very distressing to him. Paul reasoned with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue, but also took the gospel to the people in the marketplace. Here, Epicurean and Stoic philosophers challenged Paul, who was fulfilling the Great Commission by preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection to all men. Primarily Paul engaged two groups of philosophers--the Epicureans and Stoics.

The Epicureans

The Epicureans followed the philosophy of Epicurus who was born on the island of Samos in 341 BC, and who taught first in Asia Minor and afterward in Athens till his death in 270 BC. That the philosophy spread widely in Asia Minor makes it influential to the everyday lives of the churches of the seven cities of Asia. Jesus orders John to write to these seven churches in chapters Revelations 1

and 2. (Some notes are from *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.)

Epicurus taught:

“The aim and end of life for every man is his own happiness, and happiness is primarily defined as pleasure. ‘Wherefore we call pleasure the **Alpha and Omega of a blessed life** [Emphasis added]. Pleasure is our first and kindred good. It is the starting-point of every choice and of every aversion, and to it we come back, inasmuch as we make feeling the rule by which to judge every good thing” (Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus from *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.).

Epicurus used the phrases *alpha and omega* and *blessed life* to describe his pleasure-dominated philosophy. These same words become the thesis-setting words of *Revelation*. In chapter 1:3, John uses the word *blessed* of those very different from Epicurus’ pleasure seekers: “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.” The comparison in language is so stunningly the same that there can be no coincidence. A similarly stunning comparison occurs in the thesis-setting words of Rev 1:8, which follow immediately: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’” That is to say neither Epicurus and nor the central element of the Epicurean philosophy—pleasure—are the alpha and omega. Only the Almighty God and his son Jesus take these words and the preeminence and power that such words convey.

The origin of Epicurus’ philosophy lends even more credence to its being a primary target of *Revelation* and its symbolism. His birth off the coast of Asia Minor on Samos and the spread of his popular, hedonistic philosophy across the region, give great meaning to these phrases as used by Lord God, the Almighty, and Christ, the Lord, in the Revelation. When God said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” An Epicurean audience would know immediately that God was directly attacking their pleasure-dominated philosophy. Blessedness is not in pleasure; it is in the Lord God, the almighty. God repeated the same strong teaching in Rev 21:6-8 at the completion of his revelation:

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega , the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

God sets the inheritance of the faithful against the tragic second death of pleasure-seekers of every kind. In Rev 22:13-15, Jesus takes the *alpha and omega* characteristic unto himself, promising the tree of life and entrance through the heavenly city to the truly *blessed*. Thus, he adds the Godhead to the alpha and omega symbol. The evil and pleasure-seekers remain outside:

13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Revelation also makes clear the truly blessed are not the pleasure-seekers but those who follow the Lord:

- 3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it

and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. Rev 1:3.

- 13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." Rev 14:13
- 15 "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Rev 16:15
- 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." Rev 19:9
- 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. Rev 20:5-6
- 7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." Rev 22:7

In the 21st century, efforts to make worship the feel-good province of the praise worshipers have echoes of the problems confronted by the churches of Asia and Greece. Truth comes only from God and those who worship him must worship "in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). It is not the feelings or insights of the worshiper that count, but the pleasure of God. The danger then and now is that the disciples fellowship the unbelievers and fellowship the demons whom these unbelievers worship. Paul stated the case in 1 Cor 10:18-22:

Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? 19 Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

That he reiterated the same argument in 2 Cor 6:14-17 only emphasizes how critical it is that Christians understand the deceptive and enticing nature of human philosophies surrounding them:

Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

17 "Therefore come out from them
and be separate,
says the Lord.

The Stoics

The people of Asia Minor knew very well the other philosophy addressed by Paul in Athens. This group the Stoics derived their name, Stoic, from the Stoa Poikile, the painted porch at Athens, where the founders of the school first lectured. This school of Greek philosophy was founded at Athens circa 294 BC by Zeno (circa 336 BC - 264 BC), a native of Citium, a Greek colony in Cyprus. But the Semitic race predominated in Cyprus, and it has been conjectured that Zeno was of Semitic, rather than Hellenic origin. This would have given him close ties to the religions of the Samaritans and Hebrews, both of which looked to the almighty God of the five books of Moses. It is from this background that Paul refers to an unknown god in Acts 16:23. Zeno's Greek critics taunted him with being a Phoenician. It suggests, therefore, that the distinctive moral tone of the system was Semitic and not Hellenic. The centers, among others, were Tarsus and Sidon. Paul, who was formerly Saul of Tarsus, would have known with certainty the Stoic precepts. In the 2nd century

B.C., the doctrine came to Rome where it spread widely among the upper classes of Roman society. The philosophy with a center in Tarsus would influence the cities of Asia. Whether from Rome, Athens, or from Taurus, these seven cities were in a crossroads of Stoic influence.

The system acquired its most lasting influence by its adoption as the formative factor in the jurisprudence of imperial Rome and Roman law. As the Roman church assimilated aspects of the Romans and Roman law, the philosophy also contributed to the formation of Roman Catholic doctrine and ethics. The main principles of Stoicism may be summarized:

- Adherents follow nature.
- The law of Nature is reason (logos)--the principle of intelligence in man, and the divine reason imminent in the world.
- Their metaphysics inclined to be a materialistic pantheism. On the one side, Nature is the organization of material atoms by the operation of its own uniform and necessary laws. On the other side, it is a living, rational being, subduing all its parts to work out a rational purpose inherent in the whole. As such, it may be called Providence or God.

[These notes on the Stoics are in part from *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.]

Modern religions reflect the influence of Stoicism, when they seek rational answers from within themselves, their councils, clergy, and conventions, denying the infallibility of the inspired word of God as the only rule of faith and practice. Again the apostle Paul summarized the case against these reason-dominated philosophies in Col 2:8: "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ."

Application

This study will show that the enemy of the church in Asia, and by extension, of all churches for all times, was the two evils generating from the prevailing philosophies in Asia Minor. One philosophy—Epicurean—centered on pleasures and the lusts of eye and flesh; and the other—Stoic—centered on man's own reason as the final arbitrator of faith and doctrine, the very core of boastful man. Of these, John wrote in 1 John 2:15-17:

15 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For everything in the world — the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does — comes not from the Father but from the world. 17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Of the human wisdom from which both philosophies come, Paul wrote:

18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 1 Cor 1:18-21:

As *Revelation* unfolds, the wounded beast will reign over some men through their evil lusts and the false prophet will reign over other men through their empty, human reason. Of course, Satan—the serpent, the dragon, the great deceiver—will reign over the wounded beast and the false prophet. These evils and personalities play out within humankind for mortal and immortal stakes transcending governments, religions, and economies. Those humans who constitute earthly organizations make them evil.

However, God almighty, the alpha and the omega, reigns over all and above all, and with him, reigns his son, the king of kings, and those who are dressed in white garments, which are the righteous acts of the saints:

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
8 Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints). Rev 19:7-8

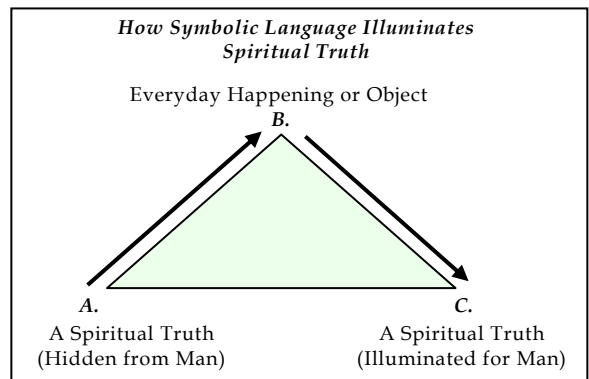
Reading Figurative Language

Revelation 1:20 explains the mystery of the seven stars and the seven golden lampstands: "20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." Many of the metaphors and figures that follow in the Revelation will be explained in the text. We are not free to speculate in cases where the exact meaning is given. When the meaning is not in the text, we must understand that metaphoric language uses two or more things that are essentially unlike. Therefore, lampstands are not literally churches. What do they have in common? Churches are a light to the world.

- In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. Matt 5:16.
- For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness." made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 1 Cor 4:5-6
- For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. Eph 5:8-10

If the meaning is in the text, we must next look to other passages on the subject, making sure there is no contradiction. The figures of speech in the Bible have a meaning provided by the Holy Spirit who searches the spiritual things of God. Man is not free to speculate what the meaning might be. Paul explains in 1 Cor 2:10-13:

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. 13 This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.



It is from these symbols that the Spirit illuminates truth. People have no frame of reference outside their own experiences. These objects and experiences of daily life reveal what was hidden, thus illuminating the spiritual meaning. Since the meaning is from God, we have no right to speculate. The meaning will always be the same to all people. Mankind is not permitted to speculate in regard to these matters. Revelation reveals God's mystery.

No Scriptures Are of Private Interpretation

Paul revealed the unwavering authority and infallibility of the scriptures in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

There is only one way to read *furnished completely*; just as there is only one way to read *every scripture*. Peter was equally unequivocal in asserting the standard for interpretation in 2 Peter 1:19-21:

19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

One cannot make up interpretations of God's word, for the scriptures are not open to imaginary constructs from the mind of man. One cannot separate the will of God from the Spirit of God, telling what the deep things of God are. It has been this way from the beginning—from Genesis to Revelation. When Pharaoh's butler and cupbearer sought the interpretation of their dreams from Joseph, Joseph revealed an eternal and abiding truth about prophecy in Genesis 40:8

8 "We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them."

Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

How more certain could it be? The interpretations of God's prophecies, dreams, and visions belong to God. Man is not free to render the deep things of God, just any way that he might like in his own mind and imaginings. Later, in Genesis 41:8, Pharaoh had difficulty with interpreting his dreams:

8 In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could interpret them for him.

When Pharaoh called on Joseph to help him, Joseph answered forever the question of who holds the deep meanings of God, whether the meaning of visions, dreams, or prophecies. In Genesis 41:15-16, Joseph answered emphatically:

15 Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it."

16 "I cannot do it," Joseph replied to Pharaoh, "but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires."

Neither can modern man do it, for the answer is in the mind of God. Moses went on to write in Genesis 41:32:

32 The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

When He gives visions, dreams, and prophecies, God has firmly decided the meaning. People are not and have never been free to decide the meaning at the pleasure of their human thoughts and imagination, as if it were some romantic novel, some work of science fiction, or some verse from Shakespeare himself.

Daniel, when confronted with the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, reiterated the teachings of Joseph on the matter of interpretation, teaching that the very same principles apply across the centuries. Our story begins in Daniel 2:19-23

19 During the night the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision. Then Daniel praised the God of heaven 20 and said:

"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever;
wisdom and power are his.

21 He changes times and seasons;
he sets up kings and deposes them.

He gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to the discerning.

22 He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what lies in darkness,
and light dwells with him.

23 I thank and praise you, O God of my fathers:
You have given me wisdom and power,
you have made known to me what we asked of you,
you have made known to us the dream of the king."

When the king questioned Daniel (Daniel 2:26-28), he replied without hesitation that God reveals and interprets his mysteries:

26 The king asked Daniel (also called Belteshazzar), "Are you able to tell me what I saw in my dream and interpret it?"

27 Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician or diviner can explain to the king the mystery he has asked about, 28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries. He has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in days to come.

The dream revealed God's plan for the coming of Christ and his kingdom in Dan 2:31-35

Therefore, this study shall make every effort to allow the scripture to illuminate scripture for, truly the Scriptures and the interpretation of Scriptures belong to God. Revelation 10:5-7 teaches:

Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. 6 And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who

created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

The mystery of God is the same for us as it was for the prophets who spoke the mystery; and so is the interpretation the same.

1. Introduction and Vision of the Son of Man (Revelation 1)

Prologue (Revelation 1:1-3)

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw – that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Paul described how revelation occurs:

2 if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, 3 how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, 4 by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), 5 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. Eph 3:2-5. See 1 Cor 2:6-16.

We can understand the Revelation of John. "What must soon take place" places a time constraint on all who read this writing. The events must soon take place, and in verse 3: "... for the time is near" makes the events of the Revelation imminent to all those who read. Paul placed the limits on time:

8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. 11 And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. 12 That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day. 2 Tim 1:8-12

Everyone who reads the Revelation confronts the imminence of the events of the book. All readers are inextricably tied to "that day" about which Paul speaks. The plan under which we live was before the beginning of time. In the meantime, the life we live is "just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." James 4:14-15. All humankind faces the imminence of the end of time whether by death or by the coming of the Lord. Everyone, from the time of the writing until the end, faces exactly the same situation. The events of the Revelation are near and must soon take place in all our lives.

The Revelation spells out the major event that is to take place in Rev 10:6-7:

6 And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

In Rev 11:15, the seventh angel sounded his trumpet and identified the completion of the mystery of God with the establishment of Jesus as king over his kingdom:

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

Of course, God resurrected Christ to sit at his right hand as described in Eph 1:22-23. Paul also described this event as the event by which he destroyed death. [See 2 Tim 1:8-12 above.]

Who is the speaker? The angel speaks but he speaks the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. *Angel* is literally a messenger or one who delivers a message. The message in this case is the very word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

To whom is the angel speaking? The angel speaks to the one who reads, the one who hears, and the one who keeps those things that are written.

What is the dramatic situation? The dramatic situation is that God has revealed to us his prophecy and the one who reads, hears, and keeps what is written shall be blessed. Christ's earthly ministry began with a pronouncement of blessings in Matthew 5. Commonly called the beatitudes, these blessings use the word *bles`sed*, just as here in verse 3. The word, used here and in the beatitudes in Matthew 5, appears seven times: Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14. The uses of *blessed* in the Revelation are so powerful as to track the development of the great single theme of the book:

- 3 Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. Revelation 1:3.
- 13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Revelation 14:13.
- 15 "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Revelation 16:15.
- 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." Revelation 19:9.
- 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:6.
- 7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." Revelation 22:7.
- 14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Revelation 22:14.

The introduction to these notes showed how Epicurus used *blessed* to describe the state of those given to pleasure: "The aim and end of life for every man is his own happiness, and happiness is primarily defined as pleasure. 'Wherefore we call pleasure the **Alpha and Omega of a blessed life.**'" [Emphasis added]. In truth, the state of blessedness comes only through the Christ and his gospel. The Revelation attacked the decadent pleasure-seeking lives of those caught up by Satan in their own lust of the flesh, lust of eye, and pride of life. The conflict in the Revelation is a conflict between the Godhead of God, almighty, Jesus Christ, the Lord and King, and the Holy spirit of God and the triad of evil composed of the dragon or Satan, the beast, and the false prophet.

The dramatic situation takes added importance as the word prophecy shows us that God is the moving force behind the situation revealed in the Revelation. The apostle Peter explained how the power of God works in men who prophesy:

19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came

about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. 2 Peter 1:19-21

The Revelation reveals that our eternal reward in Christ Jesus the Lord will soon take place.

Greeting and Doxology (Revelation 1:4-8)

4 John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

7 Look, he is coming with the clouds,

and every eye will see him,

even those who pierced him;

and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.

So shall it be! Amen.

8 "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

John identifies himself as the writer. In Rev 1:9, he describes himself as "on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. Nelson describes the situation:

[PAT muhs] -- a small rocky island to which the apostle John was banished and where he wrote the Book of Revelation (Rev 1:9). The island, about 16 kilometers (ten miles) long and ten kilometers (six miles) wide, lies off the southwest coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Because of its desolate and barren nature, Patmos was used by the Romans as a place to banish criminals, who were forced to work at hard labor in the mines and quarries of the island. Because Christians were regarded as criminals by the Roman emperor Domitian (ruled A.D. 81 AD - 96 AD), the apostle John probably suffered from harsh treatment during his exile on Patmos. An early Christian tradition said John was in exile for 18 months.

(from Nelson's illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright (c)1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers).



He is writing to the seven churches of Asia: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea." Rev 1:11. These churches become the recipients of specific messages in chapters two and three. As pointed out in the Introduction, this region was also the initial sphere of the influence of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.

John begins with a blessing of grace, which is unmerited favor, and peace, which is from God. It includes a harmonious relationship with God and man, plus inner peace that comes through Him who is, and who was. It comes through Christ at ones obeying of His gospel. The blessing is from Him who is eternal: He is now, He was, and He is before the beginning, and He is forever and ever.

Not only is the grace and peace from God, but from the seven spirits before Him and from the throne. The term seven spirits is unique to the Revelation. Appearing here with God, seven spirits makes the seven spirits before his throne have power in extending such great blessings. The Greek word for seven is *hepta* and implies fullness:

Hepta... corresponds to the Hebrew sheba' (which is akin to saba', signifying "to be full, abundant"), sometimes used as an expression of fullness, e. g., Ruth 4:15: it generally expresses completeness, and is used most frequently in the Apocalypse; it is not found in the Gospel of John, nor between the Acts and the Apocalypse, except in Heb 11:30 (in Rom 11:4 the numeral is heptakischilioi, "seven thousand"); in Matt 22:26 it is translated "seventh" (marg., "seven"). (From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

Revelation uses the word *seven* over 100 times. It uses the term seven Spirits only four times in the Bible and each use is in Revelation:

- Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne. Revelation 1:4.
- "To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Revelation 3:1.
- From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Revelation 4:5.
- Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. Revelation 5:6: 6.

The seven spirits of God are sevenfold in the sense of the sevenfold blessing in Ruth. The fullness of the word seven is similar in meaning to the fullness of the spirit given to Christ "34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit." John 3:34. [See notes below.] Christ has the seven spirits (3:1); the seven spirits are before the throne of God (4:5); the seven spirits are the eyes of the Lamb sent out unto all the earth (5:6). The seven spirits represent the Holy Spirit of God.

Isa 11:1-3 speaks of the Spirit of God metaphorically where the parts stand for the whole:

11 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord –
3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.

Beyond the issue of the lineage of Christ, this passage foretells a pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Holy One beyond what has ever happened before or since. There are seven Spirits of God

foretold here: the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom, the Spirit of understanding, the Spirit of counsel, the Spirit of power, the Spirit of knowledge, and the Spirit of fear (respect) of the Lord. All of these, in their totality comprise the Spirit of God, or as John the Baptist explained in John 3:34-35, how Jesus was endowed with the full measure of the Holy Spirit: "34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit." Isaiah's prophecy uses the parts for the whole of the unlimited and all-powerful Spirit of God—the Spirit that he gave his son without limit.

Finally, the grace and peace come from the third person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ. He is the firstborn from the dead. "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the faithful the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." Colossians 1:18. His preeminence extends as ruler over even the kings the earth.

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Eph 1:19-23

Jesus is the fullness of the godhead (deity) bodily: "9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." Col 2:9-10.

Christ is now reigning at the right hand of God and all things are under his feet. Any true reading of Revelation must accept that both Christ and the church are complete in the victory won at the cross and the resurrection of the Lord. The final victory in Jesus will be the resurrection of the saints:

- 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."
- 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"
- 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 15:53-57.

Jesus is now "above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come."

Praise to him who gave himself for us and made us free from all sin. In Matt 26:28, Jesus said: "28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." To this the Hebrew writer added in Heb 9:14: "14 How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

We are now a kingdom, and we are now priests. This is not something deferred to the second coming. Revelation repeats this status of the saints throughout the book. In Rev 5:9-10, they sing a new song:

9 And they sang a new song:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God

from every tribe and language and people and nation.

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

There is no idea of a future kingdom yet to come in the entire Bible. In fact, the teaching is emphatic:

- 6 Mark 9:1: And he said to them, "I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power."
- Colossians 1:13: 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.
- Hebrews 12:28: 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

There is no teaching in the Bible about a kingdom yet to come.

He also made us to be priests to serve his God and father. Peter describe our priestly duties: "4 As you come to him, the living Stone-rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him- 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." 1 Peter 2:4-5.

"To him be the glory and power" describes the exalted and empowered saviour. Just as the exaltation and empowerment are complete, so is the duration-"forever and ever." Forever and ever is literally into the ages of the ages. The power and glory of the Lord are complete in his resurrection and complete forever and ever.

Christ is coming with the clouds and all shall see him—those who are now living and those who have gone before. Every knee shall bow:

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil 2:9-11.

Nowhere does the Bible say that Jesus will set foot on the earth again:

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thess 4:16-17.

"I am the alpha and omega," or we would say, "The A and the Z." This verse is the thematic statement of the book. All that follows demonstrates now and forever that God is truly Almighty: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." The dragon, the devil, the beast, the false prophet, and all who follow them will suffer defeat before the power to God, Almighty, and His Lamb.

One like a Son of Man (Revelation 1:9-20)

9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. 10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, 11 which said: "Write on a scroll

what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

12 I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

17 When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. 18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. 20 The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.NIV

John identifies himself as a companion in the suffering and the kingdom. As noted before, the kingdom is present and not to be established at some future time. See the note on verse 4 for Patmos, where John was imprisoned because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

The Lord's Day receives significance throughout the New Testament:

- I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Matthew 26:29.
- When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. Mark 16:9.
- Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. John 20:1
- When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Acts 2:1
- The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Acts 2:20-21
- On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. Acts 20:7: 7.
- On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made. 1 Corinthians 16:2
- Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:25

The time of John's vision was on the Lord's Day and, by most scholars, around 96AD. This day is not to be confused with the last day when the Lord shall come again and the end is upon us:

- Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 5:5.
- As you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully that you can boast of us just as we will boast of you in the day of the Lord Jesus. 2 Corinthians 1:14.

- For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 1 Thessalonians 5:2.
- Not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 2 Thessalonians 2:2
- But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. 2 Peter 3:10.

John describes himself as in the spirit. The Lord and Paul describe this state as the state of true worship:

- God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth. John 4:24.
- So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. 16 If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? 1 Cor 14:15-17
- And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:18
- And who also told us of your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:8

It was during this period of worship that the following visions occurred as illustrated by the subsequent uses of the phrase in the spirit:

- At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. Revelation 4:2.
- Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. Revelation 17:3.
- And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. Revelation 21:10

The loud voice was like a trumpet, and this phrase introduces figurative language that begins to describe what John heard and saw. *Like* and *as* are the signal words of the simile—a figure of speech that compares two things that are essentially unlike. The trumpet and the voice are essentially unlike. The voice is not a literal trumpet, but only has the characteristics of a trumpet: perhaps it was loud and with great clarity as one often thinks of the trumpet sounding. One thing is for sure—the voice was a voice and not a literal trumpet. The voice ordered him to write what he was to see and send the message to the seven churches.

Verse 20 identifies the symbolic meaning of the seven golden lampstands: "the seven lampstands are the seven churches." "Like the son of man" is a phrase often used in the Old Testament to describe mankind. The phrase is a favorite of Ezekiel. Prophetically, it is used of the Christ:

- Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand, the son of man you have raised up for yourself. Psalms 80:17.
- "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. Daniel 7:13.

Jesus used the term “son of man” of himself many times during his earthly ministry – most likely to indicate his humanity. Phil 2:6-8 tells of his human nature:

6 Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.
8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself
and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!

But again, like a son of man is not a son of man. The characteristics of Christ present a human form: he is dressed, he has feet, a chest, a head, hair, eyes, etc. Each specific characteristic receives a metaphoric description of its own, thus the metaphor extends. The extended metaphor of Christ is beauty, power, glory, brilliance. This not the first time that the Bible describes the Christ in glory and beauty beyond ordinary imagination and words:

- In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. 4 In him was life, and that life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. John 1:1-5.
- He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. Col.1:15-18.
- In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. 4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. Heb 1:1-4

Garments and clothes characterize good works. They are used of the saints in Rev 3:4, 18; 16:15 and of Christ in 6:15; 19:13; 19:16. Hair white like wool, white as snow is used of God in Dan 7:9.

9 "As I looked,
"thrones were set in place,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat 10
His clothing was as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like wool.

Eyes like blazing fire and feet like bronze repeats in Rev 2:18: "These are the words of voice was like the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished the sound of bronze." His voice was the sound of rushing waters. The seven stars are the angels of rushing waters. the seven churches (1:20). Out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. The 16 In his right. double-edged sword is the word of God: '12 For the word of God is living and active. hand he held Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, seven

stars, and joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. II Heb 4:12. His out of his mouth face was bright as the sun at its brightest.

The influence of seeing the Lord provoked John to sudden worship as he fell at his feet as one dead. The Lord comforted John by describing his victory:

I am the first and the last (alpha and omega).

I am the living one.

I was dead and I am alive for ever and ever.

I hold the keys to death and Hades.

The resurrection of the Lord gave him keys to death and Hades. He prophesied this in Matthew 16:18-19: "18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." He fulfilled this prophecy in Acts 2 with the establishment of his church: "24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him (Acts 2:24-25)." Acts 2:33-34 adds, "33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." A major part of the Revelation story is that Christ has overcome death and Hades for all of us who are children of God, and he will put an end to death and Hades: Rev 6:7-8: "Come!" 8 I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

Rev 20:13-15: Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Paul describes this final victory 1 Cor 15:54-57:

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

John's charge is to write "what is now" and "what will take place later." The letters to the seven churches of chapters two and three are immediate, and the end of death and Hades are to take place later. There is no more valuable tool in reading the Revelation than that of correctly identifying what is now and what will take place later. For example, we have already seen that we now are a kingdom and priests. No interpretation can change this fundamental principle and say that the kingdom is still to come.

2. Warnings against Immorality and False Teaching at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, and Thyatira (Revelation 2)

The seven churches receive individual messages via their angels (messengers) in chapters 2 and 3. Just as the seven spirits (or sevenfold spirit) represent the full limit of the Holy Spirit of God, so the seven churches represent the nature of all churches for all time. This is the measure of the Holy Spirit given to Jesus, the Christ in John 3:33-34, “33 The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. 34 For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.” SYNECDOCHE is the figure of speech used here:

syn'ec'do'che: a figure of speech by which a part is put for the whole (as fifty sail for fifty ships), the whole for a part (as society for high society), the species for the genus (as cutthroat for assassin), the genus for the species (as a creature for a man), or the name of the material for the thing made (as boards for stage). Merriam Webster Online Dictionary. 2005.

By the very nature of the figure, some churches may be composites of some or all the churches in both their strengths and/or their weaknesses. The meaning for us is clear: we must take to heart the commands of the Lord to these churches as they apply to our congregation.

To the Church in Ephesus: a Loveless Church (Revelation 2:1-7)

2:1 *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:*

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. 6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

The first letter is to the messenger of the church of Ephesus. The Lord identifies himself as the speaker by selecting one of the identifying phrases used in the vivid description of him in chapter 1:12-15. For the church of Ephesus, he uses, “These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.” He begins, “I know your deeds.” Some of the deeds are good:

- Your hard work
- Your perseverance
- Your intolerance of wicked men
- Your testing of false apostles
- Your perseverance and endurance of hardships for my name
- Your not growing weary

First blush provokes, “What a church.” How can this not be a sound congregation? Yet, they had forsaken their first love ascribed to them by the Lord himself:

"42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me." John 8:42.

"15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command." John 14:15.

"23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." John 14:23.

John explains how we must live in love in 1 John 4:16-17: "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God lives in him. 17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the Day of Judgment." First love is the love of espousal. The church as the bride of Christ extends throughout the Revelation:

23 The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. Revelation 18:23.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Revelation 19:7.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Revelation 21:2.

9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." Revelation 21:9.

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. Revelation 22:17.

The Lord gives them a choice. Repent and do the things that they did from the beginning or he will remove their lampstand from its place. In their favor was their hate of the practices of the Nicolaitans.

NICOLAITANS: (nik-o-la'-i-tanz) Nikolaitai): A sect or party of evil influence in early Christianity, especially in the 7 churches of Asia.

1. The Sect: Their doctrine was similar to that of Balaam, "who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication" (Rev 2:14-15). Their practices were strongly condemned [the Lord], who praised the church in Ephesus for "hating their works" (Rev 2:6), and blamed the church in Pergamum for accepting in some measure their teaching (Rev 2:15). . . . Reference is probably made to their influence in the church at Thyatira also, where their leader was "the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess" (Rev 2:20; compare verse 14). No further direct information regarding them is given in Scripture.

3. Nicolaitan Controversy: The problem underlying the Nicolaitan controversy . . . concerned the whole relation of Christianity to paganism and its usages. The Nicolaitans disobeyed the command issued to the Gentile churches, by the apostolic council held at Jerusalem in 49 AD - 50 AD, that they should refrain from the eating of "things sacrificed to idols" (Acts 15:29). Such a restriction . . . was yet necessary to prevent a return to a pagan laxity of morals. To this danger the Nicolaitans were themselves a glaring witness, and therefore John was justified in condemning them. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul gives warning against the same evil practices, basing his arguments on consideration for the weaker brethren (compare 1 Cor 8). *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* from Simcox, "Revelation" in the Cambridge Bible; H. Cowan in Hastings, Dictionary of the Bible (five volumes), article "Nicolaitans"; H.B. Swete,

The Apocalypse of St. John, lxx ff, 27, 28, 37. (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright ©1996 by Biblesoft).

In verse seven, the spirit becomes the spokesperson, where before the speaker was clearly the Lord. The unity of the godhead is evident: John had written in John 1:1-2, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. Paul added in Eph 6:17, "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

The ones who overcome receive the right to eat from the tree of life which God placed in the middle of the garden in Genesis 2:9, and guarded from man in Genesis 3:22-24. In Revelation the tree of life becomes central to the Lord's promise to the saved:

2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2.

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Revelation 22:14.

19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. Revelation 22:19.

The Bible uses the word *paradise* three times. Jesus answered the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43, "43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Paul said, "4 was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. [Described by Paul as being in the third heaven]. Hebrews 4:14 similarly describes the ascended savior: "14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens." Corinthians 12:4.

In Revelation 2:7, the Lord said, "7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. Paradise is a word of Persian origin and means garden. Paradise is the antitype to the Garden of Eden:

8 Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. 9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Gen 2:8-9.

To the Church in Smyrna: a Persecuted Church (Revelation 2:8-11)

8 "To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 9 I know your afflictions and your poverty – yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. 10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

The Lord describes himself as the first and the last, who died and came to life again. The main characteristic of this church was their persecution from both afflictions and poverty. Yet they were rich. The reference was to spiritual riches. In chapter 3:17, the church at Laodicea was poor and

naked—just the opposite. Their persecution came from “those who say they are Jews and are not.” They were of the synagogue of Satan. Synagogue is an assembly. The phrase repeats in chapter 3:9 to the church in Philadelphia. Satan is a word found most often in Job of the Old Testament and throughout the books of the New Testament. The meaning of the word Satan is very clear in the Revelation:

9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Rev 12:9.

2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. Rev 20:2-3.

Satan, devil, dragon, and serpent all refer to the same evil being. In the face of the devil, suffering, and imprisonment, they are not to be afraid but suffer even unto death. The ten days indicates a limited time for the persecution. Their reward is the crown of life. James 1:12 describes this blessing: “12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.” Paul looked forward to the same crown in 2 Timothy 4:8: “8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing. The crown can be lost as in Revelation 3:11: “11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.”

Finally, he who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death:

11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death. Revelation 2:11.

6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:6.

14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Revelation 20:14.

8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." Revelation 21:8.

To the Church in Pergamum: a Compromising Church (Revelation) 2:12-17)

12 *"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:*

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 13 I know where you live – where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city – where Satan lives.

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. 15 Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

17 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

The Lord describes himself with the figure of “him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. An ancient writer described Pergamum as being “given to idolatry more than all Asia. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary speaks of the city:

The high hill behind it was adorned with numerous temples, among which was the great temple to Zeus, who was called Soter Theos, the Saviour God. Pergamum was the first city in Asia to erect a temple to Augustus. It was famous for its medical schools; and Asclepius, god of health, symbolized by a serpent, was worshiped there. Ramsay says, "Beyond all cities in Asia Minor, it gives the traveler the impression of being the home of authority. How appropriate, then, that here, as we are told, was Satan's throne. (from, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press).

Pergamum had good things to their account:

- You remain true to my name.
- You did not renounce your faith in me.

They were faithful in spite of persecution that led to the death of the faithful servant Antipas. The city where Satan lives and where Satan has his throne emphasizes the total desecration of the people. Their compromising nature is apparent in the things the Lord had against them—things with which they went along:

- You have people who hold the teaching of Balaam (eating food sacrificed to idols and committing immorality. Numbers 23; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 17).
- You have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.
- Repent or I will come with the sword of my mouth (the word of God as in Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 1:16).

The Lord promises a reward for overcoming: “I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.” The Lord made the hidden manna figure very clear in John 6:31-35:

31 Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

32 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

34 "Sir," they said, "from now on give us this bread."

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

Isaiah prophesied about a new name: “2 The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.” Isaiah 62:2. In Revelation 3:12, the Lord promises the church of Philadelphia: “I will also write on him my new name.” Was the new name *Christian* (slave or servant of Christ)? The New Testament uses the word only three times in -- Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28, and 1 Peter 4:16 (see also Phil. 1:1). By now, *Christian* has lost its specific meaning and finds only general use; i.e., a *Christian* nation. Religious individuals go by denominational names and not the general name *Christian*. Receiving the name, *Christian*, means that we are uncompromising slaves of Christ. Only members of the Lord’s church so faithfully go by this name, *Christian*. The idea that it was given as a derogatory name is inconsistent with the facts, since neither Jews nor Gentiles would so elevate Jesus as the Christ.

To the Church in Thyatira: a Corrupt Church (Revelation 2:18-29)

18 "To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. 24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): 25 Only hold on to what you have until I come.

26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations –

27 He will rule them with an iron scepter;

he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -

just as I have received authority from my Father. 28 I will also give him the morning star. 29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The Lord addresses the church in Thyatira with words of the Son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. As in the previous letters, this letter begins with the strengths of the church, recognizing love, faith, service, and perseverance. They are doing more than they did at first.

However, they tolerate Jezebel, who like her Old Testament namesake misled the church into sexual immorality and idolatry:

JEZEBEL: In Rev 2:20, we read of Jezebel, "the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess"; . . . as Moffat (Expositor's Greek Testament) aptly renders, "that Jezebel of a woman alleging herself a prophetess." Some members of the church at Thyatira "under the sway of an influential woman refused to separate from the local guilds where moral interests, though not ostensibly defied, were often seriously compromised. Her lax principles or tendencies made for a connection with foreign and compromising associations which evidently exerted a dangerous influence upon some weaker Christians in the city." (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

"That woman Jezebel" might be translated "that Jezebel like woman," creating a figurative connection to the Old Testament Jezebel (1 Kings 16-21). Jezebel of the Old Testament killed God's prophets and led the people into idolatry and immorality. Having given her time to repent, the Lord promises:

- He will cast her on "a bed of intense suffering."
- He will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely.
- He will strike her children dead.

The result of the Lord's actions will be a message to all the churches, illustrating that this and other lessons are to all churches. All the churches now know that the Lord will repay each according to their deeds.

There were those in Thyatira that did not hold to her teaching. Associated with her teaching are Satan's deep secrets (things). One commentator observed: "Her followers 'prided themselves upon their enlightened liberalism (verse 24).'" Many today still think that they can commune with false religion and immorality and maintain their spiritual connection to the Lord.

He, who overcomes and does the Lord's will, will receive his blessing of authority over nations—an authority described by David:

4 The One enthroned in heaven laughs;
the Lord scoffs at them.
5 Then he rebukes them in his anger
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,
6 "I have installed my Kingdom Zion, my holy hill."
7 I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:
He said to me, "You are my Son;
today I have become your Father.
8 Ask of me,
and I will make the nations your inheritance,
the ends of the earth your possession.
9 You will rule them with an iron scepter;
you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Ps 2:4-9.

He will receive the morning star:

12 How you have fallen from heaven, morning star, son of the dawn!
You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! Isaiah 14:12
19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 2 Peter 1:19
28 I will also give him the morning star. Revelation 2:28
16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." Revelation 22:16

3. Warnings against Immorality and False Teaching at Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Revelation 3)

To the Church in Sardis: a Dead Church (Revelation 3:1-6)

3:1 *"To the angel of the church in Sardis write:*

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. 6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

The words are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. The recipient is the church of Sardis:

SARDIS: (sar'-dis) (Sardeis): Sardis is of interest to the student of early Christian history as the home of one of the Seven Churches of Rev (Rev 1:11; 3:1 ff). It was moreover one of the oldest and most important cities of Asia Minor, and until 549 BC, the capital of the kingdom of Lydia. . . . At the base flowed the river Pactolus which served as a moat, rendering the city practically impregnable. In 17 AD, when it was destroyed by an earthquake, the Roman emperor Tiberius remitted the taxes of the people and rebuilt the city, and in his honor the citizens of that and of neighboring towns erected a large monument, but Sardis never recovered its former importance (compare Rev 3:12). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

The church at Sardis had a reputation for being alive, but they were dead. The use of "Wake up!" is interesting compared to the previous commands to repent. They were ordered to strengthen what remains and is about to die. Their deeds were not complete in the sight of God, and the message was clear: "Remember what you received and heard. Obey it. Repent. If not, the Lord will come like a thief."

A few people had not soiled their clothes: (Revelation 19:8 defines the figure: "8 'Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.):"

- They have not soiled their clothes.
- They will walk with me.

He who overcomes will be dressed in white and the Lord will never blot his name out of the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before his Father and his angels:

- 28 May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous. Psalms 69:28.
- 3 Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Philippians 4:3.
- 5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. Revelation 3:5.
- 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. Revelation 13:8.
- 8 The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. Revelation 17:8.
- 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what had done as recorded in the books. Revelation 20:12.
- 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15.
- Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Revelation 21:27.

To the Church in Philadelphia: A Faithful Church (Revelation 3:7-13)

7 *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:*

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars – I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

“These are the words of him who is faithful and true” describes the Lord. He “Who holds the key of David” is spoken of formerly by Isaiah:

20 *"In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah. 21 I will clothe him with your robe and fasten your sash around him and hand your authority over to him. He will be a father to those who live in Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. 22 I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. Isa 22:20-23.*

The *power to open and shut* expression is similar to the power to bind and loose in Matthew 16:19, where the Lord promises the keys of the kingdom of heaven: "19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Previously we have seen that the Lord holds the keys of Death and Hades in Revelation 1:18: "18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."

They have little strength, but have kept the Lord's word and not denied his name. The synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not (see notes on Revelation 2:9), are liars. They will fall down and acknowledge that the Lord loves these Christians that they have persecuted. Since they have endured patiently, as commanded, the Lord will keep them from the hour of trial to come upon the whole world to test them. The Lord promises that he is coming soon, and commands that they hold on to what they have. No one will take their crown, and him who overcomes will be a pillar in the temple of God:

The faithful Christians were always to be a part of the pillar of the temple of God: "15 if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." 1 Timothy 3:15. The Lord, while on earth, had promised: "I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man." Mark 14:58. The temple not made with hands is clearly the church:

- 16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." 1 Corinthians 3:17.
- For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." Corinthians 6:16.
- 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. Ephesians 2:21.
- 22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. Revelation 21:22.

The Lord will write the name of God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, on him that overcomes

The new Jerusalem, just as the temple, is the church. It is the church now and is so described in Hebrews 12:22-24:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Heb 12:28-29 finishes with the church as a kingdom that cannot be shaken: 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

In Revelation 21:2, John describes this same church: "2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

To the Church in Laodicea: A Lukewarm Church (Revelation 3:14-22)

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

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The Lord describes himself as the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. The letter is to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

LAODICEA: (la-od-i-se'-a) (Laodikia): A city of Asia Minor situated in the Lycos valley in the province of Phrygia, and the home of one of the Seven Churches of Rev (Rev 1:11). . . . It was founded by Antiochus II (261 BC - 246 BC) of Syria, who named it for his wife Laodike, and who populated it with Syrians and with Jews who were transplanted from Babylonia to the cities of Phrygia and Lydia. Though Laodicea stood on the great highway at the junction of several important routes, it was a place of little consequence until the Roman province of Asia was formed in 190 BC. It then suddenly became a great and wealthy center of industry, famous specially for the fine black wool of its sheep and for the Phrygian powder for the eyes, which was manufactured there (compare Rev 3:18). . . . In the year 60 AD, the city was almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake, but so wealthy were its citizens that they rejected the proffered aid of Rome, and quickly rebuilt it at their own expense (compare Rev 3:17). (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright (c)1996 by Biblesoft)

Their deeds, which were not hot or cold but lukewarm, characterized them as an indifferent church. As a result, the Lord said that he would spit them out. They were satisfied with their own riches and wealth and needed nothing. In reality, they were wretched, pitiful, blind, and naked.

They were to buy gold from the Lord to become rich. Peter has described faith as more precious than gold:

6 . . . you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith-of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire-may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7.

They were to buy white clothes to wear so they could cover their shameful nakedness. Revelation 19:8 defines the figure: "'8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.' (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)" Therefore they were to have faith and righteous acts.

They were to buy salve to put on their eyes, so they could see. The Lord had said in the sermon on the mount: '8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. Matthew 5:8. Faith, righteous acts, and pure hearts will overcome indifference.

The Lord rebuked those that he loved; and, in turn, they were to be earnest and repent. The Lord is knocking but we must hear his voice and open the door. He will eat with us, and we with him.

Those that overcome will sit with him on his throne. Paul describes this inheritance:

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Rom 8:16-17.

4. Heaven and the Throne of God (Revelation 4)

The Vision of Heaven (Revelation 4:1)

4:1 After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

This begins the third main section of the Revelation. John's attention moves away from what is happening in the church as it exists and survives on earth and focuses on heaven and what is and will happen there. The voice that John first heard expresses the purpose of this part of the Revelation: "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." John at once is in the spirit—not an attitude or frame of mind but the becoming of an actual part of the vision. The voice commanded, "Come up here." The place where John was going was up. The vision itself unfolds before John. Paul expressed a similar experience:

12:1 . . . I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. 2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. 3 And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—4 was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. 2 Cor 12:1-4.

"After this" indicates events, the main of which will have their consummation at the revelation of the Lord in the last day. It is not general events in sequence that follow, but rather a series of visions, the events of which parallel one another. For example, the vision turns immediately to a view of heaven and the "Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. (Revelation 4:8)"

The Throne in Heaven (Revelation 4:2-6)

2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. 3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. 4 Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. 5 From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. 6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

John saw the throne and someone sitting on it. We will arrive at the revelation of the Lord to the sound of a trumpet:

- They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. Matt 24:30-31.
- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 1 Cor 15:52-53.
- 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thess 4:16-17.

At that last trump, the unveiling of the throne in heaven will be upon us. And we too will see “that throne in heaven with someone sitting on it.” At the end of the previous chapter, the Lord spoke of God’s throne: “21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.” Rev 3:21-22. The one who sat had the appearance of jasper and carnelian (sardius)—stones that represent the brilliance of God. These stones were the first and last stones of the high priest breastplate (Exodus 39:8-13); however, a clearer understanding is in the description of the bride of the Lamb where the brightness of the gems directly connects to the brilliance of God:

“Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. Rev 21:9-11

A rainbow encircled the throne. The rainbow is used twice in the Bible to describe God and once to describe the Son of God: “28 Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.” Ezek 1: 28. Of the son of God, John wrote, “10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow [In the Greek text, this indefinite article *a* is the definite article *the*, indicating the same rainbow used to describe God.] above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars.” Rev 10:1-2.

The scene is one of beauty, majesty, and power: lightning, rumblings, and thunder. The seven lamps are the sevenfold spirit of God as in Rev 1:4-5: “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne.” These are not lamps as in *lampstands*. These lamps are blazing. Luke described the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost as tongues of fire in Acts 2:3. In Acts 2:16, Peter related this event directly to the outpouring of the Spirit of God.

Therefore, here we have God on his throne and his Holy Spirit blazing before his throne. Revelation 5:6 will reveal the Lamb in whom dwells the fullness of the Godhead (Col. 2:9): “6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.”

All of this is set on what looked like a sea of glass. They were covered with eyes and could see all around. Other passages or visions where the Lord appeared confirm the meaning of this expanse, called here the sea of glass:

- 9 Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up 10 and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. Ex 24:9-10.
- 22 Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an expanse, sparkling like ice, and awesome. Ezek 1:22.
- 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. Rev 21:21.

The Four Living Creatures (Revelation 4:6-8)

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the

fourth was like a flying eagle. 8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

*"Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come."*

In the center around the throne were four living creatures. These living creatures were like a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. Jewish secular history alleges that the four leading tribes of Israel each had one of these figures on the standard as they marched forth:

The Jewish writers tell us, that the standard of each tribe of Israel took the color of the stone which represented it in the high priest's breastplate, and that there was worked upon each a particular figure—a lion for Judah, a young ox for Ephraim, a man for Reuben, and an eagle for Dan. (from *The Apocalypse: Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1998 by BibleSoft)

Numbers 2 describes the arrangement of the tribes for battle. In Ezekiel 1, Ezekiel had a vision in which he saw four living creatures before the throne of God: "10 Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man, and on the right side each had the face of a lion, and on the left the face of an ox; each also had the face of an eagle. 11 Such were their faces. Ezek 1:10-11. In Ezek 10:15-16, Ezekiel clearly identified the living creatures as cherubim: "15 Then the cherubim rose upward. These were the living creatures I had seen by the Kebar River." Cherubim are winged, heavenly creatures ordinarily described as worshipping and serving God. In verse 8, they are worshipping God.

The angels of heaven are thus included in the revealing of the Lamb. Our god is their God; our Lord is their Lord. The adverse is also true; their enemy is our enemy. Therefore, they worship our God as Lord God Almighty. The elders lay their crowns aside (humility before the Almighty) and join the worship.

The Twenty-four Elders (Revelation 4:9-11)

9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

*11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."*

The twenty-four elders sitting on thrones indicate a responsibility of governance. Jesus promised a throne to his immediate followers in Matt 19:28-29: "28 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The Holy Spirit of God made elders in the church overseers:

28 Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. 29 I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. 31 So be on your guard! Acts 20:28-31

Paul gave special importance to certain elders in 1 Tim 5:17-18: "17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching."

They were dressed in white, which agrees with the commands to the seven churches in Revelation 3:4: "4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy;" Revelation 3:5: "He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white;" and in Revelation 3:18: "18 I counsel you to buy from me . . . white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."

Peter promised elders crowns when the Chief Shepherd appears in 1 Peter 5:1-4:

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Whoever the elders are, they are by definition older—perhaps the first appointed to serve. Paul described the early church as the firstfruits:

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Rom 8:22-23.

The elders are present as John witnessed the great multitude of the saved from the tribulation (Rev 7:11-12). They were also present at the destruction of Babylon (Rev 19:4-5).

The elders also have been raised at the coming of the Lord, for even the apostles eagerly await that day: "8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing." 2 Tim 4:8.

From this point forward, we must think of John as an observer of the day of the Lord and not a participant. He will see the elders here and the resurrection there, but they are all a part of the great day of the Lord: "12 'Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.'" Rev 22:12.

The elders' song praises the God, Almighty of all creation:

11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created
and have their being."

This song repeats the teaching of Paul among the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers of Athens and emphasizes once again the theme of the Revelation: God, Almighty is the alpha and omega, and no other can or will be. Paul taught in Acts 17:24-28:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he

determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 28 "For in him we live and move and have our being."

Thus, John, and we through him, begins to see the wonder and splendor of God revealed to us. The singular nature of this view of God, Almighty, cannot be altered by philosophy or theology or speculative theories.

5. The Lamb and the Scroll with Seven Seals (Revelation 5)

This section introduces the scroll and the Lamb, thus placing the Lamb in the very midst of heaven's glory and power. Now in addition to the Almighty God and the Holy Spirit, the Lamb, the son of God, is on the throne of God. The vision of John now reveals Christ in all his awesome power.

The Scroll with the Seven Seals (Revelation 5:1-5)

5:1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. 2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" 3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. 4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

The scroll was in the hand of him who sat upon the throne. According to Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, the word here derives from *biblos*, a scroll, or book, a word used to designate various books of the Bible. In Rev 5:1-9, the scroll represents the revelation of God's purposes and counsels concerning the world. This is also true of the little scroll in Rev 10:8. Although the word is always rendered little scroll in Revelation 10:2, 9-12, there is no real reason to so render it.

John wept because no one was able to open the scroll. Then one of the elders said to him, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." The Root of David is the Christ as the angel told Mary: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Luke 1:32-33). Isaiah 11:10-11 also reveals this eternal connection: "10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious. 11 In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the remnant that is left of his people . . . Paul quotes Isaiah in Rom 15:12: "12 And again, Isaiah says,

"The Root of Jesse will spring up,
one who will arise to rule over the nations;
the Gentiles will hope in him."

The triumphant Christ is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.

Angels Exalt the Lamb (Revelation 5:6-14)

6 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. 8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song:

*"You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God*

from every tribe and language and people and nation.

10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang:

*"Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!"*

13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

*"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"*

14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

Then John saw the Lamb, the sacrificed Son of God. The victory of the Lamb fulfills the expectation of the centuries. John the Baptist recognized the Lamb immediately: "29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29. The Ethiopian eunuch was puzzling over this very idea just prior to his conversion by Philip in Acts 8:32:

"32 The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

Paul emphatically identified Christ as the Lamb in 1 Cor 5:7-8: "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed."

Peter connected the blood of the Lamb to our redemption in 1 Peter 1:18-19:

"18 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

The Lamb was standing in the center of the throne of God fulfilling Paul's description:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Eph 1:19-23

The Lamb has the sevenfold spirit of God in his seven eyes, the power of which reaches throughout the world. This an affirmation the angels statement in Zechariah 4:10, "These seven are the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth." Jesus describes this power in John 3:34-35: "For the

one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands."

The Lamb came and took the scroll, and the four living creatures and the elders fell down before the Lamb. They had harps and golden bowls of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. We find in Revelation 8:4 that the prayers of the saints go before God. The new song tells us that this is the last and notable day of the Lord:

- The Lamb is worthy to take the scroll and open the seals revealing the mighty triumph of the Lamb and the Almighty God.
- He was slain and purchased men for God from all tribes, languages, and people.
- He made them to be a kingdom and priest to serve our God (Revelation 1:6).

The number of angels heard by John was innumerable. Some versions say that there were myriads of myriads. The millions of angels encircled the throne and the elders and the living creatures and sang their song of praise. To the angels' song were added the voices of the entire creation:

"To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever!"

The living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

This is truly the advent of the great and wonderful Day of the Lord. What a fulfillment of Paul's statement in Phil 2:9-11

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

6. The Lamb Opens Six of Seven Seals (Revelation 6)

In this section, the Lamb opens six of the seven seals. The Lamb reserves seventh seal for chapter 8 where as the eighth seal opens and the seven angels prepare to sound seven trumpets. The trumpet soundings open up other sequences of events – some past, some present, and some future.

The Lamb opened the first of the seven seals, and with the opening one of the living creatures, in a voice like thunder, said, "Come." As a command, "Come" shows that the living creatures control the horsemen. The King James Version and the New King James Version translate this, "Come and see," making John the recipient of the command. However, "and see" is inserted by the translators. The Greek text agrees with the NIV and all American Standard versions. Either "Go!" or "Come!" are acceptable; however the words, "and see," are doubtful, and generally rejected by critics. The living creature, therefore commanded the four horsemen.

Thus, the living creatures have authority over the four horsemen and their symbolic representations. Although God allows the forces of evil and natural calamity to exist across the earth, He still is over all and above all, allowing them to exist only as He wills it. Paul wrote in Eph 4:5-6, "One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."

As in chapter 4:1, John immediately saw what was happening before him. As the seals open, notice that the events are parallel. Each proceeds through time until the great and final day of the Lord. The first four scenes will involve horses with riders. The horse is never a beast of burden in the Bible. The Bible used the phrase workhorse in one place. In all, there are 37 references to the word horse and 126 references to the word horses. It is an animal of war and conquest. Job 39:19-25, in the oldest book of the Bible, describes the might, power, and beauty of the horse:

19 "Do you give the horse his strength
or clothe his neck with a flowing mane?
20 Do you make him leap like a locust,
striking terror with his proud snorting?
21 He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength,
and charges into the fray.
22 He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing;
he does not shy away from the sword. 23
The quiver rattles against his side,
along with the flashing spear and lance.
24 In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground;
he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.
25 At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, 'Aha!'
He catches the scent of battle from afar,
the shout of commanders and the battle cry.

Revelation uses the words horse and horses 16 times making it an important image, and central to the scenes of struggle in God's revelation.

The allusion to the horses in Revelation 6 is to Zechariah 1:8-13 and 6:1-8 where it is clear that they are under the control of God who sent them out through the world to serve His purposes:

8 During the night I had a vision - and there before me was a man riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown, and white horses.

9 I asked, "What are these, my lord?"

The angel who was talking with me answered, "I will show you what they are."

10 Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained, "They are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth."

11 And they reported to the angel of the LORD, who was standing among the myrtle trees, "We have gone throughout the earth and found the whole world at rest and in peace."

12 Then the angel of the LORD said, "LORD Almighty, how long will you withhold mercy from Jerusalem and from the towns of Judah, which you have been angry with these seventy years?" 13 So the LORD spoke kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me. Zechariah 1:8-13

Here the angel of the Lord understood that only the Lord has the power to destroy or grant mercy or withhold it. In Zechariah 6:1ff, the angel of the Lord calls the four spirits of the Lord going out to the whole world:

6:1 I looked up again - and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains - mountains of bronze! 2 The first chariot had red horses, the second black, 3 the third white, and the fourth dappled - all of them powerful. 4 I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?"

5 The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world. 6 The one with the black horses is going toward the north country, the one with the white horses toward the west, and the one with the dappled horses toward the south."

7 When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth.

8 Then he called to me, "Look, those going toward the north country have given my Spirit rest in the land of the north." Zechariah 6:1-8

The First Seal—Conqueror on White Horse (Revelation 6:1-2)

6:1 I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" 2 I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

With the opening of the first seal, John sees the white horse and the rider had a bow and crown and rode out bent on conquest. Notice the contrast between this weak imagery of the horseman and the powerful and mighty imagery of the Christ in Revelation 19:11-15:

11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice, he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.

In the context of the other horses and horsemen, and in the war-like and conquering symbolism, this horseman on the white horse, like the others, is conquering humankind. What force appears in white, yet assaults the children of God? After all, Revelation uses white in to describe God, the Son of God, and the righteous acts of the saints. The answer is clear.

False prophets are dressed in the white of sheep: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Matthew 7:15. In the great deceit of humankind, disguise is an important tool of the evil one: "And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve." 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

Not only is evil cloaked in white, but the deeds of evil are also deceitful: "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11. In the writings, of John this agent of evil upon the earth is the antichrist. The rider on the white horse is the false prophet who along with Satan himself and the beast become a triad of evil as the revelation unfolds.

- 18 Dear children, this is the last hour and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. 1 John 2:18.
- 1 John 2:21-23: 22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son.
- 1 John 4:3: 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.
- 2 John 7: 7 Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.

The deceit of evil is so successful because it mimics the Christ in appearance but not in word and thought. Later, John sees the true Christ.

The Second Seal—War (Revelation 6:3-4)

3 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come" 4 Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

At the opening of the second seal, the second living creature, just as the first, said, "Come." The horse is the red horse of war, having been given the right to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. The Lord taught, and our experience agrees, that war will go out across the world:

4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many. 6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. 8 All these are the beginning of birth pains. Matthew 24:4-8.

This description appears in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Civil peace in this present world is unattainable. Ezekiel described peace as a flimsy, whitewashed wall that falls after the first hard rain: "Because they lead my people astray, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash." Ezekiel 13:10-11.

The Lord did not come to abolish war, which God allows to exist, but to bring spiritual peace to us: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." Matthew 10:34-36. This spiritual peace comes only to the righteous in the Lord: The promise was clear from the prophets on:

"Peace, peace, to those far and near,"
says the LORD. And I will heal them."

20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest,
whose waves cast up mire and mud.

21 "There is no peace," says my God, "for the wicked." Isaiah 57:19-21

The red horse illustrates that war will be upon the earth and the true peace is the peace in Christ. Paul describes this true peace in Philippians 4:7: "7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

God's control of war extends to the rulers who serve only by his grace: "13:1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. . . 4 For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing." Romans 13:1-4.

The Third Seal—Famine: (6:5-6)

5 When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. 6 Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

The rider of the black horse carries a pair of scales. The cost was great. A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages. There are no luxuries, for famine withholds oil and wine. Our present world has many examples of famine. Starving children abound in places stricken like Africa. There is not even a quart of wheat for those families. Desperate as famine-stricken people may be, they will not receive relief in this life. However, Jesus promised all the world in Matthew 5:6 that he would fill them spiritually: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."

Just as with false religion and war, God allows famine to go throughout the world.

The Fourth Seal—Death: (Revelation 6:7-8)

7 When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" 8 I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

With war, famine, and disease, there comes Death and Hades. Personified here, Death is the rider of the pale horse. Hades, the realm of the dead follows close behind him. For reasons that are evident in verses 6:9-11, at the death of Christ, he overcame Hades and the righteous dead are no longer there. Vine includes this idea in his definition: "Hades: 6, 'the region of departed spirits of the lost' (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the ascension of Christ)."

A summary of the uses attributed to Hades by Vine will be helpful to understand what follows:

- The word is used four times in the Gospels, and always by the Lord, Matthew 11:23; 16:18; Luke 10:15; 16:23.
- It is used with reference to the soul of Christ, Acts 2:27, 31.
- Christ declares that He has the keys of it, Revelation 1:18.
- In Revelation 6:8 it is personified, with the signification of the temporary destiny of the

doomed.

- It is to give up those who are therein, 20:13, and is to be cast into the lake of fire, v. 14.

(From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright© 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

Death is the more dominant of the two in this passage and the rider of the pale horse. While Christ now holds the keys to Hades, he has yet to overcome Death. In 1 Corinthians 15:25-26, Paul declared, "For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy that he will destroy is death. "In 1 Corinthians 15:54-57, he added:

4 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Man's long struggle against death spans all dispensations (Hosea 13:14; Isaiah 25:8) and the overcoming of death is one part of the eternal struggle.

The instruments of physical death are war, famine, plague and disease, and the wild beasts of the earth. God—the alpha and omega—subjects all these to His will, controlling them through the four living creatures. The instrument of spiritual death is the false prophet, disguised in righteousness, but still control by God—the alpha and the omega.

The Fifth Seal—Souls of Those Slain for the Word of God: (Revelation 6:9-11)

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

As the four horsemen—the Antichrist, War, Famine, and Death—reveal, while living this earthly life, we must expect the dangers that are inherent in this present world. However, what of the saints who died because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus? The souls of those thus slain are under the altar in the vision of the heavenly scene. This passage indicates that Hades does not keep the dead in Christ. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said that the gates of Hades could not overcome his church. Those dead in this passage are clearly not in Hades. In the state represented by opening of the fifth seal, these dead in Christ are under the altar of God, they are given a white robe, and they are told to wait until the number of all those to be killed was completed. This is a dispensational context, which appears to cover from the beginning of the church until the Lamb is victorious. In context, chapter 7 will become an elaboration of the fate of those who have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

A more traditional thought, based on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, holds that Abraham's side was a separate place but still a part of Hades. Luke 16:21-24. Revelation treats Christians as being in an immediate state of bliss (paradise in Luke 16) with white robes and in the presence of the Sovereign Lord. The entirety of chapter 7 expands on the status of the Christian dead in Christ.

The question of "Who are the slain?" is important. For this passage to be consistent with the context, *the slain*, just as the *horsemen* must be symbolic. The souls of slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained are all those who have died to Christ. The slaying of all

Christians occurs when they put to death the old man and put on Christ. Paul wrote in Gal 3:26-27, "26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

Paul described this continue condition in 2 Cor 6:9-10 where he said, "Dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; 10 sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything." When Christians obey the gospel and hold to the testimony of Jesus, they slay the old man of sin. The figure of one slain is also used of Christ as in Rev 5:6, "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders." Rev 13:8 also speaks of the slain savior, "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names **have not been written** in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world."

The slaying of all Christians emulates the slaying of the Lord when they obey him. Rom 6:2-4 teaches, "We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? 3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" This death is a dying in Christ—a slaying just as he was slain. Rom 6:8-10 clearly affirms this point, "8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. We will study later in the Revelation that the second death has no power over those thus alive in Christ (Revelation 20:5-6).

Our life is a new one in Christ. Paul taught in 2 Cor 5:14-18:

For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Further, in Col 2:20-21, the scripture teaches, "Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules." And even more emphatically, in Col 3:3-4, we learn, "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

2 Tim 2:11-13 summarizes the teaching on the death of Christians:

11 Here is a trustworthy saying:
If we died with him,
we will also live with him;
12 if we endure,
we will also reign with him.
If we disown him,
he will also disown us;
13 if we are faithless,
he will remain faithful,
for he cannot disown himself.

The point that all the righteous that hold to the testimony of the Lamb are those slain for the Lamb follows consistently throughout the revelation. This study will return to the subject in Rev 20:4:

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and

because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands.

For now, this point concludes with Paul's glorious statement in Gal 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The slain in Christ are not the martyrs strewn through the pages of history during times of persecution. They are the uncountable multitudes of believers who die with Christ to sin every hour of every day through out all time and for all time.

The Sixth Seal—Terror for the Evil Ones and a Sealing for the Servants of God (Revelation 6:12-7:17)

This passage begins a thought with three divisions: *Terror to the Evil Doers (6:12-17)*, *144,000 Sealed (7:1-8)*, and *the Great Multitudes in White Robes (7:9-17)*. Many view chapter 7 as an interlude; however, we shall consider that chapter as a central part of the whole in the next lessons where as the day approaches, and the Lord deals justly with the good. For now, John's vision turns to the evil doers.

Terror to the Evil Doers

12 I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, 13 and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. 14 The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The vision portrayed under the opening of the sixth seal brings us right up to the great, awesome, and mighty day of the Lord. It is a prelude to that great day revealed in later chapters of Revelation. These images and the terror that they cause are simultaneous events poured out on the wicked:

- There was a great earthquake.
- The sun turned black,
- The whole moon turned to blood.
- The stars in the sky fell.
- The sky recedes like a scroll,
- Every mountain and island was removed from its place.

The scene takes us right up to the destruction of the world with the fervent, final appearance of the wrath of the Lamb. The context indicates that these terrible events will occur for a long enough time for the recipients to discuss their terror and to suffer at its appearance.

Metaphorically all worldly men—the rich, poor, mighty, and weak,—will respond with the same terror, hiding and even calling for the mountains to fall on them: "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

This scene is a preamble to what follows for evil people. The passage follows the characteristics and features of the Lord's own prediction in Matthew 24:29-44:

29 "Immediately after the distress of those days

"the sun will be darkened,

and the moon will not give its light;

the stars will fall from the sky,

and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

30 " At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.

32 "Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. 34 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

The wrath of God and the Lamb is upon us. Now, the scene shifts to the status of the servants of God during this very event.

7. The 144,000 Sealed and the Great Multitude in White Robes (Revelation 7)

Although many describe chapter 7 as an interlude, the chapter is actually a continuation of the thought closing chapter 6. The sixth seal opens with a description of events leading up to the great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb. It is logical to ask, "What about the righteous? What happens to them prior the great day of the Lord?" The fifth seal had opened to the question of what had happened to the souls of those slain because of the word of God and their testimony. They were given white robes to wear until the number of their fellow servants who were to be killed were completed [See notes on Revelation 6:9-11]. In chapter 7 we find that the great multitude that no one could count wore white robes [See notes to follow on Revelation 7:9 and 14]. Further, these stand before the throne of God in state opposite to the evil ones of Revelation 6:12-17. Thus, chapter 7 is a continuation of the thought that closes chapter 6.

144,000 Sealed (Revelation 7:1-8)

7:1 After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.

During the events affecting the wicked, a simultaneous set of events occurs among the righteous. Just as the Lord described the events affecting the wicked, he also described the status of his elect in Matthew 24:31: "They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

These angels and those of Matthew 24:31 seem similar to those of horses and chariots of Ezekiel and the four living creatures, who control the four horseman in chapter 6. That is, the coming of the end and the application of God's will are strictly under His control. He is the Alpha and the Omega. In this case, the angels hold back the four winds in an effort to harm the land and the sea. However, the angel from the east commands them to stop.

2 Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 3 "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." 4 Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.

5 From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed,

from the tribe of Reuben 12,000,

from the tribe of Gad 12,000,

6 from the tribe of Asher 12,000,

from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000,

from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000,

7 from the tribe of Simeon 12,000,

from the tribe of Levi 12,000,

*from the tribe of Issachar 12,000,
8 from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000,
from the tribe of Joseph 12,000,
from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.*

The command not to harm the land and the sea stays the destruction and harm until they put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God. Those sealed are clearly stated. They are the servants of our God; they were all from the tribes of Israel; and they are designated as being 144,000. We shall consider these in order.

At the Last Day, God will gather his servants. To these, described as from the tribes of Israel, God adds the great multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language of those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). This first group is definitely the group of Revelation 14:1:4, where they also are called 144,000. They had distinct characteristics:

- They had the name of the Lamb and the name of the Father written on their foreheads.
- They had been redeemed from the earth.
- They kept themselves pure.
- They follow the Lamb wherever he goes.
- They are first fruits of God and the Lamb.

Chapter 14 calls them firstfruits. As firstfruits, they are those first Christians, perhaps even prior to the Gentiles' conversion of Acts 10, sealed by the Holy Spirit as in Acts 2:38. Following the firstfruits of the sacrificial laws of the Old Testament, the earliest Christians are separated from the huge number of those to follow in verse 16: Therefore, the 144,000 are those earliest Christians who followed the Lamb and accepted the saviour, lived pure lives, and followed him without exception:

3 Israel was holy to the LORD,
the firstfruits of his harvest;
all who devoured her were held guilty,
and disaster overlook them,"
declares the LORD. Jeremiah 2:3

James extends this metaphor to the early Jewish Christians in James 1:1: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." James expands on the image in James 1:18: "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

The number 144,000 limits the size of this particular group of the saved to a finite but large number. One should compare this number to the huge number, which no one can count—a number also identified in the group of those sealed in verse 16.

Sealing and seals carried special meaning for the Jews. However, the word and meaning carried forward to the sealing of the servants of God in the New Testament. The sealing of the children of Israel occurred in Exodus 28:21: "21 There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes." In the same context in Exodus 28:36-37, Aaron was given a seal that marked him as Holy to the Lord: "36 'Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: HOLY TO THE LORD. 37 Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban.'" In the New Testament, the seal of God's servants became the very Spirit of God in our hearts. In 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, Paul said, "21

Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, 22 set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come." We are also marked in him with a seal: "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit." Ephesians 1:13. Eph 4:30 extends this thought, "30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

This sealing is an event that is continuous and parallel to the other events characterized by the opening of the seven seals. One can contrast this marking with a seal by the Holy Spirit with that mark of the beast applied to the servants of the Satan discussed in Revelation 13:16-17; 14:9-11; 16:2. As the seal of the Holy Spirit marks the servants of God, so the mark of the beast marks the servants of Satan.

The Great Multitude from the Tribulation: (Revelation 7:9-17)

9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. 10 And they cried out in a loud voice:

*"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb."*

In addition to firstfruits who were sealed, innumerable hosts were before the throne of God. The white robes are clearly those given to the slain for the word of God. This group is broader than the firstfruits and of an infinite number. They represent the whole creation and every nation of the Lord's great commission. As they cry out, they recognize that salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb. The praise echoes the meaning of Peter in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

11 All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying:

*"Amen!
Praise and glory
and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!"*

In addition to the innumerable hosts, the angels and the elders still stand before the throne of God. The "amen" is attached to the praise of the multitude of the saved. They were falling down and worshipping God, recognizing Him as all-wise and all-powerful, and worthy of thanks and honor. God exists for ever and ever or into the ages of the ages. The difference in these attributes of God and the idols and philosophers of the world becomes clear.

13 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?"

14 I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

An important question comes up. Who are the innumerable hosts? Where did they come from? The two-part answer given by the elders describes them as those who were slain for the word and testimony of the Lamb, discussed above. The innumerable hosts are the servants of God who have come out of the great tribulation. They came out of that tribulation with robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb. John names the specific tribulation in Revelation 1:9: "9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus." The great tribulation confronts all Christians who war against the flesh and the world. In Acts 9:15-16, the Lord said of Paul, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." John himself identified the struggle in Rev 2:10, "Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." Of all Christians Paul wrote in Rom 8:35-36:

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

The tribulation is upon us and is not some episode of the future as millennial sophistry would say. It is a spiritual struggle and continues in the lives of all Christians according to Paul in Eph 6:12-13: "12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."

15 *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 spread his tent over them. 1
6 Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.*

*The sun will not beat upon them,
nor any scorching heat.*

*17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne
will be their shepherd;
he will lead them to springs of living water.*

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The allusion in verses 16 and 17 is Isaiah 49:10. The allusion in verse 17 is Isaiah 25:8. This episode of the Revelation ends with the complete victory of God and the Lamb. The servants of God who are sealed are before the throne. Each episode that follows, with its sequence of events, will end with this same victory.

The victory for the saints is the same as that with which the Revelation concludes in Rev 21:1-4:

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem,

coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

The opening of the seventh seal brings the wicked and righteous right up to the great day of the Lord. Through it all, God is the Alpha and the Omega. Rev 21:6-8 teaches emphatically:

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

8. The Opening of the Seventh Seal and Seven Angels with Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8)

8:1 When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. 2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

The preceding chapter ended with the great and loud celebration. Against this is set the opening of the seventh and last seal. When he (the Lamb) opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven, indicating a period of readiness for the momentous events to follow. One might say the suspense also increased as all of heaven awaited the final revelation of the Lamb. It is important to remember that what John is about to see has remained a mystery throughout the ages. The rulers of old did not know:

7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him" –

10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:7-10

Nor did the prophets know, a case eloquently described by Peter:

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. 1 Peter 1:10-12.

As Peter concluded, not even the angels knew what God had prepared.

The silence is deafening, so we say, as the half an hour was passing. After the half an hour, John saw seven angels, described as the seven angels who stand before God. The description makes them unique in their identity. Who exactly are these seven angels? Two angels in the scriptures stand out as archangels. In addition, Jewish literature and tradition identify seven such angels. In Job 1:6, we find angels coming before the Lord: "6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD." Jesus identified angels who always see the face of the father in Matthew 18:10: "See that you do not look down on one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven." Gabriel identified himself in Luke 1:19: "19 The angel answered, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news.'" In *The Apocalypse: Exposition of the Book of Revelation*, Seiss quotes one of the Jewish writers:

“I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels, which present the prayers of the saints, and which go in and out before the glory of the Holy One.’ Whether we take this book as inspired, as the Romanists do, or as not inspired, as the Protestants generally regard it, there is no matter touching this point. The passage referred to (Tob. 12:15).”

Jude names Michael as the archangel in Jude 9: “9 But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’” Revelation 12:7 tells this story: “7 And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.” Both Gabriel and Michael play a role in the prophecies of Daniel (Daniel 8:16, 9:21, 12:13, 12:1-3). Michael is called one of the chief princes, implying more angels in this category.

In this study, we will only say the seven angels who stand before the throne of God are a class unto themselves, participating here in the final judgment of God. They are angels of presence and power, and each had a trumpet.

Another Angel with a Golden Censer

3 Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. 4 The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. 5 Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

In verse 3, another angel appears at the altar with a golden censer. Perhaps the Old Testament shadow of this event was in the atonement rituals of the Hebrews: “46 Then Moses said to Aaron, “Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them.” Numbers 16:46. With the incense here in Revelation were the prayers of the saints. The prayers of the saints were also prevalent when the Lamb took the scroll in Revelation 5:8: “8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” Two points need to be noted: A great deal happens in heaven when the saints pray. The saints’ prayers play a large role in the advent of the judgment.

This angel is a priest angel. When the saints pray, there is mediation of the highest order in heaven. We have already seen in Revelation 5:8 that when the Lamb took the scroll that the four living creatures and twenty-four elders held our prayers in bowls of incense: “8 And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.” Paul taught in 1 Timothy 2:4-7 that Jesus Christ is our mediator: “5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men – the testimony given in its proper time.” 1 John 2:1, John also affirmed that Jesus Christ speaks for us: “2:1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense – Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.” To all this power is added the intercessory power of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:26-27: “26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.”

The saints’ prayers play a large role in the advent of the judgment. When the prayers went up before the throne of God, judgment followed. The angel hurls fire from the altar of God to the earth and the power of heaven helps us as peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake. As the revelation moves to the sounding of the trumpets and the final judgment, the

saints need not fear for the same power turned to destroy the evil ones, turns to help and protect the victorious saints.

A final note before we listen to the sounding of the trumpets, some say the angel here is the Lamb. They think he is the Christ because the Christ is the mediator between God and man. In addition, it is true Revelation 10:1 describes a mighty angel in a way only fitting to the Son of God. However, this angel, in reference to the seven angels, is like a priest angel, a description fitting only to the Son of God. This description fits exactly with the teaching in Hebrews:

- For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. 18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. Hebrews 2:17-18.
- 4 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. 15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. Hebrews 4:14.
- 6 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." Hebrews 5:6.
- 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf. He has become a high priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. Hebrews 6:19-20.
- 1 The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, 2 and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man. Hebrews 8:1-2.

The angel's work is the fortifying of the saints' prayers in preparation for the destruction and chaos to follow. In this regard, it fits into the context and purpose of the opening of the seals: whatever comes in heaven or on the earth, those sealed are secure in eternity now and for evermore.

Seven Angels and Seven Trumpets (Revelation 8:6-13)

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

The sounding of the trumpets parallels in meaning the opening of the seals. The opening of the seals demonstrates the protection and victory of the saints during the period of their individual lives whenever they might live. The destruction and chaos, the place of the martyrs, the destiny of the unrighteous, the sealing of the servants of God—all of these are real to each one who stands facing the temptations and trials of life or facing the end of this life by death or the sudden return of the Lord.

The sounding of the trumpets extends these tumultuous events across all dispensations and epochs of the struggle of good against evil, light against darkness, righteousness against unrighteousness. They are from before time, from in the beginning when the word was with God and the word was God (John 1:1), from the fall of Satan, from the sin and death of humankind, from the Paradise lost. They extend to the son who conquered sin and rose from the dead, and to the redemption of humankind. The soundings herald events before time, during time and lead right up to, but do not include, the final destruction and the restoration of all things in the Lamb and his bride, the church, in chapters 15 through 22. What happens next is from before the foundations of the world and extends into the ages of the ages. This is not the prophecy of puny oligarchs and transient historical events. This story is the climax of that one told of old: It is of heaven and hell; God Almighty and

Satan; Christ and the antichrist; the apostles and prophets and the false prophets; the servants of God and the servants of the dragon; God the Alpha and the Omega and the Accuser.

Traditionally, trumpets are a call to battle. The trumpet sounds themselves are significant in announcing the presence of the Lord whose revelation this is:

16 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, 19 and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Exodus 19:16-19

During the generations of humankind, we have all stood at the edge of horror and chaos. The picture painted at the opening of the seven seals repeats here with the sounding of the trumpets in grand and great proportions. In the first representation, the concluding message was the sealing of the servants of God described in chapter 7. In this representation, with the seven trumpets, the concluding message is to those who, facing the horrible plagues of life on this earth, fail to repent. The sounding of the sixth trumpet contains this pronouncement in Revelation 9:20-21:

20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The sin and death in this present world is horrible beyond imagination, and still some miss the point of repentance.

The First Angel Sounded His Trumpet. (Revelation 8:7)

7 The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

The first five soundings of the trumpet represent the absolute devastation unleashed upon the earth and upon humankind at the fall of man. They follow in main the substance of the creation story which adorned the Paradise—the garden of Eden—with splendor and beauty and immortality. The figures themselves show how devastated a place the earth has become since the fall. The imagery is foreshadowed in the scriptures. In Joel 2:30-31, there is the foretelling:

30 I will show wonders in the heavens
and on the earth,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
31 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

In Exodus 9:23-26, there is the foreshadowing:

23 When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. 25 Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields – both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields and stripped every tree. 26 The only place it did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.

From the beginning, vegetation brought sustenance and beauty to man:

11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. 13 And there was evening, and there was morning – the third day. Genesis 1:11-13

God gave this gift of sustenance and beauty to man: "29 Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.'" Genesis 1:29. The gift was both pleasing to the eye and good to eat: "9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Genesis 2:9.

But because of the sin of Adam and Eve, God cursed the ground and made it hard to grow and made life correspondingly hard:

"Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil you will eat of it
all the days of your life.
18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you,
and you will eat the plants of the field.
19 By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return." Genesis 3:17-19

Therefore, a third of the earth burned up with the trees and green grass. The destruction of the tidal surges after storms cover the land with salt makes the grass unable to grow. Pestilence remains on the earth until the end. Even in our time of plenty, vast regions and enormous areas cannot grow. The lesson is clear: One would think that those of us who witness and experience this horrible state would repent and turn to the Lord; yet some do not.

The Second Angel Sounded His Trumpet, (Revelation 8:8-9)

8 The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, 9 a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

Once again, that which God created for man fails him in every way after his fall. How different is the destruction following the fall from the glorious plenty of the creation:

20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." 21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22 God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." 23 And there was evening, and there was morning – the fifth day. Genesis 1:20-23

In our day, we witness a tsunami, an earthquake, a meteor fall, or an oil spill. Our sustenance departs, and famine reigns. Will man see his plight, sense what is coming, and repent? Many will not repent, according to Revelation 9:20-21.

The Third Angel Sounded His Trumpet (Revelation 8:10:11)

10 The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water – 11 the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

At the sounding of the third trumpet, a great star – perhaps a meteor – falls, striking the very springs of water. This is different from the waters of the second trumpet sounding which were habitats for a human food source and seaways for commerce. Here, the star – Wormwood – turns the water bitter and people die from drinking it. The word for wormwood means bitterness and has this meaning in Amos 5:7-10, where it also relates to the stars, Pleiades and Orion, to the water sources of the planet:

You who turn justice into bitterness
and cast righteousness to the ground
8 (he who made the Pleiades and Orion,
who turns blackness into dawn
and darkens day into night,
who calls for the waters of the sea
and pours them out over the face of the land –
the LORD is his name –
9 he flashes destruction on the stronghold
and brings the fortified city to ruin),
10 you hate the one who reproves in court
and despise him who tells the truth.

Water, a life-sustaining miracle, is so abundant; yet when withdrawn or poisoned by drought and pollutions or a meteor's crash to earth, brings suffering and pain. Job 5:10 describes the source of water: "10 He bestows rain on the earth; he sends water upon the countryside." Perhaps, this is the very reason that spiritual water takes such a powerful meaning. John wrote in John 4:13-14: "13 Jesus answered, 'Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.'" Jesus added: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." John 7:37-38. Revelation concluded in Revelation 22:17: "17 The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. The analogy is clear and true: physical life needs water without poison; spiritual life needs the water of life without the poison of error.

Our very thirst and need for water should bring us face to face, as it were, with the desperation of man dying, and awaken in us the need to repent. Of all the plagues brought upon man by his fall, can any be worse than the need for and the lack of water? A world in the horror of drought and the sickness of polluted water should wake us to repentance.

The Fourth Angel Sounded His Trumpet (Revelation 8:12)

12 The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, 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 turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

God's habitat for man included the lights of day and night, described with elegance and beauty by Moses in Genesis 1:14-19:

14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, 15 and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. 16 God made two great lights – the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. 17 God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, 18 to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. 19 And there was evening, and there was morning – the fourth day.

However, with the fall of man, darkness took on the somber and dark cast of evil. So it is that the physical darkness should remind us of the spiritual darkness that finally will become the outer and blackest darkness. This story of man without light unfolds from the fall of man until the end. David poetically describes the inclusion of darkness in the plagues upon the Egyptians in Psalms 105:26-28:

26 He sent Moses his servant,
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.
27 They performed his miraculous signs among them,
his wonders in the land of Ham.
28 He sent darkness and made the land dark

Joel included darkness in his prophecy in Joel 2:31-32: "31 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 32 And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. " The Lord himself gave light and dark their symbolic meaning: in Matthew 6:22-23: "22 The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness . If then the light within you is darkness , how great is that darkness!" Not only is there this spiritual darkness but there is also a description of the final fate of the evil ones as the outer darkness, both in teaching of Jesus and in Jude. Jesus taught in Matthew 25:30 among other places: "30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Jude describes the end of false teachers in Jude 13: "13 They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever."

We have all experienced the despair of the dark. The electricity goes off in the nighttime. Dark storm clouds close out light even in midday. Huge sandstorms and snowstorms are known to cover the sun, stars, and moon for days. All of these and more should forewarn us of what we are in for if we do not repent.

The first four trumpets have sounded their warnings straight from the human experience created by God for man in the perfection of the garden, and lost to turn, oftentimes, against man after the fall. They bring us to the edge of desolation in the human experience. They should call us to repentance and obedience.

Before the sounding of the last three trumpets, an eagle shows a difference between the first four trumpets sounding and the last three trumpets sounding.

An eagle calls out in a loud voice (Revelation 8:13)

13 As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

At the end of the sounding of the fourth trumpet, an eagle flying in midair calls out "Woe!" three times. There are three points of notice.

First, the King James and the New King James versions have *angel* for *eagle*. Eagle is clearly the accurate reading according to the other translations and the overwhelming weight of scholarly opinion. The Law of Moses lists the eagle among the unclean birds. Perhaps the offensiveness of this vulture-like bird to the Jews kept the proper translation out of the older English versions. To translate *eagle*, *angel* misses the point of the figure in this passage.

Second, *woe* is an interjection of denunciation. Jesus used the word 27 times in the Gospels to condemn those not accepting his word. After that, the entire New Testament used the word only twice until Revelation, where the angels used it to pronounce the woes associated with the last three trumpet soundings and to denounce the wicked city of Babylon in Revelation 18. In his teaching, Christ mainly used the word *woe* in denouncing the Pharisees and false teachers (Matthew 23 and Luke 11). The prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, used the word *woe* to denounce the children of Israel for error and various conquerors for their assault against Jehovah.

Third, the entire 13th verse marks a transition from the hardships and misery emanating from those things created by God for man and perverted by the fall to those evil emanations created or allowed to happen for the punishment of man after his fall. Therefore, the first four soundings represented the degeneration of the creation. The last three soundings turn to the horrible happenings following the fall of man that did not exist before the fall: death and Hades, Satan's control of darkness, and the beast and false prophet leading man astray. These were all the results, not of God's creation, but of Satan's success in the fall of man and, perhaps, because of his own fall. All of these brought man to the most horrible circumstances imaginable—circumstances far worse than famine, worse than war, and worse than catastrophic events of nature. Oh yes, they are worse than imaginary wars and future events forecast by many.

Now a bird that feasts on carrion calls out these devastating woes!

9. The Fifth and Sixth Angel Sound Their Trumpets and Two Woes Pass (Revelation 9)

As chapter 8 chronicled the effects of man's fall on the destiny of man in the physical world, chapter 9 tells of the destructive nature of lust, sin and death upon man in the spiritual world—all of which occurred because of the fall of man.

The Fifth Angel Sounded His Trumpet (Revelation 9:1-11)

9:1 The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss.

At the sounding of the fifth trumpet, a star had fallen out of heaven. The past perfect tense *had fallen* shows an event concluded before the time of the past tense *saw*, which is the time of John's vision. Some variously describe the star that had fallen from the sky to earth as Satan, Martin Luther, and Mohammed, or some other. We shall take a different meaning. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss or a better translation in this case is the King James *bottomless pit*. The key allowed this star control over the Abyss. What is this abyss? Isaiah in Isaiah 14:9-15 spoke of, "The grave below is all astir to meet you at your coming; it rouses the spirits of the departed to greet you." Isaiah called this place the depths of the pit in verse 15: "But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit."

In Romans 10:6-7, Paul similarly describes the abyss:

6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 "or 'Who will descend into the deep (Abyss in NKJV)?" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

The *where* of the abyss and the shaft of the abyss is the darkest world of sin and death contrasted to heaven where there is only righteousness and light. A bottom of the abyss is, therefore, Hades. The *who* of the star or angel is Death. This interpretation agrees with the final words of this sounding trumpet: "They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon." This is not Satan, as some would suppose, but the Destroyer who is Death. Yes, Death, who rode the pale horse with Hades following, received the key to the abyss.

From whom and when did Death receive this key? At the instigation of the devil, sin and Death came. The Hebrew letter states the case in Heb 2:14-15: "14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Again, we turn to the advent of all that inflicts fallen man. After Adam and Eve's so gravely sinned, God allowed Death to reign:

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

". . . 19 By the sweat of your brow

you will eat your food

until you return to the ground,

since from it you were taken;

for dust you are

and to dust you will return." Genesis 3:17-19

Paul marked the reign of Death from Adam in Romans 5:14: "14 Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come." Hebrews directly connects Death to the devil: "By his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil– 15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Hebrews 2:14-16.

The *when* of Death having the key to the abyss is when Adam sinned. From then until now, man lives with the certain expectation of death and fear of death. 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 concludes: "22 For as in Adam all die."

The key (*key* and *keys* only appear 10 times in the Bible) to the abyss is significant because death controlled Hades and the gates of Hades. This, in addition to the verb forms previously studied, places the time of this episode before the time of John's writing of the book and before the death of Christ. Working backwards in time, at the time of these visions Christ, the Lamb, held the keys to this very abyss: "20:1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, which is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." Revelation 20:1-2. During the letters to the churches, the Lamb of God asserted his absolute control over death and Hades in Revelation 3:7: "These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." This claim is made the more certain by fulfilling the prophecy in Isaiah 22:21-23: "22 I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." The Lamb relates this claim directly to his death and resurrection: "18 I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades." Revelation 1: 18.

Answering, when did the Christ gain control of the abyss, the scripture tells us when Death held and lost the key. In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus promised that the gates of Hades would not prevail against the church: "18 And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." After the resurrection of the Lord, Peter said in Acts 2:29-33:

29 "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

From the sin of Adam until the resurrection of the Christ, Death controlled the abyss. Although Christ snatched the key of the abyss from the hand of Death, Death still reigns in the abyss. But the days of Death are numbered: "24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death." 1 Corinthians 15:24-26.

2 When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. 3 And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. 4 They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. 5 They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. 6 During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

Smoke from the abyss darkened the sun and the sky; and out of the smoke, locusts came down upon the earth. They received power *like* that of the scorpion of the earth. This entire episode is an extended metaphor; and as such, it parallels the locust plague on Egypt in Exodus 10:4-6:

4 If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. 5 They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. 6 They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians. . . .

As an extended metaphor the passage is composed of similes and metaphors. Similes, with the use of *like* and *as*, run through the passage. Metaphors imply without the use of *like* or *as*. With the opening of the abyss, darkness prevailed throughout the creation—a spiritual darkness covering all. From without the darkness came locusts with the power like earthly scorpions—the power to sting. This power of scorpions is made clear in Ezekiel 2:6: “6 And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions.” The Christ similarly stated, “19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.” Luke 10:19-20.

That these were not natural locusts is clear because they could not harm vegetation, which is what natural locusts do. Nor could they harm those with the seal of God (Chapter 7), but harm “only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” Christians are immune to the sting of the omnipresent locusts. The Christ had said that he gave the authority to trample scorpions and overcome all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19-20).

The sting itself does not kill, but tortures, and that for a limited period—five months, the summer when natural locusts thrive. The agony is like that of the sickness of a person when stung—agony to the point of wishing for death. In this metaphor, the meaning is clear: The destroyer with the key to abyss is Death. The locusts are all that is of the world, as explained in John 2:16-17: “16 For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world.” The sting is sin:

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:55-57

Once Adam and Eve succumbed to temptation, the lust of the flesh and the eye, the pride in one's own life was unleashed. As the locust, the evil desires are everywhere, their sting is sin, and fullness of sin is death. James 1:13-15 tells us, “13 When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; 14 but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. 15 Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.” From Adam came physical death and worse spiritual death. Woe heaps upon woe.

7 The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. 8 Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. 9 They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. 10 They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. 11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.

The metaphor continues with the locust looking like horses prepared for battle. Perhaps their crowns of gold are riches that appeal to the lust of the eye, and their faces like human faces and hair like women make them good to look upon, and their lion's teeth and iron helmets showed the pride of power and might. All of these are a reflection of that statement by John in John 2:16: "16 For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world."

The five months of torment receive the five month limit of verse 5, signaling that the locust will pass away as the summer passes.

The destroyer led them. Many believe the destroyer is Satan. Satan, the dragon, the serpent, or the devil, is never identified as the destroyer. The destroyer is central to the death of the first born in Egypt. Yet, it is the Lord who controls that act and permits the destroyer to enter. In Exodus 12:23, Moses wrote, "23 When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down." That the Lord controls the destroyer is repeated twice more: In Exodus 12:12-13, he said, "12 "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn – both men and animals – and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. In Exodus 12:29, Moses wrote: "And it came to pass at midnight that the LORD struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt."

The Bible does not use the Greek word *Apollyon*, except here. The Hebrew, *Abaddon*, which is transliterated here, appears in several passages all of which identify the destroyer with death. Job put the two together in Job 28:22:

22 Destruction and Death say,
'Only a rumor of it has reached our ears.'

Solomon spoke of the two in such a way to include a dominating Lord in Proverbs 15:11:

11 Death and Destruction lie open
before the LORD –
how much more the hearts of men!

He also used them together in Proverbs 27:20:

20 Death and Destruction are never satisfied,

In summary, the Hebrew text is literally *Sheol* and *Adaddon*, which is equivalent to Death and Hades, as frequently used in Revelation. Therefore, the star is the Destroyer, king of the abyss. He was the destroyer who passed through Egypt, and he is Death. The locust hordes of evil desires, the scorpion like sting of every sin, and the spiritual and physical death of all who have lived and will live testify that the Destroyer King is before us. Only the power of God's seal on our foreheads can save us. Through Christ Jesus, we are free from sin and death. In Romans 8:1-3, Paul wrote: "8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death." All men die a physical death, but to die from the sting of the scorpion is to die everlastingly.

The Sixth Angel Sounded His Trumpet (Revelation 9:12-11:13)

12 The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

The first woe is past and we are ready for the second woe. Understanding that the first four trumpet sounds are evil released upon man at his fall taking from man the natural blessings of creation and turning them against him, and that the woes following each of the last three trumpet sounds resulted from changes permitted by God affecting the condition of man. This second woe is worse

than the first woe of sin and physical death since it threatens spiritual death for an eternity. We move beyond certain doom of the bottomless pit for those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads to the everlasting doom of eternal hell fire for those who succumb to the mounted troops of the dragon. The second woe is upon us.

The Release of the Four Angels Who Are Bound at the Great River Euphrates (Revelation 9:13-16)

13 The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. 14 It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." 15 And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. 16 The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

At the sounding of the sixth angel's trumpet, John heard a voice coming from the horns of the altar. The King James' reading *four horns* is not correct, but if it were, it would not seem to change the meaning. Both the altar of the tabernacle and the altar of the temple had four horns. (Exodus 27:2-3; Ezekiel 43:15). Horns are often associated with entities that have the right to govern and the power to command, Zechariah spoke of these in Zechariah 1:18-21:

18 Then I looked up — and there before me were four horns! 19 I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these?"

He answered me, "These are the horns that scattered Judah, Israel and Jerusalem."

20 Then the LORD showed me four craftsmen. 21 I asked, "What are these coming to do?"

He answered, "These are the horns that scattered Judah so that no one could raise his head, but the craftsmen have come to terrify them and throw down these horns of the nations who lifted up their horns against the land of Judah to scatter its people."

Therefore, *horn* and *horns* are figuratively the strength and power of potentates and ruling entities. In this case, the voice from the horns commands the angel with the sixth trumpet who, in turn has the right to command the four angels who were bound at the great river Euphrates. Of the Christ, it was said before his birth by Zechariah, John the Baptist's father, in Luke 1:68-69:

68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come and has redeemed his people.

69 He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

We have already studied the image of the lamb who "had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." Revelation 5:6. Later horns will represent the strength and power of the dragon, the devil, Revelation 12:3; the beast from the sea, Revelation 13:1; and the false prophet, Revelation 13:11. 1

The four angels bound at the river Euphrates are reserved for a specific time and purpose. God had reserved them for a very hour, day, month, and year. The Euphrates was one of the rivers bordering the Garden of Eden; the river is still with us until this day. The hour, day, month, and year would seem to be that very time when nature turned against man, and death came to him along with evil desires, and sin. The time is set just this side of Eden when with his fall, man took upon himself sins unto death, spiritual death from the face of the Lord, and a casting out into the outer darkness. At that time, released and charging against mankind, were 200 million mounted troops.

The population of the United States at the time of this writing is 295,734,134. The army in this passage was 2/3 the number of this entire country. Think of almost all of America on the march. These troops had the authority to kill a third of mankind.

The Army of Death, Injury, and Plagues

17 The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. 18 A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. 19 The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.

Before considering the horror of the horses and riders, let us ask what could be such a horrible and multitudinous army – an army more in number and more deadly, perhaps, than the horde of locusts of the fifth angel’s trumpet sounding? Ephesians 6:11-13 gives the answer, “11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Therefore, the devil has at his disposal an army of the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. They are rulers, authorities, and powers of this dark world. What they are not here, and elsewhere, are physical human forces. Paul states it plainly, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood” – not the Romans, not the Muslims, not any earthly government, unless they themselves fall fool to the devil’s deceptions.

However, these forces of wickedness infiltrate the religions, the businesses, and the governments of the present world. Clergymen, world leaders, and corporate leaders are victims of the Devil’s deceit, just as are we all. Satan’s minions go forth across the world. In 2 Corinthians 11:14-15, Paul describes what all humans are up against, “ 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.”

The deceptive nature and work of Satan displays itself with the coming of the lawless one, the beast, and the false prophet in Revelation and the antichrist in the epistles of John:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.” 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10.

John once again describes his vision in an extended metaphor. The mounted troops, horses with riders, take the color of hell itself – their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The hottest fire burns a blue flame. The fiery red horse of war appeared in chapter 6:4. John adds dark blue and yellow as sulfur. Six references to sulfur in the Old Testament relate to the pouring out of the judgment of God. They are all in the manner of God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24: “24 Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah – from the LORD out of the heavens.” However, in six reference in Revelation, three are from this passage and describe this horrible army, and three others describe separately the eternal destruction of the beast and the false prophet (Revelation 19:20), the devil (Revelation 20:10), and Death and Hades (Revelation 21:8).

The three plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur are the plagues of eternal hell fire coming out of the mouths of the horses, killing a third of mankind. The power of this demoniac army is in their mouths and tails. *Out of their mouths came fire* speaks to the point of attack by trial and tribulation as in Revelation 7:14-15: “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation ; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. This fire will burn up the works of the gospel: “It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. 14 If what

he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15 If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames." 1 Corinthians 3:13-15

The power of the locust, revealed with the blowing of the fifth trumpet, was the sting of a scorpion—extremely dangerous but not always deadly. Now the power to inflict injury is in the tail with a head like snakes. Christ forecast this danger and spoke of the safety of those having their names written in heaven. Whether scorpion stings or snakebites, believers are safe. In Luke 10:18-20, he said, "18 He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

The death inflicted here is not the death of the earthly body. This death is the second death, eternal hell fire. Christ said in Matthew 10:28, "28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell." This theme of the second death with all its horror, woven through the Revelation is the result of losing our great struggle against the forces of evil. Early on in the book, the Lord promised the followers of the Lamb, "He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death." Revelation 2:11. In Revelation 20:6, our victory is one over the second death: "6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." The opposite is also true. Those whose names are not in the book of life receive the second death in Revelation 20:14-15: "The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Nothing wreaks havoc on mankind like the lives of those caught up in sins that lead to the second death. God warns often of the disastrous results of such overwhelming sin that destroys individuals, families, and nations:

- 32 Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come." Matthew 12:32.
- 4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace. Hebrews 6:4-6.
- 26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Hebrews 10:26-27
- 20 If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. 21 It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. 22 Of them the proverbs are true: 'A dog returns to its vomit,' and, 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud.'" 2 Peter 2:19-22
- 16 If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. 1 John 5:16

From refusing the Holy Spirit to turning our back on the Christ, these devastating situations lead to misery in this life and death in the life to come. Thus, it is so, as Paul said in Romans 6:23, “23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Failure to Repent (Revelation 9:20-21)

20 The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood – idols that cannot see or hear or walk. 21 Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

As eyewitnesses to the pain and suffering—the plagues of sin—in this life, mankind ought to turn away in horror and to the Lord. The phrase, *still did not repent*, shows that the rest of mankind is still in danger. God demands repentance from the evil works of their hands.

Repenting and repentance is central to the gospel message and to the meaning of Revelation. John the Baptist came preaching repentance: “1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea 2 and saying, ‘Repent , for the kingdom of heaven is near.’” Matthew 3:1-2. Jesus also preached, “3 I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Luke 13:3. Paul preached that even ignorance is no excuse for repentance: “30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent.” Acts 17:30. In this situation where there is dire need to repent, Peter writes, “9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 2 Peter 3:8-9.

The clarion call of the angel with the sixth trumpet is that all mankind must repent to escape this second death.

The sins themselves are the most odious, yet off repeated. *Worshiping demons and idols of gold go hand in hand.* Paul was clear on this issue in 1 Corinthians 10:20-21: “20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.”

Idolatry also led to the most horrendous acts:

21 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

24 Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25 They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

28 Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. 29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; 31 they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Although they know God's righteous decree that

those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. Romans 1:21-32.

Christ set the standard judging murders and murderers. In Matthew 5:21-22, during his sermon on the mount, Christ extended murder to anger: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." According to Christ, the father of sinners, the devil, is a murderer from the beginning: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:44.

The purpose of magic arts is to deceive people making them think the sorcerer is someone divine. Satan sent the lawless one to deceive with counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders: "The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing." 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10. Simon the sorcerer allowed himself to be thought great as only God is great: "'This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.' 11 They followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic." Acts 8:10-11. True converts refused to participate in sorcery or magic: "Many of those who believed now came and openly confessed their evil deeds. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them publicly. When they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to fifty thousand drachmas." Acts 19:18-19.

Sexual immorality, including such acts as fornication, adultery, and homosexuality, are sins against the mind, body, and soul. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:15-16: "Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! 16 Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, 'The two will become one flesh.'"

Thefts are expressly forbidden. Paul wrote, "He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands. Ephesians 4:28

Paul taught emphatically against these great and awful sins:

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Near the end of Revelation, John sees the fate of those who sin in this despicable manner: "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." Revelation 21:8.

10. The Angel and the Little Scroll (Revelation 10)

Chapters 10 and 11 and the first 14 verses of 12 receive treatment as interludes by many writers. A careful reading shows the entire passage to be an integral part of the second woe in chapter 9:13 at the sounding of the sixth trumpet where the armies of the dragon, 200 million strong, spread death throughout mankind. While this army wreaks havoc, the rest of mankind did not repent, continuing in devastating sins. The sounding of the sixth trumpet and the scene opened in chapter 9:13, ends incompletely, lacking either redemption or condemnation for those not repenting and those killed by the terrible army. Reinforcing this reading, chapter 11, verse 14 announces the end of the second woe: "The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon." Therefore, the second woe includes the army of death, injury, and plagues, the failure of the rest to repent, the angel and the scroll (chapter 10), and the two witnesses (chapter 11:1-14).

Chapter 10 begins with the implied but unasked question of what will happen to the rest who do not repent. Just as God allowed strong forces of evil to be unleashed at the sin of man and the fall of the devil, so also did he unleash His mighty forces of righteousness. Chapters 10 and 11 describe how God's mighty forces work in revealing His will and striking out against the army of evil. The weapon is the word of God. The righteous warriors are those who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Revelation 7:14.

A Mighty Angel

10:1 Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. 2 He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, 3 and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. 4 And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

Still a part of the sounding of the sixth trumpet, John saw a mighty angel coming down out of heaven. Previous events under the sounding of this sixth trumpet include a voice from the golden altar commanding the angel to release the four angels bound at the great river Euphrates in Revelation 9:13-16. These four angels, perhaps, were a part of the troops numbering 200 million. The army composed of these troops was one of death, injury, and plagues. This angel in chapter 10 is a mighty angel—not like the seven angels sounding the trumpets, not like the angels of the churches, and not like the angels bound at the river Euphrates.

The mighty angel (*messenger* by the use of the word in this passage) is the Lamb. An equivalent representation of the Lamb as an angel could be the priest angel offering the prayers of the saints, with incense, on the golden altar before the throne (See notes on chapter 8:3-5). In that case, the result of the angel's action on behalf of the saints was retribution. This *mighty angel* has the characteristics of the Lamb in chapter 1 and of the Lord in other passages.

He was robed in a cloud is the first descriptive phrase. In Revelation 1:7, John wrote in his doxology, "Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him." The Lord spoke many times from a cloud in

the Old Testament. For example, the Lord led the children of Israel in a pillar of cloud by day in Exodus 13:21: "By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night." When Moses went upon the mountain, the Lord spoke from within a cloud. "The cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from within the cloud." Exodus 24:16. A cloud or the clouds also clothed the divine presence in the New Testament. On the mount of transfiguration in Matthew 17:5, God spoke from a cloud, "5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud enveloped them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" In Luke 21:27-28, Jesus said, "At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. 28 When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."

With a rainbow above his head is similar to the description in Ezekiel 1:27-28 which refers to an appearance like unto a man: "Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. In Revelation 4:3, a rainbow encircles the throne of God, "A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne." All of this indicates that the mighty angel is the Lamb of God.

His face like the sun and his legs like fiery pillars are an almost direct representations of the description of the Lamb in Revelation 1:14-15: "And his eyes were like blazing fire. 15 His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace." Again, the evidence seems overwhelming that the mighty angel is the Lamb of God.

The scroll that lies open in his hand is not necessarily a little scroll [see the notes on *biblion* in chapter 5]. The scroll, which lies in his hand, seems to be the same scroll of chapter 5—a scroll no one could open except the Lamb of God. In the chapters 6:1 through 8:1, he had opened the seven seals. What is in his hand is the revelation, not all of which has unfolded. The sounding of the seven trumpets concludes at the opening of the seventh seal. The narrative at this point is midway through the sounding of the sixth trumpet, which is the second woe.

The mighty angel planted his right foot on the sea and his left on the land. When he spoke, his voice was like a lion. The seven thunders spoke, John started to write, and the voice from heaven ordered John to seal up what the seven thunders said. The word, *thunders*, appears 13 times in the Bible. Each time the word refers to the Lord speaking. Joel speaks of the Lord thundering commands to his forces without number:

11 The LORD thunders
at the head of his army;
his forces are beyond number,
and mighty are those who obey his command.
The day of the LORD is great;
it is dreadful.
Who can endure it? Joel 2:11.

John had just witnessed the army of the devil, 200 million strong, and now he hears the seven thunders begin to illustrate the might of the almighty God and His forces beyond number. The seven thunders teach us that we are coming to the end of God's final revelation to man, but not the end of all there is to know. In fact, some of the things of heaven cannot be uttered. Paul speaks of this in Romans 8:26-27: "26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot

express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4, Paul said, "He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell."

The Mystery of God to Be Accomplished

5 Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. 6 And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

Then the mighty angel swore by the Almighty God who lives forever and ever and who created all things. *There will be no more delay* is the subject of the oath. This does not refer to the end of the world and the coming of the Lamb, for we are now 1,900 years later, and that time that only God knows has not come upon us. The contrasting word, *but*, sets the time and the subject. *In the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet* tells the *when* of this passage. Since we are able to read ahead, we know that this is coming later in the revelation, and John recorded it. *The mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets* is the *what* of this passage.

The big event is the final and complete revelation of God, revealed here and revealed at start of the book in Revelation 1:1: "The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place." The big accomplishment is God's revelation in His son.

God held his mystery throughout the ages, revealing it first and partially in the prophets of old:

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things. 1 Peter 1:10-12

Not only did the Old Testament prophets seek the mystery but even the angels desired to look in on these things. Even the rulers did not know God's mystery:

6 We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. 7 No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9 However, as it is written:

"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him" –

10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

The consummation of God's mystery was in Christ. It was through Christ that God made his mystery known: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of

all things, and through whom he made the universe." Hebrews 1:1-2. In Ephesians 3:2-6, Paul explained the role of the New Testament apostles and prophets:

2 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Now, without delay, God will complete the revelation of his mystery to John. The character and nature of the prophecies are important here, and important in understanding the two prophets of chapter 11. We must not think that the focal point of Revelation is the end of the world and the destruction of the dragon, the beast, the false prophet, all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life, and Death and Hades. When the time comes, these are disposed of in little more than a verse each. The focal point is God's mystery fully revealed and spread by innumerable followers of the Lamb, throughout time.

The Army of the devil may have fire and sulfur coming out of their mouths and tails that bite like snakes, but the army of the Lord has the sword of the Spirit, the word of God (Ephesians 6:17) and that same sharp double-edged sword is coming out of the mouth of the Lamb. Revelation 1:16. In Isaiah 27:1, Isaiah forecast this same weapon in a struggle against the serpent:

27:1 In that day,
the LORD will punish with his sword ,
his fierce, great and powerful sword ,
Leviathan the gliding serpent,
Leviathan the coiling serpent;
he will slay the monster of the sea.

The Lord told of the impending use of the word of his mouth as a sword in Revelation 2:15-16: "Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." It is through the revelation that the sword becomes available to the servants of the Lord.

The Eating of the Book

8 Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

9 So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." 10 I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. 11 Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

The metaphor used in this passage is not the two-edged sword, but a metaphor of the eating of the book and of how it will taste. The voice told John to take the scroll (the mystery revealed) from the hand of the mighty Angel, and to eat it. In John's mouth, it was sweet as honey but in his stomach, it was bitter. The mystery of God is double-sided – to those who accept it, it is sweet, to those who reject it, it is bitter. To those who follow it, blessings beyond count but also trials and sufferings: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." 2 Timothy 3:12-13.

This vision concluded with the voice telling John: "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings." The revelation of God's mystery is not yet complete. John will continue to prophesy until the end of this book, orally, until he dies, and after that, through the inspired written word. Through the revelation of God do the unrepentant [See chapter 9, verse 21] have any hope. Peter clearly stated their condition in 2 Peter 2:9, "If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment." However, the Lord wishes all to follow His revelation and do His will:

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." 2 Peter 3:8-9

11. The Two Witnesses and the Seventh Trumpet (Revelation 11)

Chapter 11 continues to tell of the happenings at the sounding of the sixth trumpet. In chapter 10, the *little book* contained the revelation of God. Now the two witnesses become symbolic of the human vessels through whom the revelation came, as expressed by Paul in 2 Cor 4:7-12:

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be **revealed** in our body. [Emphasis added.]

Measuring the Temple of God and the Altar (Revelation 11:1-2)

11:1 I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. 2 But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.

John now continues an active role into the vision. In chapter 10, John learned that the revelation of the mystery of God, the word of God, is the weapon used against those who do not repent and the 200 million deadly troops. Chapter 11 elaborates on the concept by identifying those who will wield this weapon of truth. John already knows that he must continue his work of prophesying. The voice that he had heard from heaven tells him to measure the temple and the altar and count the worshippers there. Before we understand the measuring, we must understand the nature of the temple of God.

The Old Testament temple was a shadow of the true temple of God. Jesus, himself, began teaching about a spiritual temple in Matthew 12:4-6: "Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? 6 I tell you that one greater than the temple is here." In John 2:19, Jesus spoke of his body as a temple, "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.'" At his death, Jesus removed the symbolic meaning from the Jewish temple:

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. 52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. Matthew 27:51-53

The temple of God replaced the Jewish temple. Matthew used the term *holy city*, repeated in in this chapter and in the Revelation as the church, New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. The saints are the temple of God as Paul said, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. Paul also compared this temple of the living God with the temple of idols: "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 2 Corinthians 6:15-16.

In Christ, we exist as the temple of God. "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit." Ephesians 2:21-22. Peter affirms this very teaching:

“You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” 1 Peter 2:4-8. Jesus also taught explicitly: “12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it.” Revelation 3:12.

The temple of God is a spiritual temple, and therefore, what must be measured and counted are the spiritual dimension of the church here on earth and those who have already died for the Lord. That number is readily available:

- “Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever.” Revelation 4:9-10.
- “Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.” Revelation 5:11-12.
- “Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.” Revelation 7:4:
- “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.” Revelation 7:9-10.

These enumerable hosts of righteousness contrast to the 200 million troops of evil plus the impenitent of chapter 9. These hosts of righteousness are they who wield the spiritual sword, the word of God. The worshippers are a spiritual Israel, as it were, and the temple is a spiritual temple, the church. The word *gentiles* takes its meaning from the ordinary and general use of the word, not the specific use as in the phrase *Jews and Gentiles*. Vine tells of the first meaning of *ethnos*: “denotes, firstly, ‘a multitude or company’; then, ‘a multitude of people of the same nature or genus, a nation, people.’” (From Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

The nation or people spoken of here is the nation described at the beginning of the sounding of the sixth trumpet—the troops of the evil and the impenitent of chapter 9. The temple is the church and the court is the world. From the court or the world, they will trample the holy city. Ordinarily we would think Jerusalem. However, all the cities of the revelation are symbolic. This symbolism continues in verse 8, “Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.” Revelation 11:8. In addition, Revelation itself clearly defines the meaning of the term holy city:

- “I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” Revelation 21:2.
- “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.” Revelation 21:10.
- “19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. Revelation 22:19.

The holy city is the bride, the church, in heaven as clearly shown, and on earth—the church now and the church in eternity. That the holy city is the church now is clear; for Hebrews 12 spells out its

exact nature. Hebrews 12:22-24 uses the present tense *"you have come"* of the *heavenly Jerusalem, city of the living God, and the church of the firstborn*:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Hebrews 12:28-29 affirms the nature of the church in the present and not in the future, but in fact they are one and the same: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire."

While the temple encompasses those before the throne of God, the holy city describes the church and the suffering it endures as the troops of evil and the impenitent trample it for 42 months. We must view the indefinite *42 months* in the sense of the sweet and sour nature of the revelation in chapter 10. Those who obey the word by eating the bread of life will suffer intermittently while enjoying the blessings of God in this life and the one that is to come. Jesus used this same analogy in John 6:35-40:

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life . He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.. . . 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. 40 For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

The ongoing struggle of good against evil goes on in the outer court against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. This struggle began with the fall of man and the casting out of the devil. It is in this context that the Lord gave power to his two witnesses in verse 3.

The Two Witnesses (Revelation 11:3-6)

3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." 4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. 5 If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. 6 These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

The two witnesses' episode is the last part of the sounding of the sixth trumpet, the second woe. In the immediate context, they are empowered by God as witnesses of great abilities to uphold and deliver the revelation against the enemy who are trampling on the holy city. In the broader context, the witnesses have appeared once before in the revelation of Zechariah 4: There they appeared as assurance to Zerubbabel as lampstands with olive trees for oil beside them. When asked what they were, the angel relied, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty." The two witnesses, as those of old, are not by earthly power or earthly might but by the Spirit of the Lord Almighty. The two witnesses, also like those of old are "the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth."

In summary, the two witnesses serve the Lord of all the earth and serve Him by the spirit of the Lord. After just experiencing the evil troops, 200 million strong and the gentiles trampling the holy city, we now learn that God's weapon is a spiritual one. The weapon of the Almighty is not physical might or military power. Jesus explained the nature and character of the struggle in John 18:36: "Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my

arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.'" In Revelation 5:6-7, John wrote of the Lamb: "He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth." The Lamb of God spoke to the church in Revelation 3:1, "These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars." These selfsame spirits are before the throne of God, "Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God." Revelation 4:5-6. Jesus described this power of the Spirit of God in him in John 3:34-35: "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands."

In addition to the Lamb who had seven eyes and the seven spirits of God, the seven lights on the lampstands in Zechariah were "the eyes of the LORD, which range throughout the earth." In these two contexts, we know that the witnesses have the sevenfold spirit of God; they speak the word of God; and they range throughout the world. The power of the witnesses is the power of the word of God—the revelation of His mystery. As the apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Romans 1:16-17. Thus, the witnesses as lampstands are a symbol of God's power in the word of their prophecy. We shall assert that one witness personifies the prophecy of the Old Testament and that the other personifies the prophecy of the New Testament. Indeed, chapter 11 verse 10 calls them prophets.

The witnesses are prophet in the sense of forth telling and not foretelling. God's power in the word comes to bear through the prophets in the figure of the lampstands and the two witnesses, defining the nature of the battle. In the parable of the sower, the devil comes and takes away the word of God from their hearts, so they may not believe and be saved." Luke 6:12. In John 13:2, the devil had entered the heart of Judas and prompted him to betray the Lord. The opposing force is the word of God: "12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12. The servants of God take up this sword to fight the troops of evil and the nations who trample on the holy city the church: "Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Ephesians 6:17.

The word of God revealed in the prophets is exactly the subject of John's testimony. John wrote in Revelation 1:1-2: "John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." Later in Revelation 19:13-14, John named the Lamb: "13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God." This is the same eternal word that was from the very beginning: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning." John 1:1-2.

Three divine characters align themselves against the forces of evil in the revelation: the Almighty God, the Lamb of God, and now, the sevenfold Spirit of God. These three, with the enumerable, true worshippers, are set against the heavenly hosts of wickedness.

The two witnesses, prophets, in a figure of speech called synecdoche (See notes on Revelation 2:1), stand for all the prophets of all time in two classes—the Old Testament prophets and New Testament apostles and prophets. The grouping of the prophets in this order agrees with Hebrews 1:1-3: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. 3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." Chapter 11, verse 6, calls the witnesses "two men."

The Spirit of God works in revealing the word of God through the prophets. 2 Peter 1:19-21 explains the process of all prophetic discourse:

19 And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Paul summarized this process in the expression, God-breathed in 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." The two witnesses are great warriors of righteousness across time from the fall of man to the final revelation to consummate at the sounding of the seventh trumpet (10:5-7). Even Abel in the very beginning was a prophet (Luke 11:49-51).

The 1,260 days is 42 months and the same as the 42 months (1,260 days) of verse 2. However, verse 2 speaks to the trampling of the holy city, the church. This verse speaks to the time the prophetic word of God protects God's children—a time soon to come with no delay. The prophets work—oral and written—parallels the assault of evil on the followers of God and will be over when the Lord returns, at the same time that all persecution ends. Notice that God protects the Woman and her child from the dragon, sporadically, for this same 42 month (see Revelation 12:6).

The Spirit of God empowers the witnesses with the sharp and two-edged sword and with awesome miracles to use against the powers of the prince of the air. "Fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies" As the troops of evil could destroy by fire of trial and persecution, the ultimate power of destruction by fire belongs to the Lord:

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

The Almighty God spoke directly in these very terms in Jeremiah 5:14: "Therefore this is what the LORD God Almighty says: 'Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.'"

"This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die" shows that just as the troops of evil have the power of sin to kill, the prophets have the power of the Spirit of God by whose judgment, the word of God, will judge and cast those opposed into the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death (See Revelation 20:14; 21:8). God gave the witnesses other powers:

- Elijah used the power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain. I Kings 17:1; 18:1-45.
- Moses used the power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague. Exodus 7:20.

The Beast Overpowers and Kills the Witnesses (Revelation 11:7-14)

7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. 8 Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. 10 The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

11 *But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. 12 Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.*

13 *At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

14 *The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.*

At the point that they (the witnesses standing for all the apostles and prophets) finished their testimony, the beast attacks. Notice the witnesses have finished their testimony. This is our first introduction to what Paul called a power of this dark world (Ephesians 6:12). Chapter 13 fully describes the beast. For now, we know that the beast is from the Abyss and that it has the might to overpower the witnesses and to kill them. The beast affected the earthly lives of all the prophets:

48 So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. 49 Because of this, God in his wisdom said, "I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute." 50 Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, 51 from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Luke 11:48-51

Jesus placed the time of the end of the prophets to a time within the generation to which he was speaking. Speaking retrospectively and prospectively of the plight of the prophets, Jesus included all the prophets and apostles in this group of those killed. Implicit in the language of John and the language of Jesus is the fact that the prophets were killed and their prophecy ended. Paul agreed saying, "But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away." 1 Corinthians 13:8.

Their bodies lie in the streets of the great city, contrasted to the holy city of 11:2. The scripture teaches plainly that the great city is a figure. The great city is Sodom and Egypt, but is also where they crucified the Lord, that is, secular Jerusalem. The phrase great city appears 13 times in the Bible—five times in the Old Testament and the other eight in Revelation. In the Old Testament, it refers to sinful Nineveh four out of five times. In the Revelation, it symbolically includes Babylon throughout chapter 18, where her fall receives detailed consideration. In Revelation 17:18, the great city is the woman who sits on the beast and the great city rules over the kings of the world. In Revelation 16:18-19, the great city splits into three parts because of God's wrath poured out on the earth. The great city, the secular city, contrasts to the holy city, the spiritual city, the New Jerusalem.

9 For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. 10 The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. Revelation 11:9-10.

The three and a half days is equivalent to the approximate time Jesus spent on the cross and in the grave. Having been crucified at the third hour of the day, he died about the ninth hour. Luke recorded the time of Jesus death and the prophetic nature of Jesus in Luke 24:19-24: "About Jesus of Nazareth, they replied. 'He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place.'" If this were the case, then Christ stands symbolically for the Old Testament and the New Testament prophets. From the cross, he looked back to the revelation from of old. Just as he had said on the Sermon on the Mount, "Do not think

that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Matthew 5:17-18. At the point of his death, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom (Mark 15:38).

As the death of Jesus ended the era of Old Testament prophecy, so his life began the era of the New Testament. He had told his apostles in John 15:26-27, "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. 27 And you also must testify, for you have been with me from the beginning." Their mission, as Christ's mission, ended in persecution and, for most, martyrdom. History documents the tragic end of almost all the apostles. Two vivid examples are Paul and James. In Acts 12:2-3, James, the brother of John, was put to death with the sword, and Peter was seized. Paul understood how much he was to suffer from the beginning, "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. 16 I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.'" Acts 9:15-16.

The men of the all the earth celebrated and gloated because these two had tormented those who live on the earth. What appears to be a point of victory suddenly changes. "A breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them." The metaphor of Jesus, who stands for all prophets and apostles, past and present, continues as God raised them from the dead and took them up in a cloud. As the prophets were ending their time on earth, literally dying out, as it were, they become forever alive in the written word. Jesus had foretold this in Matthew 24:34-35: "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away." Peter quoted the prophet Isaiah, "'But the word of the Lord stands forever:' And this is the word that was preached to you." 1 Peter 1:25.

The metaphor extends to include the ascension of Christ as it relates to all the prophets, for they went up to heaven in a cloud. In Acts 1:9 tells us, "After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight."

The revelation by the prophets is complete, and it was to this very moment that John spoke, "And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, 'There will be no more delay! 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.'" Revelation 10:6-7.

Heaven's response to this event was immediately and momentous, but not so momentous as to be taken for the final demonstration of God's wrath, which is reserved for the last "Woe!" :John records, "13 At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven."

Summary of the Sounding of the Sixth Trumpet and the Second Woe

The events of the second woe may be summarized: the release of the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates (Revelation 9:13-16); the army of death, injury, and plagues; failure to repent (Revelation 9:20-21); the angel and the little scroll (Revelation 10); measuring the temple of God and the altar (Revelation 11:1-2); the two witnesses (Revelation 11:3-14); and the beast overpowers and kills the witnesses, who are raised from the dead (Revelation 11:7-14).

"14 The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon"

The Seventh Angel Sounded His Trumpet (Hebrews 11:15-19)

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying:

*"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power
and have begun to reign.*

*18 The nations were angry;
and your wrath has come.*

*The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your saints and those who reverence your name,
both small and great –*

and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, the revelation opens with a loud celebration and worship in heaven. In contrast, the sounding of the sixth trumpet opened a scene of horror as the devil's destructive troops—200 million strong—stormed through the world. The sixth sounding had concluded with God's temple, the holy city and the witnesses were enduring in their battle. Now, victory is in air. The kingdom of the world now is the Kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, according to the loud voices in heaven. The temple in heaven and the prophets receive special attention in the worship.

That the kingdom of the world has ended and become the kingdom of the heaven is a central principal of the revelation. John has taught on two occasions that the saints are reigning (present tense) with Christ. In Revelation 1:5-6, we studied, "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever!" Again, in Revelation 5:10, John wrote what the four living creatures and 24 elders sang in their new song,

*"you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

*10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth."*

When did they become a kingdom? This question is important since many think it will occur at some future date and last for a literal thousand years. As we have studied, the use of the perfect tense verb, *has made*, is an action in the past preceding time of the main verb. At John's writing, the Lord had made the saints a kingdom. This is in agreement with the teaching of Jesus, who pinpointed the time of the coming of the kingdom in Mark 9:1, "And he said to them, 'I tell you the

truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.” In Luke 22:29-30, Jesus used the present tense verb to describe the receiving of the kingdom, “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Paul also uses the present perfect tense verb (time before the present time of Paul’s writing in Colossians 1:12-14, “12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Finally, the Hebrew writer used the present progressive tense verb (an action continuing in the present), “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our “God is a consuming fire.” Hebrews 12:28-29

The preceding episode, represented in the sounding of the sixth trumpet, described the temple of God, the holy city, and the prophets of God as they overcame the army of the devil. After that victory, we come to the celebratory statement: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord (one supreme in authority. See Strong’s. *Lord* is used of God Almighty in verse 17) and of his Christ (anointed, i.e. the Messiah in Hebrew, used of Jesus. See Strong’s). The length of the reign is *for ever and ever* or literally, into the ages of the ages. There was no failure and no need for a future earthly struggle. The victory was certain and final in Jesus. Isaiah said, “A bruised reed shall he not break, And smoking flax shall he not quench, Till he send forth judgment unto victory.” Matthew 12:20-21. Paul agreed in 1 Corinthians 15:56-57, “The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” John, in 1 John 5:4-5, taught, “This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.”

The twenty-four elders, on their thrones before God, fell on their faces worshipping God. Their worship concludes the rescue of a world destroyed by sin and man lost in sin, represented in the sounding of the trumpets. At the sounding of the seventh trumpet, their worship summarizes this victory:

- *We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty . God is all mighty and all powerful.*
- *The One who is and who was. God is everlasting.*
- *Because you have taken your great power.*
- *And have begun to reign. With the victory of the Christ and resurrection of the prophets.*
- *The nations were angry. They thought the holy city was trampled over and the prophets dead.*
- *And your wrath has come. This is the third woe. The first woe was one of sin and death and the reign of the Destroyer. The second woe was one of savage troops which could not overcome the temple of God, the holy city, or the prophets, the word of God*
- *The time has come for judging the dead. The last enemy to be subdued will be death.*
- *And for rewarding your servants the prophets. The valiant prophets, Old and New Testament, of the preceding woe, receive their reward.*
- *And your saints and those who reverence your name. There appears to be two groups: your saints, those set apart, and those who reverence God’s name.*
- *Both small and great. There will be no distinction in degree of service or reward. —*
- *And for destroying those who destroy the earth. Paul describes his last great judgment:*

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Then God's temple in heaven opened. This is the same temple discussed in 11:1; however, we have added to the scene the ark of his (God's) covenant. The covenant, Old and New Testament, was complete with the work of Christ and the prophets. Paul wrote about its completeness: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Jude wrote about its completion: "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that **was once for all** entrusted to the saints." Jude 3-4.

Forecasting the judgment of all things, *there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.*

In summary, the scene is set for the final judgment. The Lamb has instructed the churches, the Lamb has opened the seven seals, and the angels have sounded the seven trumpets. What follows will be the final episodes in the judgment forecast at the time of the fall of man and the curses upon mankind and the devil and the forces of evil.

The first will be the judgments outstanding between the woman and the dragon, the devil. Next will be the judgments against the beast and false prophet, followed closely by the disposition of Babylon and the prostitute. The serpent and his followers will receive their judgment, and last of all, the Lord will cast judgment on Death and Hades. Those whose names are in the Book of Life, the church, enter into the joys of the Lord.

12. The Woman and the Dragon (Revelation 12)

This episode between the woman and the dragon disposes of the curse upon serpent and the enmity between the woman and the serpent because of the fall of man recorded in Genesis 3:13-16:

13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all the livestock

and all the wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly

and you will eat dust

all the days of your life.

15 And I will put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;

he will crush your head,

and you will strike his heel."

16 To the woman he said,

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;

with pain you will give birth to children.

Your desire will be for your husband,

and he will rule over you."

There are two possible symbolic meanings in the dramatic situation set between woman and the devil. In the literal story, literal man as the seed of woman will step on the serpent and that the serpent will strike the literal heel of man. One symbolic meaning might be that the seed of woman Christ will crush the head of the devil by resisting temptation and overcoming death. It is clear that the devil was unable to strike the heel of Christ, who rose from the dead sin free and ascended into heaven.

Paul revealed the second symbolic meaning to the church at Rome in Romans 16:19-20: "Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. 20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Therefore, the offspring of the woman is the church under whose feet the God will crush Satan. The story that follows is an extension of the metaphor, taking on the characteristics of an allegory. An allegory is a story with two meanings, a literal meaning, and a [symbolic](#) meaning. The true offspring of woman are those faithful to God across the ages as identified in last verse of the chapter: "17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus."

A Great and Wondrous Sign—the Radiant Woman (Revelation 12:1-2)

12:1 A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.

“A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven” shows that the scene John is viewing is extraordinary, especially as compared to just another sign in verse 3. “A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head” describes the radiant woman who has with sun as clothing, the moon under her feet, and a crown with twelve stars. She is radiantly arrayed with all the glory and grandeur of God’s creation. The crown is a victory crown (stephanos). The crowns in verse 3 of the dragon are diadems or ruling crowns (diadema). This word for crown is the same as used for the crown of thorns worn by Christ, for the crown of righteousness in 2 Timothy 4:8, and, the crown of glory in 1 Peter 5:4. The twelve stars are the saved of spiritual Israel, the New Jerusalem.

This woman is not the Virgin Mary, as some suppose, nor is she just a symbol of all women. A woman so adorned can only be the bride of Christ. The entire revelation is about Christ and his bride. The conflict between the bride and the devil has existed from the fall of man. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, “I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. 3 But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.” Of Christ and the church, Paul wrote:

... Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. ... 32 This is a profound mystery — but I am talking about Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:25-32

The woman was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. By their very nature, the redeemed of all ages constitute the offspring of the beautiful woman. Revelation 7:14 describes them as “the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” The woman—the bride, the pure virgin, the called out—has struggled to bring forth offspring in every generation. Her offspring are the children of God as opposed to children of the devil. In John 8:43-44, Jesus spoke of this fact as it related to the children of devil, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him.”

In our story, the woman is in symbolic travail and anguish. Jeremiah 4:31 captures the sense of the allegory, “31 I hear a cry as of a woman in labor, a groan as of one bearing her first child—the cry of the Daughter of Zion gasping for breath, stretching out her hands and saying, ‘Alas! I am fainting; my life is given over to murderers.’” Note especially how John and Jeremiah use the words murderer and murderers. The children of God of each generation from Abel to the present suffer travail as they birth the true offspring of God for the next generation.

Another Sign—the Red Dragon (Revelation 12:3-6)

3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. 4 His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

Another sign appeared—an enormous red dragon. Another sign contrast to the great and wondrous sign. Verse 7 explains the dragon figure clearly—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan. The meaning of the word dragon, unknown in modern times, has its root meaning back in Job. God, through Job, described the leviathan, in a way consistent with what we now think of as dragons. In Job 41:1-13, the description offers a fit analogy to explain the devil as dragon:

- He is strong and graceful.
- His mouth is ringed with fearsome teeth.
- His back has rows of shields, tightly sealed together.
- His snorting throws out flashes of light; his eyes are like the rays of dawn.
- Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out.
- Smoke pours from his nostrils as from a boiling pot over a fire of reeds.
- His breath sets coals ablaze, and flames dart from his mouth.
- Strength resides in his neck; dismay goes before him.
- His chest is hard as rock, hard as a lower millstone.
- The sword that reaches him has no effect, nor does the spear or the dart or the javelin.
- He makes the depths churn like a boiling caldron and stirs up the sea like a pot of ointment.
- Nothing on earth is his equal, a creature without fear.

The dragon had seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. The red dragon contrasts to the woman clothed in the sun. The seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns describe his dominion and authority. These physical characteristics convey a spiritual meaning of authority (heads) power (horns) and dominion (crowns). Ephesians 6:12 describes fully the sum of the metaphoric meaning: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” This is the power and horror of the dragon. In Daniel 7:6, Daniel says his four-headed beast is one given authority to rule. The horns, the heads, and crowns describe the power and authority the devil, and not Rome or Egypt or any other minor force. Seven is the number of fullness and 10 is the number of completeness. The use of both numbers here does not extend beyond the symbolic meaning. The dragon is an entity of full and complete power over his kingdom—the spiritual host of wickedness.

In the next chapter, the dragon gives power and dominion to the beast. While writing of crowns, heads, and horns, John gives the meaning of the symbols, “The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.” Revelation 13:2. The crowns, heads, and horns will always take this meaning: power, throne, and authority. Crown used here is different from the woman’s crown—*stephanos*, a crown of victory. The word used here is *diadema* and is always the symbol of kingly or imperial dignity. Revelation 12:3; 13:1; 19:12 use this meaning of crown of the dragon, of the beast, and of the Word of God.

The word, *head*, carries the consistent metaphoric meaning of authority. It is used this way of Christ, husbands, and wives in 1 Corinthians 11:3; of Christ in relation to the church in Ephesians 1:22; and now in relation to the Dragon, the beast, and the false prophet.

Similarly, the horns represent strength as used for the Lamb in Revelation 5:6 and the strength of the dragon and the beast in Revelation 12:3; 13:1, 11; 17:3, 7,12,16. Metaphorically, they signify political power and strength. See Psalms 18:2; cf. 1 Samuel 2:10; Lamentations 2:3. The notes on Revelation 9:13-16 discusses further the meaning of horns.

The dragon’s tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon’s strength and power was such that he could challenge heaven and sweep a third of the stars (angels)

out of the sky and down to earth with his tail. Thus the rebellion and war between God and His angels and the devil and his angels started.

“The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born.” The timing of the event is that same as the temptation and fall of man. At the birth of the first children, Cain and Abel, the woman struggled against the dragon, who waited ready to devour the child as soon as he was born.

Verse 5 says that she gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. In lineage, the male child was Christ and all those born again (John 3; 1 Peter 1:22-23). In ancestry, the child was all those true to the Lord from the beginning, bringing Christ to us. The child would rule all nations with an iron scepter. Revelation 2:27 used this phrase of the Lord, as does Revelation 19:15: “15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter.” All those of the church will rule with him: “And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Luke 22:29-30.

And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne means that the child was taken up by God to his throne, but the woman, the church, stayed. The woman found her refuge as she fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. The 1,260 days is the same time that the holy city was trampled on and the same time that the two witnesses prophesied. Revelation 11:2-3. 42 months and 1260 days are the same. God protected the woman, the bride of Christ, the church, the holy city against the dragon. God sheltered the woman in a prepared place just as he had sheltered the children of Israel:

10:1 For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. 2 They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. 3 They all ate the same spiritual food 4 and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:1-5

The figure does not mean that the woman will not suffer, for she is in the desert; and some individuals will falter, as did the children of Israel. The woman, the holy city, will survive.

War in Heaven (Revelation 12:7-9)

7-9 7 *And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down – that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

At the time of Adam and Eve, the devil in the form of the serpent had already turned against God and seeks then and now to turn man and woman against God. He immediately led their son Cain into false worship and murder. The *and* here links the war in heaven to the struggle against the woman and her offspring. These are parallel events, related to one another, but separate. It links to the vision itself and the events in heaven, which consummate in the limiting of the power of the dragon and his place in the revelation. Jude refers to Michael as an archangel (Jude 9).

That the dragon was not strong enough to win shows that God can always control the devil. Jesus was present at the fall and described it: “18 He replied, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’” Luke 10:18-19. The influence of the dragon and his angels was restricted to the earth. However, even on earth, he was subject to the power of God. For example, he could not move against Job without God’s explicit approval in Job 1-2. In 1 Corinthians 10:13, Paul wrote, “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you

can stand up under it." The dragon does have the power to lead the whole world astray. There is no wondering about who the dragon is. He is the ancient serpent, the devil, or Satan.

A Loud Voice from Heaven (Revelation 12:10-12)

12:10-12: *10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:*

*"Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God,
and the authority of his Christ.*

*For the accuser of our brothers,
who accuses them before our God day and night,
has been hurled down.*

*11 They overcame him
by the blood of the Lamb
and by the word of their testimony;
they did not love their lives so much
as to shrink from death.*

*12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens
and you who dwell in them!
But woe to the earth and the sea,
because the devil has gone down to you!
He is filled with fury,
because he knows that his time is short."*

The previous discussion of the fall of the dragon used the past tense *was*. The following words of instruction and praise are in the present tense. One will have to conclude that, with the victory in heaven, salvation and the power and the kingdom of God was complete. God's victory over the dragon forever predicted the outcome for the dragon. What was to be the outcome for each person who was to live is the central unanswered question. There will be no future coming of the kingdom, for it has come. The New Testament always looked back to this point where Christ was raised to sit over his kingdom and forward only to the salvation of the children of God, whenever they might live upon the earth.

There is a three-fold fulfillment to God's eternal purpose (Ephesians 1). Salvation has come in the "name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 4:10)." "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:12. The power of God has come: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." Romans 1:16. And the kingdom of our God has come: "13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Colossians 1:13-14. Whatever arguments one might make about when God consummated his plan, it is clear that at the time of this writing it was fully complete. Nothing that follows will predict any changes or any future events not included in his plan at this point.

The authority of his Christ is certain. At the beginning of the Gospel, the devil held authority of all the kingdoms of the world: "The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 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. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.'" Luke 4:5-7. By the time of his prayer in John 17, Jesus had authority to give eternal life:

“For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him.” John 17:3. In Matthew 28:18-19, just before his ascension Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” In 1 Corinthians 15:24-25, Paul speaks to the very end of the matter: “Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.” An exact description of the authority of Christ places the focal point of this authority at Christ’s resurrection from the dead:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Ephesians 1:19-23.

Jude 25 offers a fitting conclusion to the subject of the authority of Christ which he had before all ages and now has and will have forevermore: “To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.”

A loud voice from heaven summarizes the status of

- *For the accuser of our brother:* The word devil means accuser (diabolos), although accuser here is from a different word (kategoros).
- *Who accuses them before our God day and night:* Job is the best example of the devil accusing someone before God:

6 One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, "Where have you come from?"

Satan answered the LORD, "From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it."

8 Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil."

9 "Does Job fear God for nothing?" Satan replied. 10 "Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face."

12 The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger."

Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. Job 1:6-12

- *Has been hurled down:* The hurling down takes a figurative turn here, as it moves from the result of the struggle in heaven to a struggle of the accused brethren.
- *11 They overcame him:* The *they* has to be the brethren of Jesus, the followers of the Lamb, for it was by his blood that they overcame him.
- *By the blood of the Lamb:* In Revelation 7:14-15, there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. There the elder describes them as “they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”
- *And by the word of their testimony.* The blood of the Lamb is Christ’s part, offered on the cross. The followers’ part is the word of their testimony. The church, the called out, individually

- *They did not love their lives so much:* We met these brethren before in Revelation 6:9: “When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.” All Christians die to sin in order to live with Christ [See Romans 6].
- *As to shrink from death:* John summarized the brethren’s state in Revelation 2:10, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.”
- *12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens.* Heaven may rejoice because of this victory of the brethren.
- *And you who dwell in them!* The brethren, past, and the brethren, present, the innumerable multitudes, and all the hosts of heaven are victorious.
- *But woe to the earth and the sea:* With the dragon cast down, the earth and the sea are his domain.
- *Because the devil has gone down to you!* The loud voice calls the dragon the devil (accuser). The dragon and his angels have gone down to the earth and sea.
- *He is filled with fury. Because he knows that his time is short.* Having lost the struggle in heaven, it is only a matter of time until the devil’s finish.

The Enraged Dragon (Revelation 12:13-17)

12:13-17: *13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. 15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

The struggle now is upon the earth, the dragon filled with fury where he turns his wrath toward the woman the bride of Christ. Peter describes the dragon as a roaring lion in 1 Peter 5:8, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” The dragon, who saw that he had been hurled to the earth, pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The dragon continues the attack on the woman and her offspring from Revelation 12:6.

That the woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach reiterates the security of the woman in the desert. Here the figure of the two wings of a great eagle has a direct antecedent in the escape of the children of Israel in Exodus 19:4: “4'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.’” The church will always be out of the serpent’s reach. Her children may fall

but the church will survive all assaults. *A time, times, and half time* is time counted by the lunar calendar as the custom of the Hebrews. *A time* is a year; *two times* is two years, and *half time* is a half year. So far, we have seen 42 months, 1,260 days, and *a time, times, and half times*, all of which represent the intermittent time of the church's persecution throughout the ages from the fall of man to the victory of the lamb. The intermittent nature of the persecution and the survival of the woman is in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Daniel wrote of it:

7 The man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by him who lives forever, saying, "It will be for a time, times and half a time. When the power of the holy people has been finally broken, all these things will be completed."

8 I heard, but I did not understand. So I asked, "My lord, what will the outcome of all this be?"

9 He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. 10 Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand. Daniel 12:7-10

"15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth". The prophets used water and rivers to speak of impending attacks by troops. In Jeremiah 46:6-7, Jeremiah used the figure to describe the troops of the Babylonians:

6 "The swift cannot flee
nor the strong escape.
In the north by the River Euphrates
they stumble and fall."
7 "Who is this that rises like the Nile,
like rivers of surging waters?"

A similar figure was used in Jeremiah 47:2:

"See how the waters are rising in the north;
they will become an overflowing torrent."

The troops in this case would be the army of over 200 million in Revelation 9:16 with their mouths of fire, smoke, and sulfur and their tails like snakes. The earth thwarted the dragon by opening its mouth and swallowing the river. The earth has helped the children of God in a similar way in Exodus 15:11-12 when they were fleeing the Egyptians:

11 "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?
Who is like you –
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?
12 You stretched out your right hand

and the earth swallowed them.

In Numbers 16:30-34, the earth responds in testimony to the power of God compared to the sorcerers of Egypt:

"30 But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt."

31 As soon as he finished saying all this, the ground under them split apart 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them, with their households and all Korah's men and all their possessions. 33 They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. 34 At their cries, all the Israelites around them fled, shouting, "The earth is going to swallow us too!"

The result was that the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring – those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. The enraged dragon left the woman whom he would never defeat because of the power of God and the Lamb and made war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. What follows is the revelation of the nature of the attack on those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. The question of who are the offspring of the woman is here settled forever. **They are those who those obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.**

13. Warriors of the Dragon: The Beast out of the Sea and the Beast out of the Earth (Revelation 13)

The war turns away from the woman and her ascended male child. The enraged dragon makes war against her offspring. There is no question as to whom the offspring are. They are those who obey God's commands and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Rev 12:17). In this chapter, the beast coming out of the sea joins the dragon in his evil effort to overcome these offspring.

The Beast out of the Sea (Revelation 13:1-10)

Rev 13:1-4: 13:1 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. 2 The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. 3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. 4 Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"

This passage reconnects to the deposition of the dragon after his challenge in heaven. The loud voice in the previous chapter had said, "But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you." From the two provinces of the devil's influence will come two beasts – one of the sea and one of the earth.

Isaiah described the monster out of the sea in Isaiah 27:1:

27:1 In that day,
the LORD will punish with his sword,
his fierce, great and powerful sword,
Leviathan the gliding serpent,
Leviathan the coiling serpent;
he will slay the monster of the sea .

From that early time, God promised to punish the monster with His great and powerful sword – the word of God. Because God gave us His complete Revelation, we can see the end of the beast from this vantage point of his beginning. Rev 19:15-16 and 19-21 teach:

15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The

two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

In verse two, the heads and the crowns demonstrate the beast's power, throne, and great authority: "The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority." It is important to remember, in reading these very symbolic passages, that in symbols the meaning runs from the concrete (the known) to the abstract (the unknown). Verse 4 says that the dragon gave the beast his great authority. The extent of the power and authority of the beast is in the numbers 7 and 10. Seven represented fullness and 10 represented completeness. The actual numerical value has no meaning in and of itself. Revelation 17 will discuss the nature of the beast and its influence in detail. The beast itself is a total and complete entity or being, just as the devil. Revelation 17 will describe the beast as one who once was, now is not, and will come up out of the abyss to his own destruction, which gives the beast the ability to sustain itself against adversity. The beast of the sea and the beast of the land are here until they are thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 19:20).

The beast resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. His power, throne, and authority came from the dragon. This is an allusion to Daniel's dream where he saw four great beasts, each different from the others, come up out of the sea. (See Daniel 7:2-8:1). Where the Daniel vision has four separate beasts, three of which are represented by a lion, a bear, and leopard, respectively, this beast is a combination of the four. His physical powers complement his delegated power of principality and dominion and great authority. If anything, the beast is a combination of all the Daniel images. If this is true, this beast exceeds any imagination of power and authority of the Daniel beast. Therefore, the beast's kingdom is not one or a series of earthly kingdoms. It is that kingdom spoken of at the sounding of the seventh trumpet – the kingdom of the world in Rev 11:15:

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

As such, it is all-inclusive of world principality, power, authority, and might. In truth, the beast has all the power, throne, and great authority of the dragon; however, both are subject to the will of God. This power will last until the victory of Jesus, when the Lord, himself, will apply all authority given to him in Matthew 28:18. At that time, the Lord will deliver the end to the beast and the false prophet. The dragon's gives his power to the beast; God gives His to a Lamb.

3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. Fatal wound in one of the heads (represents a principality or domain) stopped the beast at one point. His dominion ended, but the fatal wound had been healed. The past perfect tense makes the action of the wounding begun and completed in the past. The healed or resurrected beast stands to the dragon as the Lamb stands to God. This explains the phrase: the beast as one who once was, now is not, and will come up out of the abyss to his own destruction. The beast clearly has a past, a present (at the time of this writing), and a future. Verses 11-18 presents more facts regarding this fatally wounded but alive beast.

The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. 4 Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" The scope of is in Ephesians 6:12-13 reveals the scope of the devil's influence . However, it also shows the scope of the devil's kingdom by delegation to the beast. Their kingdom

is literally the kingdom of the world: "but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Eph.6:12)."

One can see the power of the beast from Nimrod's Babylon and Nineveh to the kingdoms of this present world (See notes on 13:11). The answer to the question of who can make war against the beast, is found in Daniel's vision:

13 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. Daniel 7: 13-14

Revelation 11:15 states the fulfillment of this promise: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." The perfect tense verb placed the occurrence of the kingdom of the Lord at a time preceding John's vision. At the time of John's writing, the kingdom of the Lord was an accomplished fact. The kingdom had come.

Daniel further describes these events:

21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, 22 until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom.

26 "But the court will sit, and his power will be taken away and completely destroyed forever. 27 Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him." Daniel 7:21-27

13:5-8:5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months.

The God limited the beast to the intermittent and symbolic time of forty-two months. This is the fifth time this figure has appeared in different forms (Revelation 11:2, Revelation 11:3, Revelation 12:6, Revelation 12:14, Revelation 13:5). Each time it limits the influence of the dragon against the followers of the Lord:

- 2 But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. Revelation 11:2
- 3 And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. Revelation 11:3
- 6 The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. Revelation 12:6
- 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Revelation 12:13-14
- 5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. Revelation 13:5-6

This limitation also exists in Daniel's vision where it is said that this entity, the beast in Revelation will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change God's law and times. He will literally fight for his life and his dominion:

24 The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom. After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. 25 He will speak against

the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time [three and a half years or 42 months.]. Daniel 7: 24-25

Paul also describes the beast and his nature in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-7: “For that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God [NASU].” Paul speaks twice about one holding back the man of lawlessness. “You know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time,” Paul writes and adds, “7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way [NASU].

At the point that the lawless one is revealed, Paul explains, “The Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.” The full manifestation of the beast will be revealed fully when Lord Jesus comes. The Revelation reiterates this passage by Paul almost exactly at the time of the destruction of the beast (man of lawlessness): “

20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse. Revelation 19:20-21

The false prophet of this passage is the second beast of Revelation 13. He will be the one to whom the dragon delegated the power of lying miracles, signs, and wonders in 2 Thessalonians 2:9:12:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness [NASU].

The power of second beast (the false prophet) is the first beast (the man of lawlessness), and the power of the first beast is the dragon (the serpent, the devil, Satan). This reveals a trinity of evil and destruction.

Paul stated twice that the man of lawlessness was held back. Indeed, the Revelation speaks of binding even Satan for a period (Revelation 20:1-2). Of this, Christ prayed, “I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me.” John 17:11-12.

6 He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. 7 He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

The beast directed his verbal attack against heaven and God. The power, authority, and influence of the beast was unlimited. He not only could make war against the saints, but he could conquer them.

The beast won the battle for the inhabitants of the earth—all whose names have not been written in the book of life—leaving only the saints with hope. Even though people worship the beast now, they do not fully understand the horror to which they have committed themselves. They will be shocked when they find out: “The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.” Revelation 17:8.

The expression, the book of life, becomes a central figure, used 6 times in Revelation. Those whose names are written in the book of life may know that whatever the assault by the beast, they will be victorious.

- The Lord will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. Revelation 3:5
- The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast. Revelation 17:8
- 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. Revelation 20:12
- 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:15
- 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. Revelation 21:27

That the book of life belongs to the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world shows that God's eternal purpose was complete in the Lord's sacrifice on the cross. God determined it that way, and it happened that way. At the time of John's writing, Jesus had laid down his life for the whole world. John summarizes in his letter:

18 We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him. 19 We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one. 20 We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. 1 John 5:18-20.

13:9-10: 9 He who has an ear, let him hear.

*10 If anyone is to go into captivity,
into captivity he will go.*

*If anyone is to be killed with the sword,
with the sword he will be killed.*

This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

We have just seen that the lamb was slain from the creation of the world and that the inhabitants' names were or were not written in the book of life from the creation of the world. God determined His plan before the foundation of the world, and the Lamb fulfilled it upon the cross. God also determined His plan for man before the foundation of the world, and man fulfills it by dressing in white and not soiling their clothes (Revelation 3:4-5). The choice to hear or not hear is the basis of the free moral agency of man. Paul addressed this issue:

11 In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12 in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory. Ephesians 1:11-14

To follow the path of the beast is to be captive made by it. Nothing will help. To struggle with the beast requires endurance and faithfulness. We must be patient as the Lord's eternal purpose in Christ unfolds. John has previously written in Revelation 2:10, "10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

The rest of the chapter will introduce a second beast out of the earth. We have two beasts, one from the sea and one from the earth. They are both entities and beings of immense proportions. The second beast, who later will be called the false prophet (Revelation 16:13), receives the power and authority of the first beast. Their influence and purpose display totally, fully, and single-mindedly against the Christ, the lamb. Yet, they work in two different ways.

In ascertaining who or what these beasts are, consider these parallel passages of John:

- 18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. 2 John 2:18.
- It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son. 1 John 2:22.
- 4:1 Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. 1 John 4:1-3.
- 7 Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. 2 John 7.

By the time of John's first letter, the spirit of the antichrist was underway. The second beast, the false prophet, played a crucial role.

The Beast out of the Earth (Revelation 13:11-18)

This part of the Revelation explains how the first beast received his wound and what happened after that. Also described for us is the influence of the dragon through the second beast. From the time shortly after the flood, the armies of men and paganism marched in lock step across the world. The Old Testament is the story of a small remnant of Jews who held together against all odds until the Messiah came. The devil's influence was great and the first beast was in almost complete control. Government and idolatry worked hand in hand. Hence, the ten horns, seven heads, and ten crowns of the first beast. As we have seen, it held the power, throne, and great authority of the dragon, so great was its fullness and completeness. It was a world without redemption.

The beginning of the account of this influence appears in the genealogy of Noah in Genesis 10:8-12:

8 Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. 9 He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before

the LORD." 10 The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. 11 From that land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah 12 and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

As Nimrod's kingdom spread, so did the influence of the Babylonian Sun-god, which is now considered to be Baal of the Old Testament.

The Babylonian Bel-Merodach was a Sun-god, and so too was the Canaanite Baal whose full title was Baal-Shemaim, "lord of heaven." The Phoenician writer Sanchuniathon (Philo Byblius, Fragmenta II) accordingly says that the children of the first generation of mankind "in time of drought stretched forth their hands to heaven toward the sun; for they regarded him as the sole Lord of heaven, and called him Beel-samen, which means 'Lord of Heaven' in the Phoenician language and is equivalent to Zeus in Greek." Baal-Shemaim had a temple at Umm el-Awamid between Acre and Tyre, and his name is found in inscriptions from the Phoenician colonies of Sardinia and Carthage. (from International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblsoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

2 Kings 17:7-20 summarizes the influence of Baal, and therefore the beast, on Israel:

7 All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods 8 and followed the practices of the nations the LORD had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced. 9 The Israelites secretly did things against the LORD their God that were not right. From watchtower to fortified city they built themselves high places in all their towns. 10 They set up sacred stones and Asherah poles on every high hill and under every spreading tree. 11 At every high place they burned incense, as the nations whom the LORD had driven out before them had done. They did wicked things that provoked the LORD to anger. 12 They worshiped idols, though the LORD had said, "You shall not do this." 13 The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets."

14 But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers, who did not trust in the LORD their God. 15 They rejected his decrees and the covenant he had made with their fathers and the warnings he had given them. They followed worthless idols and themselves became worthless. They imitated the nations around them although the LORD had ordered them, "Do not do as they do," and they did the things the LORD had forbidden them to do.

16 They forsook all the commands of the LORD their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. 17 They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

18 So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, 19 and even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced. 20 Therefore the LORD rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence.

The Lord's answer, in Zephaniah 1:2-2:1, prophesies the end of Baal and therefore the influence of the beast:

2 "I will sweep away everything from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

3 "I will sweep away both men and animals; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. The wicked will have only heaps of rubble when I cut off man from the face of the earth," declares the LORD.

4 "I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all who live in Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every remnant of Baal, the names of the pagan and the idolatrous priests— 5 those who bow down on the roofs to worship the starry host, those who bow down and swear by the LORD and who also swear by Molech, 6 those who turn back from following the LORD and neither seek the LORD nor inquire of him. 7 Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited. 8 On the day of the LORD's sacrifice I will punish the princes and the king's sons and all those clad in foreign clothes. 9 On that day I will punish all who avoid stepping on the threshold, who fill the temple of their gods with violence and deceit.

What follows in Zephaniah 1:10ff is an almost exact description of the destruction of Babylon found in Revelation 18. This passage is also the last time, of 80 times, that Baal is mentioned in the old Testament; and it is mentioned only once in the New Testament (Romans 11:4) and that in reference to the 7,000 who did not turn to Baal in 1 Kings 19:18.

Therefore, the first beast influenced the growth and spread of idolatry and paganism in the world from the flood until the Christ. It was only after the victory of Christ on the cross that the influence of paganism diminished. Christ executed the wounding of the beast out of the sea and binding of the dragon that ancient serpent who is the devil or Satan (Revelation 20:1-2). At the time of Jesus' coming the devil, and by extension, the first beast controlled the entire world. Even Israel had departed from the ways of God. Jesus pronounced his woes upon the Jews in Matthew 23. When he confronted Christ, the devil had authority over all nations: "5 The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 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. 7 So if you worship me, it will all be yours.'" "8 Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" Luke 4:5-8.

However, by the time Paul wrote Romans 13:1-3: "For there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." The wounding of the first beast had occurred by the time of Paul's writing.

11 Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.

Turning now to the second beast out of the earth, we find one, who in contrast to the first beast, has only two horns. His power and authority rests on deceit and not might. Therefore, he has two horns like a lamb, but he speaks the words of the dragon. Of course, the Revelation has already revealed the true Lamb of God. Jesus warned us about this imposter and his ilk in the Sermon on the Mount at the beginning of his ministry in Matthew 7:15, "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." Of these wolves, Paul told the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20:28-31, "I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. 30 Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." Paul also spoke of the deceitful nature of what was to come: "The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." 1 Timothy 4:1-2. We cannot doubt that this deceit

is the work of the dragon. In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Paul describes the nature of the deceit confronting the faithful: "13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. 15 It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."

12 He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. 13 And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.

When the first beast was wounded, the dragon's authority did not diminish. It was given to the second beast to exercise on behalf of the first beast. Using his deceit, the second beast made the earth and the inhabitants worship the first beast. This was a straight trip back to paganism and idolatry.

Verse 14 will tell us that the first beast was wounded by sword. The sword must be the one that comes out of the mouth of the Lamb of God. It is clear in Revelation and entire New Testament that the word of God is the instrument of this warfare against the dragon and the second beast. In his very nature, the Lamb was the word of God. John wrote in John 1:11:1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning." The Hebrew writer describes this word, "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." Hebrews 4:12-13. The Revelation speaks clearly:

- These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword." Revelation 2:12.
- In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword Revelation 1:16
- Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." Revelation 19:15
- The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, Revelation 19:21

John teaches that Jesus received the unlimited spirit of God in John 3:34-35: "For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. 35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands." Jesus, while on the earth had power over demons, nature, sin, and death. Jesus could even command the dragon, the tempter. In Matthew 4:4, Jesus commanded the tempter with scripture when he said, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" And again in Matthew 4:7, he said, "Jesus answered him, 'It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" However, in Matthew 4:10, he added a command when he said, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Later, when talking to Peter, Jesus commanded, "Get behind me, Satan!" Mark 8:33. Jesus wounded the first beast by the sword out of mouth, the word of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 describes the great and miraculous signs of the second beast: "9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing."

14 Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. The second beast used the signs and wonders to deceive the people. The main sphere of the first beast's influence was direct; now he is served through the second beast and worshippers commanded by the second beast. Christ described the image of the beast in all its wickedness and in

its representation of a new idolatry that influenced the world beyond the paganism of old Babylon. In the Sermon on the Mount, he taught against the extreme opposite of God and personified Money (mammon) as an idol: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Matthew 6:24. Paul called greed, idolatry in Colossians 3:5. Peter prophesied of a coming religion advanced by false teachers in 2 Peter 2:12: "In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up," he wrote. After describing them thoroughly and conclusively, Peter connects them to the beast; "12 But these men blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like brute beasts, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like beasts they too will perish."

Peter concludes with a description of the aims and purpose of these followers of the beast:

13 They will be paid back with harm for the harm they have done. Their idea of pleasure is to carouse in broad daylight. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their pleasures while they feast with you. 14 With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed – an accursed brood! . . . Blackest darkness is reserved for them. 18 For they mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. 19 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are

15 He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed.

The influence of the image of the beast is world-wide with the power to kill those who do not follow.

16 He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, 17 so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

The mark – the name of the beast is a slave mark – identifies the slave with the master. We have just studied where Peter called them all "slaves of depravity (2 Peter 2:19)." Paul described these slaves in Romans 6:15-17, "Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey – whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?" Peter called them, "Slaves of depravity – for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him (2 Peter 2: 18-19)." The idea of a mark on sinners originated as early as with Cain in Genesis 4:15-16: "Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him." The Lord used a mark on the forehead to designate the righteous in Ezekiel 9:3-6:

Then the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side 4 and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."

5 As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. 6 Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark .

18 This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

It is man's number speaks to the imperfection of the number six. Seven was thought to be the perfect number of fullness, as used of the seven-fold spirit of God, seven churches, seven stars, etc. Six is an imperfect number, and therefore, the number of man. The number 666 aptly describes the triad of

evil: the dragon—who is the serpent, the devil, Satan—the first beast—who is the man of sin, the antichrist—and the second beast—who is the false prophet.

From the time of Nimrod to Jesus, the first beast worked through the kings to allow paganism to control the kingdom of the world. After Jesus received all authority—a death blow to the first beast—the second beast worked through paganism to control the kings and the kingdoms of world. However, just as with the first beast, the second beast's influence will be short lived. Indeed, at the sounding of the seventh trumpet, loud voices in heaven declared: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." Revelation 11:15.

14. The Lamb, the Three Angels, and the Harvest (Revelation 14)

From the devil and his two beasts, the vision turns toward the beginning of the consummation of the revelation. The vision shows the Lamb with the first fruits purchased from among men, the three angels forecast the events about to transpire in the revelation, and the Lord oversees the reapers.

The Lamb and the First Fruits Purchased from among Men (Revelation 14:1-5)

14:1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion.

John sees the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. In the Old Testament, Zion was first a fortress and then the city of David. The account in 2 Samuel 5:6-10 tells of the transition:

6 The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, "You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off." They thought, "David cannot get in here." 7 Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David.

8 On that day, David said, "Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach those 'lame and blind' who are David's enemies." That is why they say, "The 'blind and lame' will not enter the palace."

9 David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the supporting terraces inward. 10 And he became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him.

The prophets used Zion in a symbolic way to refer to the coming city of God. Micah wrote in Micah 4:6-7:

"I will gather the lame;
I will assemble the exiles
and those I have brought to grief.
7 I will make the lame a remnant,
those driven away a strong nation.
The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion
from that day and forever.

That it is the holy city still to come is clear, for it will last forever.

In the New Testament, Zion becomes synonymous with the holy city, the New Jerusalem. Peter connected Zion to the holy city of the New Testament in Acts 2. As he began his sermon in Acts 2:16-21, he preached, "16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." He then proceeded to quote Joel, relating the prophesy to the occurrence on Pentecost:

17 "In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
 your young men will see visions,
 your old men will dream dreams.
 18 Even on my servants, both men and women,
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
 and they will prophesy.
 19 I will show wonders in the heaven above
 and signs on the earth below,
 blood and fire and billows of smoke.
 20 The sun will be turned to darkness
 and the moon to blood
 before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
 21 And everyone who calls
 on the name of the Lord will be saved."

In Joel 2:32, the deliverance was to be "on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem." The Hebrew writer explained exactly what the spiritual Zion is in Hebrews 12:22-24:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

And with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

This 144,000 must be same as those sealed in Revelation 7:4. Not only were they sealed, but they were also marked: "Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory." Ephesians 1:13-14. To this, Paul describes the marking: "19 Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness." 2 Timothy 2:19. The name of the Father is in direct contrast with the mark of the beast (Revelation 13.16-17) which is the name of the beast. In neither case are these literal marks, but figuratively, they describe whose servants we are: "17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." Romans 6:17-18.

The term his name has as its antecedent the Lamb. The name of the Lamb and the name of the Father tell us the ownership of the 144,000. As discussed in chapter 13, in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 9:3-6), the Lord had a mark put on the foreheads of those who "grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in" Jerusalem. When the judgment came, the order was given: "But do not touch anyone who has the mark."

2 And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.

The metaphors, expressing the nature of the sound John heard, describe the power and the suddenness and the beauty of this heavenly sound. They occur elsewhere in Revelation:

The voice of Christ was like the sound of rushing waters. Revelation 1:15

The sound like a great multitude in heaven was like both the rushing waters and the peal of thunder. Revelation 19:6

One of the living creatures in a voice like thunder said, "Come!" Revelation 6:1-2

The seven angels with the seven last plagues held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb. Revelation 15:2-4

3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.

This is not the first time a new song appears in the text. In Revelation 5:8-10, the elders and the four living creatures sang a new song when the lamb took the scroll with the seven seals. However, in this former passage, the words of the song appear right in the text. There is no doubt about the meaning of the first new song. In the present passage, no one except the 144,000 could learn the new song. We learn specifically that the 144,000 singers are the redeemed of the earth.

4 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. 5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

Verse four and verse five offer further descriptions of who the 144,000 are. The use of the present tense places the 144,000 in the here and now. That they did not defile themselves with women and that they kept themselves pure describes their spiritual faithfulness to the Lamb. The church, the bride of Christ, is to be presented "to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless (Ephesians 5:27-28)." In 2 Corinthians 11:2-3, she is to be "a pure virgin to him" with "sincere and pure devotion to Christ."

They follow the Lamb wherever he goes alludes to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 16:24-25: "24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it." The Christian's service, as we follow the Lamb, will require that we "follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness (1 Timothy 6:11). The losing ones life is losing the fleshly existence and being raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 3:3-6).

They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

Both God and the Lamb receive the firstfruits of the harvest (Exodus 23:16). The offering of firstfruits is continuous, with the fruit of the harvest offered year after year. The 144,000 are a continuing and reoccurring group of followers still on earth offered up to God and the Lamb. These are the same firstfruits as those sealed in Revelation 7. James 1:18 identifies the followers as a kind of the firstfruits: "18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." Jeremiah gives exact meaning to the symbolic use of the word in Jeremiah 2:2-3:

"I remember the devotion of your youth,
how as a bride you loved me

and followed me through the desert,
through a land not sown.
3 Israel was holy to the LORD,
the firstfruits of his harvest;
all who devoured her were held guilty,
and disaster overtook them,"
declares the LORD.

The 144,000 are those still in the desert and are the woman, the church, still in the desert of chapter 12. They continually offer themselves as a sacrifice in the war against the dragon.

5 No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

In the struggle between the church and the dragon, the truth is a defining element. From the beginning, "You will not surely die." To the man of sin, truth and lie separate good from evil. The very work of the man of sin is a lie described in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12: "11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness." In 1 John 2:21-23, John was more specific in describing the antichrist: "21 I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. 22 Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist – he denies the Father and the Son." Lying is one of those defining sins that leads one to the fiery lake of burning sulfur: "8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and *all liars* – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." Revelation 21:8. The firstfruits cannot be liars, but the children of the devil are liars: "44 You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." John 8:43-44.

Three Angels Forecasting the Events about to Transpire in the Revelation (Revelation 14:6-13)

6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth – to every nation, tribe, language and people.

In the first five verses, the firstfruits, the 144,000, stood with the Lamb on Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem. Now the vision turns toward the disposition of the enemy. The angel had the eternal gospel to proclaim. This is the only time John uses the word gospel in any of his writings. The NIV New Testament uses the word gospel 96 times, and those are mostly in Paul's writings. Paul used the word gospel in a sense that conveys the totality of the message of Christ. For example, in Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." In 1 Corinthians 15:2-5, he included in this meaning the elements of the gospel:

2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.

In Ephesians 1:13, he used the word gospel to define the word of truth: "13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation." Paul's usage of the word gospel as truth became, by that use, the general and common understanding of the meaning of the word gospel.

However, the announcement here, with the addition of the word, eternal, is more in keeping with the proclamation of the angels at the birth of Christ, although in Luke 2:10, the verb form is used by the angel issuing a proclamation of the birth of Christ: "10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." The phrase, for all the people, is similar to the phrase in our text, to every nation, tribe, language and people.

7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water."

By the angel's pronouncement, the eternal gospel receives its meaning: fear God, give him glory, and worship him. The first, *fear God*, is reminiscent of Solomon's final word as the teacher in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14: "13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil." Both angel and Solomon connect their commands to the hour of the last judgment. Peter, in 1 Peter 1:17, likewise connects fear and the judgment of God, "17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear."

Give him glory expresses the second part of the angel's pronouncement. Paul places this glory in the context of Christ and the church: "21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!" Ephesians 3:21. *Worship him* is the final phase of obligation in this angel's proclamation. The angel describes God as having made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water, all of which are evident of his everlasting power and divinity. Paul wrote, "20 For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Romans 1:20. All of us are able to comprehend the Lord God, and so worship him.

8 A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

Just as the first angel announced the eternal gospel, the second angel announces the fall of Babylon the Great. All of six mentions of Babylon in Revelation designate it the great city or Babylon the great. In Revelation, there are eight mentions of the great city with six of those tying directly to Babylon. The first mention of the great city in Revelation 11:8 illustrates its metaphoric use: "8 Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified." Babylon, the great city, stands in marked contrast to the holy city, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 11:2; 21:2; 21:10; 22:19). The great and evil nature of this universal but metaphoric city shows in the city's ability to make all nations drink her wine. Later, in Revelation 18:2-3, the city's influence extends to the nations, the kings, and the merchants of the earth:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!
She has become a home for demons
and a haunt for every evil spirit,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.

3 For all the nations have drunk
the maddening wine of her adulteries.
The kings of the earth committed adultery with her,
and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

Pervasive is the great city's influence, but she is already fallen by the pronouncement of God's judgment by his angel.

9 A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, 10 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. 11 And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever.

There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." The third angel pronounced God's judgment on anyone who worships the beast, his image, and receives his mark on the forehead or hand. These are they who drink the maddening wine of her adulteries (14:8; 18:2-3). Now they must drink the wine of God's fury, poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. *Cup* here has the sense that the Christ prayed in Matthew 26:39, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." By this pronouncement the holy angels and the Lamb will witness their torment in burning sulfur. The duration will be forever and ever (into the ages of the ages) and day and night. There is no rest for those who receive the mark of the name of the beast.

12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

The pronouncements of the angels make the disposition of the faithful, of Babylon, and of those that receive the mark of the name of the beast, certain. However, the pronouncement does not mean it has come, and therefore, the saints must patiently endure in God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Because the Lord has pronounced these things, they will be:

I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like me.
10 I make known the end from the beginning,
from ancient times, what is still to come.
I say: My purpose will stand,
and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46:9-10

and further:

the LORD Almighty is his name:
3 I foretold the former things long ago,
my mouth announced them and I made them known;
then suddenly I acted, and they came to pass. Isaiah 48:2-3

13 Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

The Lord Overseeing the Reapers (Revelation 14:14-20)

14 I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. 15 Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." 16 So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

The one seated on the cloud, like the son of man, and with a crown of gold is the Lamb (See Revelation 1:9-18; 10:1-3). He has a sharp sickle in hand fulfilling the prophecy of Joel:

for there I will sit
to judge all the nations on every side.
13 Swing the sickle ,
for the harvest is ripe.
Come, trample the grapes,
for the winepress is full
and the vats overflow –
so great is their wickedness! Joel 3:12-13

The harvest that is about to occur is that one spoken of in the parable of the sower: “ 38 The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, 39 and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.” Matthew 13:37-39.

The Lord swung his sickle to harvest the earth.

17 Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. 18 Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." 19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

The first harvest appears to have been a harvest of the faithful since those harvested received no consequences. In this passage, the angel in charge of fire called to the Lord that grapes from the earth's vine were ripe. The grapes went into the wine press of God's wrath and the grapes were trampled (compare Revelation 14:10). That grapes went in and blood flowed out shows the metaphoric nature of the passage. We know from the pronouncement of the first angel the judgment is upon those who received the mark of the name of the beast. Therefore, the grapes are the people who that serve the beast. As the juice separates from its grape, their blood—the source of life itself—will separate from their flesh. Enough blood to rise as high as the horse's bridle and spread 180 miles, shows the completeness, fullness of God's judgment.

The timing of these two harvests is evident in 1 Cor 15:20-26:

20 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. . . . 23 But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

15. God's Wrath Completed: Seven Last Plagues (Revelation 15)

15:1 I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues – last, because with them God's wrath is completed.

John saw another great and marvelous sign. *Another* links this sign with the one previously so described, that of the beautifully adorned woman, the church, in chapter 12. That chapter dealt with the security and victory of the church over the dragon. Chapter 15 begins dealing with the seven last plagues, which complete the wrath of God. John is also nearing the end of the completed revelation of God. Revelation 10: 7 has said, “ 7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.” When that seventh trumpet sounded, loud voices in heaven declared the accomplishment: “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” Revelation 11:15.

Chapter 15 forecasted the completion of God's wrath and the harvest. The seven plagues are the last. With them God's wrath is complete. Now John will see them in great specificity. In the following chapters, the seven angels will pour out their seven bowls of God's wrath. Next, a certain one of the angels will show John the fall of Babylon, the eternal destruction of the beast and the false prophet, the end of the dragon, the devil, the destruction of the wicked, the final destiny of death and Hades, the victory of the church, and the reward of the righteous.

Seven Angels with Seven Last Plagues

2 And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.

Chapter 14 contained an opening vision of those offered as firstfruits. Now we see those who had been victorious over the beast, his image, and the number of his name. They stand before a beautiful sea of glass mixed with fire. The scene appears to be like that one before the throne of God in Revelation 4:6: “6 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.”

They held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

The allusion here is to the victory song that Moses wrote for the Israelites after their escape in Deuteronomy 31:19 beginning and recited fully in Deuteronomy 32. Harps, as used here, are symbolic of the *sound like harps* of Revelation 14:2-3: “The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps . 3 And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.” In the church, the instrument with strings was the heart in Ephesians 5:18-20: “19 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” *Make music* (to play on a stringed instrument) has a specified instrument, *your heart*.

The Triumphant God

Our victory song is one of triumph of God and victory for the church.

“Great and marvelous are your deeds,

*Lord God Almighty,
Just and true are your ways,
King of the ages.
4 Who will not fear you, O Lord,
and bring glory to your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship before you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

The song begins with holy and reverent praise of God's name by combining the phrases *Lord God Almighty* and *King of the ages*—a two-fold expression of the great glory of God. *King of the ages* carries special significance since *ages* indicates eternal as in "*life eternal*," in John 17:3. John uses this same word commonly in the phrase *eis ton aiona* which does not mean "unto the age" but "forever." Vine, from whom these notes are taken, speaks specifically to the multiple translations of this passage:

(2) In Revelation 15:3, the RV has "King of the ages," according to the texts which have *aionon*, the KJV has "of saints" (*hagion*, in inferior mss.). There is good ms. evidence for *ethnon*, "nations," (KJV, marg.), probably a quotation from Jeremiah 10:7. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

More important to this song is the connection of the King of the ages to the final statement of victory in Revelation 11:15: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

The clause—*Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name?*—reflects the degree to which the God Almighty has won this victory. Revelation 14:6-7 predicted this fear and glory to God: "6 Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth — to every nation, tribe, language and people. 7 He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come.'" In the preceding chapter, the first of the three angels, who had the eternal gospel to proclaim, said, "Fear God and give him the glory, because the hour of his judgment has come." Later in Revelation 19:5, during the hallelujah section, fear again returns as a theme: "5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying: 'Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!'" Paul had used similar language in Ephesians 3:20-21, "20 Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever!"

That all nations shall come before God and worship him shows the totality of God's victory when final judgment comes. Indeed, Paul writes that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Christ is Lord to the glory of the father:

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:9-11

The Tabernacle of the Testimony

5 After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. 6 Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.

The tabernacle of the Testimony stands in apposition to the temple in heaven, making them the very same. In Revelation 11:19, at the conclusion of the experience with the two witnesses, upon whose testimony the word of God is secure, the ark of God's covenant was within his temple: "19 Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant." That it is *the Testimony* makes the testimony specific to God's purposes. Later, in Revelation 19:10, the angel tells John to "hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

God will base his judgment on the testimony of his witnesses, the prophets, as it exists in his covenant. Paul confirmed this in Romans 2:15-16: "16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares."

The book of Revelation itself begins and ends with statements concerning the testimony. The first use of the word connects it to the word of God in Revelation 1:1-2, "2 who testifies to everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." At the end of the book in Revelation 22:16 Jesus says, "16 'I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.'"

7 Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. 8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

Each of seven angels receives a golden bowl filled with the wrath of God. In the preceding chapter, we learned that the wicked must drink the wine of God's wrath poured into the cup of his fury (14:10). Isaiah 46:9-10 and Isaiah 48:2-3 teach that God knows the end from the beginning, and that his purpose will always stand.

The entire New Testament speaks of God's wrath as an accomplished fact. In Romans 1:18-19, Paul wrote, "18 The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." Again, in Colossians 3:5-6, he said, "5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming." In 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16, Paul writes in the present perfect tense, showing that God's wrath has already begun at a point in the past. He said, "They displease God and are hostile to all men 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last."

The seven plagues of the seven angels are to begin and finish in chapter 16 as they pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath upon the earth. However, the wrath of God was a fact established by the victory of the Lamb and the church forever and ever.

16. The Seven Bowls of God's Wrath (Revelation 16)

16:1 Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

Although, no one could enter the temple, John heard a loud voice from the temple. Chapter 15 verse 1 calls the seven bowls of God's wrath the seven last plagues in. With these plagues, God's wrath is completed. Before visiting the specific plagues, it is important to note that they extend to all who do not keep the words of the Revelation: "18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book." Revelation 22:18. These plagues differ from those announced by the sounding of the trumpets in chapters 8 and 9 where the plagues are intermittent and partial (one-third appears to place a limit on the devastation). In chapter 16, God's wrath is full, complete, and overwhelming. Here, also, those who have the mark of the beast and worship his image will refuse to repent (16:11). Although these plagues are horrible in extent and degree, they are nothing like the final act of God's wrath—the lake of fire, the second death (20:15; 21:8). These seven wraths have a single unifying principle: the angels pour out their bowls to the complete destruction of man's habitat: the land, the sea, the springs of water, the sun, the light, the great river Euphrates—the very region of Eden, and the earth itself. In the next several verses, God's wrath reverses his physical creation of the world, fully and completely. The events do not seem to be chronological, but parallel, as illustrated by verse 12-14 and 16, where the kings of the earth are gathered for a later battle. Also, the final acts of God's judgment—the destruction in the lake of fire—is reserved until later in the Revelation.

The First Bowl of God's Wrath

2 The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

In Revelation 16:2, the plagues begin with the infliction of pain to the mortal bodies. The ugly and painful sores are reminiscent of the sores of Job in Job 2:7-8: "7 So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. 8 Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes." So horrible was Job's misery that he said, "1 Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?" Job 3:11. Of course, what Job experienced could barely approach the experience of the completed wrath of God. The target of God's wrath is the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image.

The Second Bowl of God's Wrath

3 The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

At the sounding of the trumpets in chapters 8 and 9, we saw afflictions upon the earth that should lead one to repentance. The interim afflictions of chapter 8 were partial; i.e. a third of the living creatures in the sea died. Now the plague of the second bowl of God's wrath killed everything in the sea. *Blood like that of a dead man* illustrates the horror and stink of decay. This plague is reminiscent of the blood plague against Egypt in Exodus 7:19. Here the consequences of God's wrath are not to warn as in Egypt but to punish. In chapter 14, blood flowed out of the winepress of God's wrath (14:19). The blood figure demonstrates God's denial of life to these evil people. The Lord had said in Leviticus 17:14, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood ; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

The Third Bowl of God's Wrath

4 The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. 5 Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

*"You are just in these judgments,
you who are and who were, the Holy One,
because you have so judged;
6 for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets,
and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."*

7 And I heard the altar respond:

*"Yes, Lord God Almighty,
true and just are your judgments."*

The third angel poured out his bowl into the very source of drinking water, and this water, too, became blood. We learn from the angel in charge of the waters that God is just in his judgment. Symbolically, the blood resulting from God's wrath is in juxtaposition to the shed blood of the saints and prophets. The wrath is upon the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image. Of these, the angel said that they receive just as they deserved. The altar responded that judgments of the Lord God Almighty are just and true. It is common for people to argue against the judgment of God by saying that God in his goodness would not do wrathful acts toward man. God's judgments are true and just, and man has every opportunity to be righteous. The burden is upon man to turn from the beast and his image. The invitation to turn from this evil is open to all according to 2 Peter 3:9: "9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." God provides a way out of idolatry and other sins: "13 No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. 14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 1 Corinthians 10:13-14

The Fourth Bowl of God's Wrath

8 The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. 9 They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

Not even with scorching by the sun, would these hardhearted followers of the beast repent. They cursed the name of God and refused. Nor would they glorify him even though he had the control over the plagues. The sun so necessary for light and life scorched the people who cursed God. In spite of the severe punishment, they refused to repent and glorify God.

The Fifth Bowl of God's Wrath

10 The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony 11 and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

The fifth angel poured God's wrath directly on the throne of the beast. The kingdom of the beast is that kingdom of the world. At the sound of the seventh trumpet in Rev 11 :15, a loud voice had announced, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ." God

plunges the beast and his kingdom into darkness, denying light. Christ spoke of the outer darkness (KJV) to which the unfaithful are destined. In Matthew 8:12 the Lord said, "12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 22:13 and Matthew 25:29-30 offer the same thought.

The Sixth Bowl of God's Wrath

12 The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. 13 Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14 They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

The sixth woe takes us back to Babel and the river Euphrates. As Nimrod and Baal spread the kingdom of the beast, once again evil is on the march. The actors who play out this final dramatic scene are together: Evil spirits, spirits of demons, one each out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet, go up to deceive the kings of the whole world.

The war forecasted is to be a spiritual one. The weaponry is that of miraculous signs used to deceive the kings of the earth. The last rally of the forces of evil rely on deceit as they use these miraculous signs—lying wonders described in 2 Thessalonians 2—to gather the kings of the whole world to battle God Almighty. Paul spoke of this same time:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness. 2 Thessalonians 2:8-12.

In 1 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul spoke of this time when he said: "In later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron." The gathering here is specific to the spiritual battle and the spiritual battle is specific to the great day of the Lord.

The great and glorious day of the Lord was to happen after the events on the day Pentecost when the church was established in Acts 2:20-21: "20 The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord . 21 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3). It will come after the man of lawlessness is revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4). The lost angels will be kept in darkness, bound by chains, until the judgment on the great day (Jude 6) The earth will be destroyed at the coming of the day of the Lord in 2 Peter 3:10: "10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." The Lord describe the great day of their wrath in Revelation 6:16-17:

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

15 "Behold, I come like a thief!, Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

This quotation of the Lord appears to move back to the present time. In spite of the fact that the revelation reveals God's wrath in detail, the coming will still be as a thief, unexpected in its coming. *Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him* speaks to the preparation of the saints. In Revelation 19:7-8, clothes are a direct metaphor for the righteous acts of the saints:

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.

8 Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

The figure was previously used in Revelation 3:18: "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness." The Lord purposefully leaves the exact time of his coming undisclosed. This has always been the case. No one knows except the father. In Matthew 24:36-37, Jesus had fully taught this principle: "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. . . . 42 Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. . . . 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

16 *Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.*

Some versions read Harmagedon. The name is only here in the Revelation. The allusion is to the Old Testament and Mount of Migiddo where great kings were at battle:

(Harmagedon from Hebrew *har meghiddo*, "Mount of Megiddo"; the King James Version Armageddon: This name is found only in Revelation 16:16. From International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, Electronic Database Copyright © 1996, 2003 by Biblesoft, Inc.)

The Old Testament tells the story of the battle twice:

29 While Josiah was king, Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the Euphrates River to help the king of Assyria. King Josiah marched out to meet him in battle, but Neco faced him and killed him at Megiddo. 30 Josiah's servants brought his body in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. 2 Kings 23:29-30

Chronicles records the same event:

20 After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah marched out to meet him in battle. 21 But Neco sent messengers to him, saying, "What quarrel is there between you and me, O king of Judah? It is not you I am attacking at this time, but the house with which I am at war. God has told me to hurry; so stop opposing God, who is with me, or he will destroy you."

22 Josiah, however, would not turn away from him, but disguised himself to engage him in battle. He would not listen to what Neco had said at God's command but went to fight him on the plain of Megiddo.

23 Archers shot King Josiah, and he told his officers, "Take me away; I am badly wounded."
24 So they took him out of his chariot, put him in the other chariot he had and brought him to Jerusalem, where he died. 2 Chronicles 35:20-24

Other than the place name and the great kings battling, this story of old has little to do with the present passage and impending battle. Revelation 19:19-21 describes the battle where the Lord and the armies of heaven destroy the armies of the east, the beast, and the false prophet.

The spiritual allusion here is to the battle that the armies of heaven fight daily, as described by Paul and previously noted in this writing:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. Ephesians 6:10-18

To make Armageddon a physical and literal battle on earth, as some do, requires one to deny the metaphoric nature of all John's vision. For example, the dragon is a literal dragon, not the devil; the mouths of the devil, the beast and the false prophet are literal mouths, etc.

The Seventh Bowl of God's Wrath

17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" 18 Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. 19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. 20 Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. 21 From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

The last bowl of God's wrath decimates the habitat of man. This bowl deals with the end of that habitat. The specific judgment upon the souls of men comes in chapters 20-21 and the lake of fire, the second death. Imagine the worst earthquake, and beyond, to one that the earth has never seen. The great city—the city of evil—the direct opposite to the heavenly city, the holy city, splits into three parts. This city of the wicked is the city of that triad of evil, the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. The great city, Babylon the Great, receives special attention to its destruction in chapters 17 and 18. The victory of the Lamb and his bride, the holy city, will follow in chapters 19, 21, and 22. Babylon the great receives the full fury of the wine of God's wrath. The plagues were so terrible that they cursed God.

"It is done," signals the consummation of God's wrath. The phrase echoes that one made by Christ on the cross in John 19:28-30:

28 Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty." 29 A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put

the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. 30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John began his description of the death of Jesus by stating that Jesus knew that all was now complete. The study of chapter 14 showed that God's pronouncements establish the happening:

Because the Lord has pronounced these things, they will be:

I am God, and there is no other;

I am God, and there is none like me.

10 I make known the end from the beginning,

from ancient times, what is still to come.

I say: My purpose will stand,

and I will do all that I please. Isaiah 46:9-10.

Although this bowl of wrath shows the events of the destruction of the earth, the Lord's coming is still as a thief. Parallel to this description of this final wrath is one by Peter in 2 Peter 3:7-13:

7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

The great day of the Lord will see the end of the physical world and the end of the spiritual struggle also. We have already studied Revelation 6:15-17:

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

The events of the verses 12-21 parallel the events described by Christ in Matthew 24. In Matthew 24 Jesus and his disciples were walking away from the temple. In verse 1, Jesus said, speaking of the temple, "Do you see all these things? I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." In verse 3, the disciples responded by asking him two questions, "3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'"

The Lord answers the two questions.

Verses 3-25 answers the first question which is, *when will this happen*. Jesus said that even though many would come claiming to be Christ, though there would be wars and rumors of wars, and though kingdom would rise against kingdom, the end is still to come. He said that you will be persecuted, put to death, and hated; and that many would turn away from the faith, and that many false prophets will appear. He said that many false prophets would appear, and many would fall away from the faith. Those who stand firm, Jesus said would be saved. And the gospel of the kingdom would be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations. Then he said that the end would come. These are the same events that lead up to and include the situation in Revelation 16. The tabernacle of testimony is open (Revelation 15:5).

In this context, the Lord answers the first question: *when will this happen*—the destruction of the physical temple in Jerusalem. The Lord said that it would be when they saw standing in the holy place (the temple) the abomination that causes desolation (Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:11). The *it* in the question is the destruction of the temple, Daniel prophesied. Jesus told them that, if at this time, anyone said that there he is. Do not believe because false Christs and false prophets would appear and do great signs and miracles to deceive. This is also what Revelation 16:14 said.

Verse 26-35 answers the second question: *what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age*. Jesus said that if any one said that he is here or he is there, do not believe it. Jesus said that after the distress of those days, including but certainly not limited to the destruction of the temple: “The sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” This also is what is prophesied in Revelation 16:17-21.

At that time, after the distress of these days: “30 . . . the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

Jesus concludes with the same teaching as Revelation 16:15, which reads: “Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.” In Matthew 24:42-44, Jesus said,

42 “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”

17. The Woman on the Beast (Revelation 17)

The completion of God's wrath, begun in chapter 15:1, moves from the destruction of man's habitat to the destruction of the evil ones. Revelation 17 and 18 tell of the fall of the great city, Babylon, the prostitute. The text explains many of the following figures and images.

The Punishment of the Great Prostitute (Revelation 17:1-2)

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. 2 With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of God's wrath is now escorting John through the vision, connecting these chapters clearly to completion of God's wrath and not to some new theme. The subject here is the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters. The angel clearly defined the waters in verse 15, saying that the waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. This is the same multitude over whom the beast is said to have authority in Revelation 13:7-8: "And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. 8 All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world." The woman sits on top of the multitude of the world. Verse 19 tells specifically that the woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.

The great city—set opposite to the holy city, the heavenly Jerusalem—is the Babylon and Nineveh founded by Nimrod (Genesis 10:12) , the Nineveh of Jonah (Jonah 1:2; 3:2), Sodom and Egypt (Revelation 11:8), and the Jerusalem of the Lord's crucifixion and Jeremiah's lament (Revelation 11:8; Jeremiah 22:8). The great city is these kings, but more, the great city is all the kings of the earth of verse 19. That all the kings of the earth had committed adultery with the prostitute and that the inhabitants were drunk with her adulteries show the degree of her influence in defiling mankind with sin.

The Prostitute and the Scarlet Beast (Revelation 17:3-6)

3 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. 5 This title was written on her forehead:

MYSTERY

BABYLON THE GREAT

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When the angel carried John in the spirit into a desert, John saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast. The beast, met in detail in chapter 13, has the fullness and completeness of evil, represented by the heads and horns. (See notes on chapter 13). The beast, which has the authority of the dragon, the devil, united with the woman. The beast stands to the adulterous woman, Babylon, as Christ stands to the pure bride, the church, the New Jerusalem—evil with evil and righteousness with righteousness. The scarlet of the beast contrasts to the white of the Lamb.

The woman's dress of purple and scarlet, gold, and precious stones demands two comparisons. The first is to the wonder and purity of the dress of the woman, the bride, the church in chapter 12. That woman is clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and crown of twelve stars on her head—magnificent and wondrous. The difference is between a prostitute and a pure virgin. The second contrast to this great prostitute is the description of just such a woman in Jeremiah 4:30:

30 What are you doing, O devastated one?

Why dress yourself in scarlet

and put on jewels of gold?

Why shade your eyes with paint?

You adorn yourself in vain.

Your lovers despise you;

they seek your life.

Perhaps more interesting than the woman's dress is the woman's cup filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. In contrast, Paul taught of the church that she is the pure virgin of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2). The one—the holy city, the church—is a pure bride to Christ; the other—the great city, those of the world (17:15, 18)—is the prostitute of the beast. The prostitute's cup, metaphorically standing for the contents, contains filth and abominable things. The church's cup contains Christ's blood of the new covenant in Matthew 26:28-29: "8 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." In his comparison of the two cups, Paul made this distinction in 1 Corinthians 10:18-22:

18 Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? 19 Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. 22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

In verse 5, John learns from the title written on the prostitute's forehead who she is. The word, MYSTERY, places the prostitute and her meaning within the specifics of God's mystery as revelation where it means something that was once hidden but is now made known. In Revelation 10:6-7, the revelation of God's mystery was to occur at the sounding of the seventh trumpet; and it is still under the sounding of that trumpet that the mystery of the woman on the beast is made known. John had written, "7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

The mystery of God's eternal purpose included the destiny of the saints and the sinners alike. The revelation of the mystery of the great city was part of its great antithesis, the holy city. That the prostitute's fate should be sealed in this final revelation accentuates the victory and triumph of the

pure bride of Christ. The scriptures assure repeatedly that all that was hidden is revealed. Paul wrote in Romans 16:25-27:

25 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him – 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

The phrase *all nations* in this passage includes those identified in verse 15 as the waters upon which the prostitute sits: people multitudes, nations, and language. The revelation of the eternal God seals their fate. The revelation, including the fate of the prostitute, the great city, was put in effect “when the times will have reached their fulfillment (Ephesians 1:9-10).” In chapter 15 verse 1, John learned that with the last seven plagues, God’s wrath was completed. The phrase *was completed* is past tense, and therefore, a fact accomplished. In addition, as the seventh angel poured out the last bowl of God’ wrath in chapter 16:17, a loud voice from the throne said, “It is done.” Among the resulting happenings were that the great city split into three parts, and that the cities of all nations collapse, and that God remembered Babylon and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Since the woman is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth (17:18), God now completes his revelation of that part of the mystery which was once hidden, but is now made known.

BABYLON THE GREAT is used to describe the great city that rules over the cities of the nations. Synonymously, the woman is the great city (17:18), and the great city, Babylon. Chapter 18 calls Babylon the *great city* three times in 18:2-3, 10, and 21, and implies the name many times over. The second angel announcing the impending doom had forecast in Revelation 14:8: “A second angel followed and said, ‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.’” Chapter 18 will describe the doom of Babylon the great in detail. As the New Jerusalem, the holy city, stands for the church, so Babylon, the great city stands for the called out multitudes that followed the paganism of the Old Testament and the multitudes that followed the second beast, the false prophet of this revelation of God. The connection is to the beast out of the sea that marched across the world with his armies of Baal, from the flood, to Babel, to ancient Babylon, Nineveh, and throughout the world. This is the same beast, who was fatally wounded by Christ and his victory, but who rose again with the beast out of the earth, deceiving once again the multitude of mankind by his image and the false prophet (See notes of chapter 13). Other metaphors for the great city are in Revelation 11:8-9: “8 Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.”

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH figuratively describes the iniquitous nature of the woman, in contrast to the purity of the bride of Christ, the pure virgin. In chapters 17 and 18, *adulteries* is used four times; *adultery*, three times, illustrating the immorality of the woman. Infidelity to God led to the fall at Eden, to the destruction by the flood, to the ruin of Israel by the worship of Baal and the practice of his pagan immorality, and to the rejection and crucifixion of the Christ, the lamb.

The Mystery of the Woman and the Beast (Revelation 17:6-8)

6 I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. 7 Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns.

John saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, those set apart, and those who bore the testimony of Jesus. *Blood* here is not to be taken as literal blood, as in physical persecution, for Christ himself told us in Matthew 10:27-28, “28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” The saints and those who bear the testimony of Jesus are new creatures, born again of the water and the spirit. In John 3:5, “5 Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’” As Christ shed his earth blood on the cross, Christians shed their blood symbolically when they are buried with Christ in baptism—the likeness of his death, burial, and resurrection. The description of this new birth to a new life is explained in detail in Romans 6:3-7:

3 Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

It is these new creatures that the dragon, the beast, and the prostitute are after to kill once again spiritually. To understand the following chapters, one must understand that the battle is spiritual and the very souls of the saints are in jeopardy. In Revelation 13:6-7, John learned of the beast: “7 He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.” God’s wrath is upon them and upon those who follow them according to Revelation 16:6: “6 for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets.” In this spiritual battle there is a physical consequence to the saints and those who stand for the testimony of Jesus—they often lose their physical lives. Revelation 6:9 teaches: “9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.”

The angel sees that John was greatly astonished when he saw the woman and tells him that he is going to explain the mystery of woman and the beast she rides. The beast is the seven horned and ten horned beast met in chapter 13 (See notes on entire chapter). The numbers represent the fullness and completeness of the beast’s capacity to accomplish his purposes. In Revelation 13:2, John learned that “the dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.” The beast stands to the dragon as Christ stands to the Lord God Almighty.

The Beast upon Whom the Woman Rides (Revelation 17:6-8)

8 The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

John has seen before this beast come up out of the abyss in Revelation 11:7, “7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. The *they* of this quotation are the witnesses of chapter 11. He did not return from the abyss until they had finished their testimony. There are other references to the containment of the beast and the dragon. One regards the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2:2-12:

3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

This is an apt description of the second beast, the false prophet who has the power of the first beast (see chapter 13). Paul continues:

5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming.

The work and the coming of the lawless one is according to the work of Satan who is the dragon:

9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, 10 and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

John finds the dragon similarly confined in Revelation 20:1-3:

20:1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Jesus described to his apostles who would do the binding and holding back of these evil forces in John 14:16-18: "16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever – 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you." The Holy Spirit – Spirit of Truth – constrained the triad of evil until the witnesses had completed their work and the revelation was complete. In context, this will happen shortly, for at the conclusion of John's writing, the revelation will be complete.

In the present context, John sees the same beast who *once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction* and whom he had seen before in Revelation 13:2-3: "The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. 3 One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed." The phrase *now is not* also follows what John saw in Revelation 13:11-13: "11 Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. 12 He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed." *And will come up out of the abyss* describes his future status to John, but his present status to us.

When the spiritual gifts were taken away releasing the man of lawlessness, the false prophet, and second beast, and when the apostles and prophets had completed the revelation, the beast would reemerge, but with power limited to the deceit of the false prophet, the second beast,

and power of his image of the first beast, created by the false prophet. False religion and mammon will reign. (See notes on chapter 13).

What John sees is effectively what Jesus and Paul describe about the restraining power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit remained containing the dragon and the beast until that which is perfect had come. Jesus had taught in John 14:25-26, "25 "All this I have spoken while still with you. 26 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." Paul taught that the spiritual gifts would cease when that which was perfect had come in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10: "But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." James identifies God's law as that perfection in James 1:25; "25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does."

The force that constrains and binds the devil and the beast is God's complete Revelation of his will and word – first through the apostles and prophets and now through his written word.

When the beast comes up out of the abyss, he goes to his destruction. The followers of the beast – those whose names are not in the book of life – will be astonished when they see the beast because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. One only needs to view the present world of false religion, decadent sin, and the rampant materialism in service to mammon to understand the horror and success of the beast. However successful that the beast seems, he is on his way to destruction.

The Angel Explains the Vision of the Beast (Revelation 17:9-14)

9 "This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. 10 They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. 11 The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.

This calls for a mind with wisdom signifies the difficulty of the passage. Many interpretations are given, yet one is true. Seven heads is given two metaphoric comparisons – hills and kings. The analogy is like saying that two plus two is four and one plus three is four. The commonality is four. The commonality in this passage is government. Hills as seats of power have consistently represented government, and kings are consistently those who govern.

The prophets used mountains and hills in this metaphoric sense: as in Isaiah 2:2, which uses both mountains and hills in the metaphor:

2 In the last days
the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established
as chief among the mountains;
it will be raised above the hills ,
and all nations will stream to it.

In Jeremiah 51:24-25, Babylon is addressed, "O destroying mountain." the prophecy goes on to say, "I will . . . make you a burned out mountain."

Seven represented fullness and 10 represented completeness as studied in chapter 13. The governments spoken of here are full in their power and authority. It is also upon these governments that the woman sits. There are also seven kings. Seven fully powerful kings are controlled by the wanton woman, who sits over the kingdoms. Five of the seven kings have fallen. There are only five such kingdoms, all of which fit the description given.

Micah 7:11-13 points to the places where one must look:

11 The day for building your walls will come,
the day for extending your boundaries.

12 In that day people will come to you
from Assyria and the cities of Egypt,
even from Egypt to the Euphrates
and from sea to sea
and from mountain to mountain.

13 The earth will become desolate because of its inhabitants,
as the result of their deeds.

From Egypt to the Romans, from the flood and Nimrod to John's revelation, there are only five such kingdoms: Egypt, Assyria, Persia, Babylon, and Greece. In Daniel 2, Daniel claimed four kingdoms until the kingdom of the Lord should come out of the mountains—four and not five, because Daniel began counting from his day forward:

44 "In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever. 45 This is the meaning of the vision of the rock cut out of a mountain, but not by human hands — a rock that broke the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold to pieces. Daniel 2:44-45

Daniel also describes how the beast—the kingdoms of the world—will be destroyed by the kingdom of God that will never be destroyed.

The five kingdoms, then, have fallen, and one is. Of course, *the one which is* is the Roman kingdom—the kingdom in existence at the time that John was writing. However, there is one that is to come, and that kingdom will remain for a while. This final king represents the Holy Roman Emperors that followed the Roman Empire. The Holy Roman Empire was the last kingdom of this class of kingdoms. These kings are all of a class and all controlled by the prostitute who sits atop them.

The beast is an eighth king. The word, *an*, indicates a king but not one of the previous class. All these seven governments, from the flood until fragmentation of governments, were controlled by a king, the beast of seven heads (full in authority) and ten horns (complete in his might and power). The dragon had given "the beast his power, his throne, and great authority (Revelation 13:2)."

12 "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. 13 They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. 14 They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

The ten horns are also ten kings, but kings and kingdoms of a different class from the seven in the preceding verses. They are complete, as the number, ten, indicates; and, therefore, apparently they will fulfill the rest of time until the end of the earth. Ten is not to be taken as literal here since there is no indication in the text as with the seven kings who are actually counted out. That they have not yet come means that they will receive kingdoms during the course of time. They give their power and authority to the beast who is now represented by the second beast, the false prophet, with his working and delusion of error (2 Thessalonians 2). They and their subjects worship the image of the first beast:

11 Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. 12 He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. 13 And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. 14 Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. 15 He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. 16 He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, 17 so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. Revelation 13:11-17

Even the kingdoms of the earth make war against the Lamb. The true religion of Jesus has a history of repression. The persecution of the saints, the wars of religion and greed, the pervasive immorality, the spread of communism and other atheistic influences, religious terrorism and extremism, unconstrained materialism—all of these and more make for the war of wars against the Lamb. The end of that war will be victory for the Lord of lords, the King of kings, and his called, chosen, and faithful followers. This is the very same conclusion reached by Paul in discussing the outcome of the influence of the man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians:

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15.

The Beast and the Ten Horns Turn against the Prostitute (Revelation 17:15-18)

15 Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. 16 The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. 17 For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. 18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

In verse one, John saw the prostitute sitting on many waters. Here the angel tells John that the waters are people, multitudes, nations, and languages. The province of influence for this evil woman is worldwide for all time. That the beast and the ten horns hate the prostitute seems contrary to the last part of the passage where the woman—the great city, Babylon, the prostitute—rules over these very same kings of the earth. This paradox is easily resolved.

The beast and the ten horns hate the prostitute so badly they bring her to ruin. They figuratively eat her flesh and burn her with fire. The crux of the matter is that God put this in

their hearts, but in so doing they allowed the beast to rule with their power. Since the woman rides the beast, they both wage the war against the Lamb and his followers but to their destruction and according to the purpose of God. A few illustrating points are in order. Communistic governments, in theory and practice, fight immorality, a province of the prostitute. Yet, religion is discouraged or even outlawed, immorality is pervasive, and sin prevails. In our country, government activity exudes a religious air, maintaining a public appearance that is against sin and evil. Yet, prostitution thrives, gambling is government supported, media is overwhelming in its mindless violence, unbridled materialism, and permissive sex. Advertisements depend on the attractions of the lust of the flesh and eye, and the vainglory of life—power, ambition, and earthly wisdom. Religious extremists who reject immorality in eating, drinking, and dressing wage their religious wars around the world. The beast rules, and the prostitute that great city rides atop him.

Chapter 17 forecasts the end of the beast and of this prostitute, the great city, Babylon. Chapter 18 will see the fall of Babylon and chapter 19 will see the beast and the false prophet captured and thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

18. The Fall of Babylon (Revelation 18)

Chapter 17 provided a chain of metaphors that identified Babylon. In chapter 17, verse 18, the woman on the beast is the great city, and in verse 5, she is Babylon the great. Leading up to chapter 18, in Revelation 14:8, where the three angels announce the coming wrath of God, John saw the second angel who said, "8 A second angel followed and said, 'Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.'" As the wrath of God, in the seventh bowl, poured out in Revelation 16:19, John wrote, "19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath." Chapter 18 goes into a great and detailed lament over the end of Babylon, the great city.

Chapter 18 contrasts with chapter 21 where the glories and beauties of the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, the heavenly city, shines with the glory of God. Babylon with its citizens of the world and the New Jerusalem with its saints, made perfect, tell the story of the redeemed and lost in these final chapters of God's Revelation. After chapter 18, the terms *Babylon* and *great city* do not appear again in Revelation. Their retribution in this chapter is the very end of them. Verse 21 announces this fate: "With such great violence, the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again."

Fallen! Fallen! Is Babylon the Great (Revelation 18:1-3)

1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. 2 With a mighty voice he shouted:

"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!

She has become a home for demons

and a haunt for every evil spirit,

a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.

3 For all the nations have drunk

the maddening wine of her adulteries.

The kings of the earth committed adultery with her,

and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries."

An angel declares the first episode of chapter 18—one of three voices and angels who speak during this lament over Babylon. John describes this angel in some detail. The angel has authority; his splendor illuminated the earth; and he shouted with a mighty voice. Since an authority is one whose will must be obeyed, the pronouncement of the angel establishes the very certainty of the events that he describes. The word, *fallen*, is in the present tense, showing the established fact that Babylon is finished. Although time will run its course, Christ with his victory sealed the fate of Babylon.

Babylon the great was a city of unbridled pleasure, sexual immoralities, and rampant materialism. Now it is a place for demons and evil spirits. Unclean and detestable birds are vulture-like carrion eaters, feeding on flesh. Implicated in her sin and woe are the merchants and kings of the earth. *All*

nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries shows her former control and influence. The extent of her evil influence reached to the kings of the earth who committed spiritual adultery with her and to the merchants who grew rich by their material relationship with her. Immorality and mammon combine to seduce the citizens of this great and worldly city, but no more shall this be the case.

The Fate of Babylon Is Announced to the People of God (Revelation 18:4-10)

4 *Then I heard another voice from heaven say:*

*"Come out of her, my people,
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;*

*5 for her sins are piled up to heaven,
and God has remembered her crimes.*

*6 Give back to her as she has given;
pay her back double for what she has done.
Mix her a double portion from her own cup.*

*7 Give her as much torture and grief
as the glory and luxury she gave herself.*

*In her heart she boasts,
'I sit as queen; I am not a widow,
and I will never mourn.'*

*8 Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her:
death, mourning and famine.
She will be consumed by fire,
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.*

9 *"When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. 10 Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:*

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,
O Babylon, city of power!
In one hour your doom has come!"*

Another voice from heaven, which is not the mighty angel of verses 1-2, addresses God's people as *my people*, making the voice the voice of Christ or the Lord God Almighty. The appeal to God's people to come out of the world is the same call that Christ and his apostles and prophets issued. Jesus taught from the beginning that we cannot serve God and Money: In the sermon on the mount, he taught in Matthew 6:19-24:

19 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

24 *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.*

Paul taught in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16 that the people of God are to have no fellowship with the evil of the great city:

14 Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? 15 What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

The clauses in verse 4 are cause and effect:

so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;

There is no way around the conclusion that if we share in Babylon's sin, we will receive her plagues. This statement becomes an eternal principle, which abides from the victory of Jesus on the cross until the last great day. It is true for all people for the rest of time. The clauses, *Her sins are piled up and God has remembered her crimes*, show the certainty of God's retribution for the great city and for those who do not come out. Hebrews 2:1-3 teaches:

1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. 2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, 3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

One might think that because the time since the Lord died is long past and that evil runs rampant and unchecked, that there might be no accounting for iniquity. The voice from heavens assures otherwise: "For her sins are piled up to heaven and God has remembered her crimes."

A consistent theme, woven throughout the New Testament, is that the saints will judge with God and the Lord, Jesus Christ. In Matthew 19:28 Matthew wrote, "28 Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" Paul taught this same principle in 1 Corinthians 6:1-3:

1 If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? 2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!

The understood *you* of this passage teaches, also, that saints will judge: *you* give her back as she has given; *you* pay her back double for what she has done; *you* mix her a double portion from her own cup; and *you* give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.

The arrogance of her worldliness leads Babylon to boast. She is queen to the beast; she is the bride of the beast. However, the beast will be thrown down (19:20), she will be a widow, and she will mourn. In one day – the great day of the Lord – death, mourning, and famine will overtake her. The tables turn, as it were. Fire will consume her. The mighty Lord God will judge her. This is the end of the prostitute, the great city, Babylon. What follows are the laments of her lost people, those who put their faith and trust in her iniquities. The church is victorious. The worldly and ungodly people lament the fate of Babylon.

The First Lament: the Kings of the Earth (Revelation 18: 9-10)

9 "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. 10 Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:

"Woe! Woe, O great city,

O Babylon, city of power!

In one hour your doom has come!"

Much of Revelation and the entire Bible is about the failure of the kings of the earth to recognize the proper place of God and the lamb. Beginning in Revelation 1:5, there is recognition of Jesus Christ as the true ruler of the kings of the earth: "Grace and peace to you . . . from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth" It is at the end of the Revelation that these kings of the earth are humbled before Christ—the King of kings and the Lord of lords. In Revelation 21:22-24, John wrote:

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.

Much of the Revelation story is about how these kings of the earth would receive a just reward for their adulterous relationship with the prostitute, Babylon. Revelation 6:15-17 forecasts their doom:

15 Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. 16 They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! 17 For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Now their adulteries and their intoxication have come the full course in Revelation 17:1-2: "2 With her the kings of the earth committed adultery, and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

Because they cast their lot with the wrong city, Babylon, and the wrong woman, the prostitute, they weep and mourn, terrified at her torment. They stand afar off and cry:

"Woe! Woe, O great city,

O Babylon, city of power!

In one hour your doom has come!"

This chapter 18 marks the end of Babylon, but the kings of the earth reappear in Revelation 19:19 where John saw "the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army."

The Second Lament: The Merchants of the Earth (Revelation 18: 11-17)

11 "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more— 12 cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; 13 cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

14 "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' 15 The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn 16 and cry out:

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!*

17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!"

In addition to the kings of the world, merchants will lament the doom of Babylon. With Babylon gone, they cannot buy their cargoes. In our day, one might say goods and services. Their avenue to riches is gone. The catalog of products is interesting as it illustrates the vast array of worldly products—metals, textiles, articles of every kind, spices and oils and grains and animals. The list is all inclusive of the material world. Finally and most horribly, the list of traded items ends tragically with the bodies and souls of men. With but a few changes in items of commerce, this passage describes the very world we live in.

The result of the fall of Babylon on the merchants of the world is just as bad as what befell the kings of the earth. The fruit is gone; the riches and splendor have vanished; the merchants stand far off, terrified at her torment; they weep and mourn.

The beauty and wonder of the revelation is how writers, apostles and prophets, could speak such similar words, though separated by so much time and space. James writes an eloquent passage in James 5:1-6, which stands in perfect agreement with John:

1 Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. 2 Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. 3 Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. 4 Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. 5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. 6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

Jesus had forecast this same teaching, recorded in Matthew 6:24, "24 No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money." Jesus also spoke of the uselessness of placing our hope in worldly treasures in Matthew 6:19-21, "19 Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Paul also focused his writing on the fleeting nature of worldly wealth in 1 Timothy 6:17, "17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

It is not that saints are rich in the present world that condemns them, but it is that the saints with earthly wealth must put their hope in God and not mammon (money).

The merchants who placed their hope in mammon will be in extreme circumstances when Babylon falls: the fruit they longed for will be gone; their riches and splendor will have vanished; never to be recovered; they stand far off, terrified at her torment; and they will weep and mourn 16 and cry out.

Their lament describes the great city in the very same terms that John used to describe the great prostitute in chapter 17, verse 4. The lament reads in Revelation 18:16-17,

*“Woe! Woe, O great city,
dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet,
and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!
17 In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!”*

The description of the great prostitute reads in Revelation 17:4, “4 The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.”

God will bring to ruin the wealth of the whole world in one hour.

The Third Lament: All Who Earn Their Living from the Sea (Revelation 18: 17-20)

"Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. 18 When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' 19 They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:

*"Woe! Woe, O great city,
where all who had ships on the sea
became rich through her wealth!
In one hour she has been brought to ruin!
20 Rejoice over her, O heaven!
Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!
God has judged her for the way she treated you."*

Every sea captain, all who travel by sea, and all who earn their living by the sea grieve over the destruction of Babylon. The modern day corollary to this ancient metaphor includes the flight crews, all those millions who fly every day for pleasure and business, and all those involved in the commerce of our day, which depends on air freight and air traffic. These modern day travelers and business people are even called “road warriors”.

Their sorrow is evident: throwing dust on their heads, with weeping and mourning, they cry out their lament. The laments have progressed in their conclusions. The first lament concluded that in one hour, Babylon’s doom had come. The second lament concluded that in one hour Babylon’s great wealth had come to ruin. The third lament concluded that heaven and the saints, apostles, and prophets rejoice because God has judged Babylon. Doom, ruin, and judgment have come to Babylon.

Babylon Thrown Down (Revelation 18: 21-24)

21 Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said:

*"With such violence
the great city of Babylon will be thrown down,
never to be found again.
22 The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters,
will never be heard in you again.
No workman of any trade
will ever be found in you again."*

*The sound of a millstone
will never be heard in you again.
23 The light of a lamp
will never shine in you again.
The voice of bridegroom and bride
will never be heard in you again.
Your merchants were the world's great men.
By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.
24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints,
and of all who have been killed on the earth."*

Violently, God will throw down Babylon to be found never again. No musicians, no workmen, no sounds of millstones, no light of lamp, no voice of a bridegroom and bride – none of this will ever be again in Babylon. The indictment is clear: she led astray the nations; she shed the blood of the prophets and of the saints, and of all who lived on the earth. The multitudes of the world owe their spiritual death to the enticements of the great city.

Chapter 18 marks the end of the great city, the great prostitute. Chapter 19 will see the end of the beast and the false prophet. Where chapter 18 focused on the woe and destruction of Babylon, chapter 19 will focus on the four-fold hallelujahs and the victory of the Lamb.

19. Four-fold Hallelujah and the Rider on the White Horse (Revelation 19)

Chapter 19 has three parts: a four-fold hallelujah, the arrival of the King of kings and the Lord of lords, and the victory over the armies of the beast and false prophet. This chapter is the climatic chapter of the Revelation. Victory upon victory follow for the King and Lord of all. God destroys the minions of evil and glorifies the Lamb and his bride, the church.

Four-fold Hallelujah (Revelation 19: 1-10)

At the condemnation of the prostitute, John hears the great multitude in heaven shouting a fourfold hallelujah. The word, *hallelujah*, means, "Praise ye the Lord." The *h* is pronounced. It is sometimes a short song of praise or thanksgiving as is so used here.

The first hallelujah

1 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

2 for true and just are his judgments.

He has condemned the great prostitute

who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.

He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."

A great multitude celebrates the victory over the great prostitute, Babylon. The overcoming and destruction of the great prostitute show that salvation, glory and power belong to God. The prostitute got exactly what she deserved; God's judgments are true and just. Through her adulteries, she had corrupted the earth and led man into spiritual death. Now God has avenged the blood of his servants. Paul described the matter in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10:

5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.

The second hallelujah

3 And again they shouted:

"Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."

When they again shouted, "Hallelujah," her smoke went up forever and ever. The duration of the prostitute's judgment is so pronounced. Literally, forever and ever is into the ages of the ages and indicates no end to her punishment. The destruction rendered by God has no relief from a certain end. The devil, the beast, and the false prophet also receive this torment without end in Revelation 20:10: "And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

The third hallelujah

4 The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:

"Amen, Hallelujah!"

5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

*"Praise our God,
all you his servants,
you who fear him,
both small and great!"*

The elders and the four living creatures join in the worship. At this point, there is a response from the throne (perhaps the Lord, himself). All God's servants, great and small, are to fear him. The first hallelujah dealt with the duration of God's punishment; this hallelujah deals with the all-inclusive nature of those who worship him.

The fourth hallelujah

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

*"Hallelujah!
For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
7 Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
8 Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear."*

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

John hears the sound like the roar of rushing waters and loud peals of thunder. Here, John heard, "What sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder." This is the fifth time John has heard this overwhelming sound. In each case the sound is from the throne (4:5; 16:18), the temple (11:19), and in response to the censer from the altar being poured out (8:5). The shouting that John heard has the force, power, and majesty of heaven and the throne of God.

This hallelujah announces that the wedding of the lamb to his bride has come. The contrast is clearly to the destruction of the great prostitute of the first hallelujah. Preparations are over; the bride has made herself ready. She, the church, the heavenly city, receives fine linen to wear. Since

fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints, the saints adorn the bride. The saints give their lives to this adornment.

This is the first time that the word, *bride*, appears, used in this manner, to designate the marriage between Christ and the church. Now with the wedding announced, the idea of the bride becomes a central theme of the closing chapters beginning in Revelation 21:1-2: "2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." John sees the bride in Revelation 21:9-10: "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." By the time that the Revelation closes in the last verse, the bride joins equally with the Spirit to call people to the Lamb: "7 The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!'" Revelation 22:17. Paul concurs with John in this matter in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "2 I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him."

The bride adorned with the righteous acts of the saints describes the necessity of the sufferings, trials, and perseverance of the saints. Their righteous lives make the wedding to the Lamb of God possible. Through hardship and travail, the righteous stand firm. From their baptism to the grave, the saints of God put on Christ, through baptism initially, and through their righteous works as they live as Christians. Paul described the first act in Galatians 3:26-28: "26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, 27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." The Lamb's message to the churches was that they were to so dress. In Revelation 3:4, John recorded, "4 Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy." The analogy also appears in Revelation 3:17-18, "18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see." The Lamb had warned the church to keep their clothes with them in Revelation 16:15, "15 Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

John Directed by the Angel

9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

10 At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The angel of verse 9 appears to be the angel of 17:1, who was one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls of God's wrath and invited John to see the punishment of the great prostitute. The only other angel in context is the angel of 18:1, who apparently was an angel of a special class—having great authority, illuminating the earth by his splendor, and having a mighty voice. The angel, in this context, instructs John. God blesses those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb:

Makarios is used in the beatitudes in Matthew 5 and Luke 6, is especially frequent in the Gospel of Luke, and is found seven times in Revelation, 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14. It is said of God twice, 1 Timothy 1:11; 6:15. In the beatitudes, the Lord indicates not only the characters that are "blessed," but the nature of that which is the highest good. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)

The notes on Revelation 1 spoke about how the word, *blessed*, marks the single overarching theme of the Book of Revelation. The development of that theme reaches its climax with the wedding of the bride and the Lamb of God. The passages bear repeating in this present context:

Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. Revelation 1:3: 3.

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." Revelation 14:13.

"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Revelation 16:15.

Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." Revelation 19:9.

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. Revelation 20:6.

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." Revelation 22:7.

"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Revelation 22:14.

Even in the parables, Jesus had taught the importance of the coming of the bridegroom and the need to be prepared (See Matthew 9:15 and 25:6-10). The beauty, celebration, and glory of wedding supper of the Lamb are in direct contrast to the fate of the great prostitute, Babylon: "The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again." Revelation 18:23.

These are the true words of God connects the joining of the bride and bridegroom to the revelation from God. In John 14:10-11, Jesus taught, "The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 11 Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves." He later included in his prayer the relationship of the word of God and the truth, "17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." John 17:17. At this point in the revelation, John is getting to the "heart of the matter."

So taken was he by the events, John fell down to worship the angel. However, the angel describes himself as a fellow servant of God with John and all those who hold to the testimony of Jesus. The angel's simple command, "Worship God!" is so plain, so emphatic, that one cannot miss the point of to whom we owe allegiance, homage, awe, and reverence. Not the angels in heaven, not religious clerics, not temples made with hands, not relics or statues, or any such persons or things. Worship God!

The angel states what appears to be an eternal principle: "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." The New Testament is replete with this connection between our testimony and God's prophecy through the apostles and prophets. Three examples will suffice. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:11, "11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God." Jude wrote of contending for the faith entrusted to the saints in Jude 3-4, "I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints." It is this spirit of prophecy and our testimony of it that perfects the church. Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:11-13:

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

A Majestic Christ Appears (Revelation 19:11-21)

This part of chapter 19 picks up where events paused in Revelation 16:12-16 where John learned that the beast and the false prophet gathered the kings of the whole world together for battle on the great day of God Almighty. The pause in the events of the great battle allowed the angel to show John the fate of the great prostitute, the great city Babylon. With the fate of the prostitute concluded with the four-fold hallelujahs, the narrative returns to the great battle and the final disposition of the beast and the false prophet.

19: 11-16: 11 I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. 12 His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. 13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. 14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. 15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. 16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

John sees heaven standing open. These very first words of this episode establish the place of the battle as in heaven, making it wholly and totally a spiritual battle. Not only is the place of impending battle in heaven, but the armies of the Lord are also the armies of heaven (19:14). Plain and true, the battle of Armageddon (16:16) is a spiritual battle setting the beast, the false prophet, and kings of the whole world (16:12-14 and 19:19-21) against the church the bride of Christ. There is no evidence that Armageddon is a physical battle on this earth. The evidence is to the contrary, the rider on the white horse is already KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

The rider of the horse is called Faithful and True. In the letter of the church of Laodicea, Jesus called himself faithful and true. John recorded in Revelation 3:14, "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation." Once again, the text is certain. The Lord is now the ruler of God's creation. There will be no future kingdoms on this earth. He is *now* KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. And we are *now* a kingdom and priests with him: "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father – to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Revelation 1:5-6.

The purpose of the Lord is to judge and make war. His description here is similar to the one in the first chapter: eyes like blazing fire, many crowns upon his head, and dressed in a robe dipped in blood. On the one hand, he has a name written on him that no one knows but himself; on the other hand, his name is the word of God. This name, the word of God, is reminiscent of John 1:1. John wrote, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning."

The armies of heaven were following him; they too are riding white horses. The phrase, *they are dressed in fine linen, white and clean*, shows that the army of heaven is clothed with the righteous acts of the saints as in Revelation 19:8: "(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)" The dress is figurative of the righteousness of the saints, during this spiritual war. This spiritual army, so amassed, is the army spoken by Paul in Ephesians 6:10-13:

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Everyday, Christians fight the spiritual war against the beast and the false prophet. Indeed, even the armor of this warfare is spiritual armor.

14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Ephesians 6:14-17.

In this passage by Paul, the weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. In John's vision the Lamb is so equipped also, "15 Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations." Christ gave the same the description of himself in Revelation 1:16, "16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword." In the letter to the church at Pergamum in Revelation 2:12, the sword is sharp, double-edged. In the same passage the Lord tells how he will use the sword, "16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth." Revelation 2: 16. The writer of the Hebrew letter describes the full nature of the sword as the word of God, "12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." Hebrews 4:12-13.

In summary, the war is in heaven, the armies of the Lord are spiritual armies of heaven, and the sword is a spiritual sword, the word of God. The Lord himself is the Word of God. There is no room in this passage for the sectarian materialism, which calls for a physical, material war in this present, material earth. The battle of Armageddon is a spiritual battle fought between the armies of heaven and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

The phrase, *he will rule them with an iron scepter*, is from a prophecy in the second Psalm, verse 9. In the letter to the church at Thyatira (Revelation 2:26-27), the Lord quoted the prophecy and applied it to himself and to his followers, "26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations – /27He will rule them with an iron scepter,/he will dash them to pieces like pottery." In Revelation 12:5, the phrase specifically describes the Christ child, "5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." Thus, the Lord of this context is a reigning Lord. He has written on his robe, dripped in blood, and on his thigh, "KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORD'S. He is the one who treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. The reference here to the winepress connects us once again to the harvest of the earth of Revelation 14:19-20, "19 The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. 20 They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia." The end of the harvest is the end of flesh and all things worldly in verses 17-18.

The End of Flesh (Revelation 19: 17-18)

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, 18 so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."

With the harvest of the last day, flesh and blood will be no more. God's wrath is upon all flesh, small and great, mighty and weak, free and slave. The events that follow will bring a just end to flesh and fleshly matters. The beast and false prophet, the dragon, and all those whose name is not written in the Book of Life receive their righteous judgment.

The Fate of the Beast and the False Prophet (Revelation 19: 19-21)

19 Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. 20 But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. 21 The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Suddenly the war is over for the kings, the beast, the false prophet, and the rest of them. Only the dragon remains, however, his fate, too, is sealed. From Eden to the flood, from Babel to the cross, from the cross to this great day of God Almighty, the battle waged across time is over. The sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse has slain the enemy. Those who stood for the testimony of Jesus—clothed in the linen of their righteous acts—and the Word of God are victorious. In just three verses, the Lord defeats the beast and the false prophet. They are thrown alive in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Flesh is no more, but the punishment is forever.

20. Judgment: The End of Satan and Death and Hades (Revelation 20)

Revelation 20 generates the most contentious discussion of any of the chapters in Revelation. The chapter becomes a main proof text for those proponents of a 1,000-year reign of Christ on this earth. Indeed, there is no mention in the Bible of Christ returning to the earth. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 clearly asserts that those alive and those raised will be caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, where we will be with the Lord forever:

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

The New Testament and, in fact, the entire Bible explicitly exclude an earthly and material reign of the Lord, and the text of chapter 20 does not mention a return to earth or a material kingdom on earth. Therefore, one must look to the text of chapter 20 for the meaning of the thousand years as it relates to a spiritual reign and the binding of the dragon. The thousand years covers a time period from the binding of the dragon until he is loosed for a little while (20:1, 3b). The period also covers the time from the beginning of Christ's kingdom until the end of that kingdom (20:4b). That these times are the same becomes apparent in a careful reading of the text of chapter 20.

The very nature of the use of the term, *one thousand years*, emphasizes its indefinite meaning. The term is used only two other in the Bible in the way of its use in chapter 20. The first time was by David in Psalms 90:4-6

4 For a thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.
5 You sweep men away in the sleep of death;
they are like the new grass of the morning –
6 though in the morning it springs up new,
by evening it is dry and withered.

The *thousand years as one day* metaphor reoccurs in 2 Peter 3:7-9:

7 By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.
8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. 9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

Peter and John, speaking the same thing on the same subject, solidify the view that the thousand years of chapter 20 is a long but indefinite period. It is the period from the binding of Satan until his

loosing and from the beginning of Christ's kingdom until its end. Both of these will receive more attention as they occur in the text.

The Binding of the Dragon (Revelation 20:1-3)

20:1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. 2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. 3 He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

The angel that John saw was coming down out of heaven with the key to the abyss. John had seen this angel before. He had opened the abyss in chapter 9 and allowed locusts with the power to sting like scorpions of the earth (See notes on chapter 9). Now the angel once again uses the key—this time, to bind the dragon with a great chain. The locking and sealing the abyss metaphorically restrains the dragon from deceiving the nations any more. The issue at question—when did the thousand years begin?—is answered by another question—when was the dragon bound?

From the beginning of his earthly ministry, Christ showed power over the devil—a power that eventually led to his victory over death and his sending of the Holy Spirit to aid the disciples. During his temptation by the devil, Jesus rebuked him with a command, showing that the dragon's power was on the wane, "10 Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.' 11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him." Matthew 4:10-11. Later, while speaking to Peter in Mark 8:33, Jesus commanded, "Get behind me, Satan! . . . You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

Not only was Jesus able to command and rebuke the devil, but he also established power over the kingdom of the devil—evil lusts, sin, and demons. He extended this power to his disciples in Luke 10:18-20, "18 He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. 19 I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. 20 However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." (See chapter 9 for a discussion of scorpions and snakes as evil lusts and sin, the weapons of the dragon.)

The devil continued to be bound after Christ ascended. The church, his kingdom, received protection during this long, but indefinite time, called here, a thousand years. John has written in his gospel in John 14:16-19, "16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." Chapter 11 has already chronicled the way the word of the apostles and prophets and later that word in the testimony of Jesus thwarted the evil and strikes terror in the hearts of those who see the witnesses. The chain that binds the devil is the word of God, written by the apostles and prophets and testified to by the saints. In Revelation 19:10, the preceding chapter, the angel told John, "I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." It is the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy that keeps the dragon from deceiving the nations anymore. The truth is there for all to know. Not even the gates of Hades shall overcome the Lord's church (Matthew 16:16-19).

The First Resurrection and Reigning with Christ (Revelation 20:4-6)

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their

hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

At the same time as the binding of the dragon by the power of a resurrected Christ, the kingdom of Christ came into existence. These two events—the binding of the devil and the beginning of the kingdom of Christ mark the beginning of the metaphoric thousand years. It is during this time that those given authority to judge sit upon the thrones. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 6:2-3: “2 Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life!” Jesus, while yet living in this world, promised his disciples in Matthew 19:28, “28 Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

John next saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. John had met these souls at the opening of the seals in Revelation 6:9-11:

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

The time of their vindication is near. Previously, these notes discussed the symbolism of dying for the word of God. All Christians experience this death when they die to sin. Paul describes, in detail, the death of Christians to sin and the resurrection to a new life (called here “the first resurrection.” In Romans 6:5-11, Paul explains the first resurrection:

5 If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— 7 because anyone who has died has been freed from sin.

8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

For souls to obey Christ and rise with him to walk in newness of life is the new birth spoken of by Jesus to Nicodemus John 3:3-7:

3 In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

4 “How can a man be born when he is old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

That they should not worship the beast nor receive the mark of the beast is critical to those raised with Christ. The import of the letters to the seven churches (See notes on chapters 2 and 3) was to keep the saints secure from Satan. Christ through John enjoined the church in Revelation 2:10, "I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life." Peter warned about the ever presence of the devil in 1 Peter 5:8-9, "8 Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."

These Christians will come to life—the first resurrection where they are raised from baptism to walk in newness of life. These same Christians will reign with Christ for the thousand years. The beginning of the thousand years started when these Christians entered the kingdom. Jesus said, while on earth, in Mark 9:1, "1 And he said to them, 'I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power.'" Paul showed that Christians were brought into the kingdom in Colossians 1:12-14, "12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

Christ's kingdom has been on the earth from the time God first brought saints into it on the day of Pentecost after Christ's death. The thousand years and this kingdom on earth, the church, began at the same time. John has witnessed this principle repeatedly in the revelation. Two examples will suffice: Revelation 1:5-6 states, "5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father." The combination of the perfect tense verb, *has made*, (an action begun in the past and continued to the present) and the present tense infinitive, *to be* (a permanent state of being), show us in a kingdom from that first day, continuing forever. The praise of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders affirmed this very principle in Revelation 5:9-10:

You were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.
10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.

How long this kingdom, now upon the earth, the church, will continue marks the end of the thousand years. Jesus taught that the exact day no one knows in Matthew 24:36-37, "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man." In 2 Peter 3:8-10, Peter taught the same thing: "8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. . . . 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." Although Paul does not give a specific day for the end to come, he does give an unmistakable sequence of happenings, including the end. In 1 Corinthians 15:22-24, Paul wrote, "22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own

turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him. 24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power.”

Therefore, the thousand years is continuing, the Dragon is bound by the spirit of prophecy and the testimony of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit bears witness with out spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, joint-heirs with Jesus (See Romans 8:8-16-17).

The first resurrection is the resurrection from baptism into the death of Jesus that we might walk in newness of life. We are born anew, according to John’s gospel. Blessed and holy are those who have part in this first resurrection, for the second death has no power over them and they will be priests of God and of Christ and reign with him for the thousand years. Just as the kingdom and the thousand years began with those first Christians and continues to our time, so does the priesthood, which is composed of these same Christians. Peter wrote of Christians in 1 Peter 2:9-10, “9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

The second death has no power over Christians who have washed away their sins and been raised to walk in newness of life (the first resurrection). The second death has no power over them. Paul described the first death as a spiritual death in Ephesians 2:1-5:

2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.

To this first and spiritual death, Paul added the first resurrection in Colossians 3:1-4, “1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

The Revelation clearly explains the second death. In Revelation 2:11, Christians learn how to escape it, “11 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” According to Revelation 20:14-15, the lake of fire is the second death, and in Revelation 21:8, it called the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

The Devil’s Doom (Revelation 20:7-10)

7 When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison 8 and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. 9 They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God’s people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. 10 And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

At the end of the thousand years is the time when Jesus will deliver the kingdom to the father. It will occur when Jesus has overcome all his adversaries. 1 Corinthians 15:24-26 records these events: “24 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed

all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death."

Gog, the king, and Magog, the kingdom, from a prophecy of Ezekiel represent the spiritual battle between the dragon and the church. *The camp of god's people, the city he loves* is the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem, the church. Nelson describes that ancient event:

The leader of a confederacy of armies that attacked the land of Israel. Described as "the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal," Gog is also depicted as being "of the land of Magog" (Ezekiel 38:2-3), a "place out of the far north" of Israel. Ezekiel prophetically describes Gog and his allies striking at Israel with a fierce and sudden invasion (Ezekiel 38-39). According to Ezekiel's prophecy, Gog will be crushed on the mountains of Israel in a slaughter so great it will take seven months to bury the dead (Ezekiel 39:12). (from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986, Thomas Nelson Publishers)

There is little if any evidence that Ezekiel's prophecy historically happened, indicating that the Israel of that prophecy was the spiritual Israel, the church, and the battle was a spiritually battle against those who wear white garments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. Therefore, this passage in Revelation 20 has the same meaning as the battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16:16, the final battle with the beast and the false prophet in Revelation 19:19-21.

Satan will go first to his doom and Death and Hades will quickly follow in verses 20:14-15. All of Satan's resources, gathered from all over the world, could not overcome the church, the camp of God's people, the city that he loves. Fire devoured the followers of Satan, and Satan, the devil, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, just like the beast and the false prophet before him. The end of Satan comes in just three verses or 113 words.

The Judgment of the Dead (Revelation 20:11-15)

11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

John once again sees the throne of God (See notes on 4:1-6). This time all mankind appears, the great and small. In Daniel 7:9-10, Daniel tells of a similar vision:

9 "As I looked,
"thrones were set in place,
and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His clothing was as white as snow;
the hair of his head was white like wool.
His throne was flaming with fire,
and its wheels were all ablaze.
10 A river of fire was flowing,
coming out from before him.

Thousands upon thousands attended him;
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
The court was seated,
and the books were opened.

The dead were judged by what was written in the books. Paul had presented the nature of this judgment in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." In the letter to the church at Ephesus, the Lord had said, "5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." Revelation 3:5. Paul referred to certain Christians as having their names written in the book of life (Philippians 4:3). David spoke of the removal of names from the book of life in Psalms 69:27-28:

27 Charge them with crime upon crime;
do not let them share in your salvation.
28 May they be blotted out of the book of life
and not be listed with the righteous.

Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire, which is the second death. Thus, came to pass the completion of the revelation as it affected the end of the good and bad. Paul had written that the last enemy was death. In 1 Corinthians 15:53-57, he wrote,

"54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

If anyone's name was not written in the book of life, he too was thrown in the lake of fire.

21. The Completion of the Revelation of God (Revelation 21)

The beast and the false prophet, the great city Babylon, the dragon, Death and Hades, and all those whose names were not written in the book of Life have found their fate. John's vision turns to the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, the bride of Christ. The readers of John's revelation learn about the tree of life, the river of life, and the invitation of the Lord.

The Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-7)

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

John's vision turns to one of a "new heaven and new earth." The new heaven and new earth are also spoken of by Peter in 2 Peter 3:13, "13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." Peter calls the new heaven and new earth the home of the righteous. The Hebrew writer made very clear that the new earth is a heavenly one and that he also prepared a city for them in Heb 11:13-16:

13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

In keeping with the images of the entire revelation, John describes the new heaven and new earth as the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Revelation 19:8, taught that the righteous acts of the saints adorn the bride. The "home of righteousness" and "righteous acts of the saints" fitly describe the church. Paul had called the church a pure virgin in 2 Corinthians 11:2, "I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him." In Ephesians 5:25-33, Paul also speaks of the church as wife of Christ.

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. . . . 32 This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church.

There can be no mistaking the fact that the church is the bride; and if the bride, then, the new Jerusalem, the Holy City, and the new heaven and the new earth. The spiritual nature of Christians and the church transcend the physical earth and the physical heaven that pass away. The saints are not of that physical world. Jesus prayed in John 17:14-17, "14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it." In 2 Peter 1:3-4, Peter concurred with this transcending

nature of Christians and the church, "3 His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

The extended metaphor of this present passage finds its exact counterpart in Hebrews 12:22-29, "22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven." Once again, the metaphoric chain is taut: the church of the firstborn (Christ), is the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, Mount Zion.

The new heaven and the new earth is the church, the bride of Christ, when John wrote, now when we live, and forever and forever. The church, the bride of Christ, exists now and in all eternity.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

The passage where the vision appears is in the past tense. The loud voice from the throne (who is God in verse 7) speaks in the present tense. The present nature of the statements reflects a condition existing as the voice speaks. Therefore, it is the bride, the church, as she exists of earth, of whom the voice speaks. The church in the passages that follows will have a present, yet transcending nature. The voice speaks of the church now and forever.

This transcending nature of Christians and the church receives emphasis from the loud voice. That the dwelling of God is with men and that He will live with them repeats the last promise of the saviour while on earth. In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

It is interesting that the dwelling of God is with men, for mankind has generally thought the opposite: that we are going up to heaven to live there with God. The teaching of the gospel is extensive and comprehensive, leaving no doubt that God lives with us now and forever. In Romans 8:9, Paul wrote, "9 You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you." He repeated the principle repeatedly. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, he said, "16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" 2 Timothy 1:14 reiterates, "14 Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." John also taught in his letters that God dwells in us now, "12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us." 1 John 4:12. In 1 John 4:15-16, John added, "15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us."

That he will wipe away every tear also speaks of the church in its present but also its transcendent form. Even now when earthly troubles overwhelm the saints, they rejoice. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1:6-7, "6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." A few verses later in 1 Peter 1:8-9, he concluded, "8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Paul also wrote, in Romans 8:37-39:

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In Ephesians 3:16-19, Paul describes how the love of God equips and strengthens us:

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Christians transcend death itself because of the victory of Jesus over death and the abolition of death as his last enemy. As in chapter 20, for those blessed and holy made by the first resurrection, the second death has no power, and therefore no sadness and no sorrow. (See notes on Chapter 20:6).

The New Order (Revelation 21:5-8)

5 *He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*

6 *He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*

The statement that the old order of things has passed away leads directly into the next statement by one seated on the throne, "I am making everything new!" The previous verses show that the new heaven and new earth—spiritual in nature—replace the physical earth and heaven—material in nature. The Holy City replaced the great city, and the heavenly Jerusalem replaced Babylon. The King of kings, the Lord of lords, replaced the beast, the testimony of Jesus, the spirit of prophecy replaced the false prophet. The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (Revelation 11:15). The Lord God Almighty destroyed the dragon. These are the changes made in detail in the course of the revelation. That God is so able to clothe the earth is clear from Hebrews 1:10-12:

10 He also says,

"In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

11 They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.

12 You will roll them up like a robe;
like a garment they will be changed.

But you remain the same,
and your years will never end."

The one seated on the throne, commanded John, "Write this down, for these words are faithful and true." The phrase, *these words are faithful and true*, also appears in chapter 22:6 where it directly

relates to the impending end of the revelation which is said to be soon taking place. In the very next verse (21:6), the one seated on the throne says in the present tense, "It is done." That he is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, echoes Revelation 1:8: "'8 I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'" "It is done," refers to the completion of God's revelation and the accomplishment of his eternal purpose in Jesus. Accordingly Ephesians 1:9-10 taught, "9 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ." So it was that Jesus said, as the old order passed, on the cross in John 19:29-30: "30 When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." John had heard these words—*it is done*—before in Revelation 16:17: "17 The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'It is done!'" This occurrence of the statement followed the prediction in Revelation 10:7, which said, "7 But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." Thus, what is done here and what must soon come to pass is the final complete revelation of God's mystery to be written by John, the last of the apostles and prophets. The concluding event of that great mystery was His Christ's victory on the cross, chronicled and described throughout these pages by John.

The message from the voice from the throne sets the great, concluding dichotomy of the revelation of God—they who overcome will receive God's great reward, and they who fail receive God's condemnation. For the righteousness, there is the spring of the water of life. They will be children of God. The fate of the unrighteous needs no explication: "8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." Nor does this list of ungodly acts need elaboration, for in it are all those sins that lead inexorably to the mark of the beast and the fiery lake of burning sulfur.

The Bride, the Wife of the Lamb (Revelation 21:9-14)

9 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." 10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. 11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. 12 It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. 13 There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. 14 The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Previously, in chapter 17, one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came to John to reveal the fate of the great prostitute, the great city, Babylon. Now we have one of those same angels coming to John and saying he would show him the bride, the wife of the lamb, which is in verse 10 the heavenly Jerusalem, the Holy City. This study has already concluded repeatedly that the bride, the wife, the Holy City, and the New Jerusalem are the same. That these terms all refer to the church now and to come forevermore is evident in this passage. Once again, the Holy City comes down out of heaven; it is not earthly, for heaven and earth pass away. Although John describes what he sees in material terms, the terms represent something essentially unlike their material nature. This is the very meaning of metaphor and symbolic language.

The first statement in the description is a clear non-symbolic plain language statement, "It shone with the glory of God." Fortunately, direct insight comes from Hebrews 1: 3, "The son is the

radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." When one looks to the bride, the wife of the lamb, one finds this same glory of God. Jesus said in John 14:9-10, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work." Just as Christ reflected God's glory so does the bride. What they see is not flesh and blood, but the divine nature.

The next statement, "Its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal," is a simile. Once again, the bride reflects the bridegroom. John had written in Revelation 1:16, "16 In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance."

The city had a high wall with twelve gates. The names of twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates, where stood twelve angels. The symbolism relates the heavenly city to those saints under the Old Testament law who brought the world to Christ. Israel of the world brought the world to the spiritual Israel. The metaphor begins with David who wrote in Psalms 24:7-10:

7 Lift up your heads, O you gates ;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
8 Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle.
9 Lift up your heads, O you gates ;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.
10 Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty –
he is the King of glory.

Among others, Isaiah also spoke of the gates of the heavenly city in Isaiah 54:11-14:

11 "O afflicted city, lashed by storms and not comforted,
I will build you with stones of turquoise,
your foundations with sapphires.
12 I will make your battlements of rubies,
your gates of sparkling jewels,
and all your walls of precious stones.
13 All your sons will be taught by the LORD,
and great will be your children's peace.
14 In righteousness you will be established:

In a figure, it was through Israel and the law that the Lord brought us to Christ. In Galatians 3:23-24, Paul wrote, "23 Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. 24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." And again in Romans 10:4, he said, "4 Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." Therefore, through Israel of the flesh all men had opportunity to become this spiritual Israel. In Romans 9:6-8, Paul wrote:

6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. 7 Nor because they are his descendants are they all Abraham's children. On the contrary, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." 8 In other words, it is not the natural children who are God's children, but it is the children of the promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring.

The city also had twelve foundations and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Since there are twelve apostles with names on the gates, one might ask which twelve are they, and what of Matthias and Paul. Common in the gospel was the designation twelve apostles or twelve disciples. Paul designated the apostles and prophets as the foundation of God's household in Ephesians 2:19-21:

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

Measuring the City (Revelation 21:15-21)

15 The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. 16 The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. 17 He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. 18 The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. 19 The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. 21 The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

This is the second time for a measuring of the Holy City. The first occurred in Revelation 11:1-2 and excluded the outer court because the persecution of the Holy City, still going on. However, the temple of God, the altar, and worshippers were measured. In the current passage, the trials and temptations are over; the bride, the wife of the Lamb is complete. It is done. The angel will measure the Holy City in its entirety.

The angel measures the city, its gates, and its walls in an extended metaphor that speaks to the city's overwhelming greatness and beauty. The measurements are with man's measure, which illustrates the city's overwhelming proportions. The size of the city is magnified by the large numbers, when it is so measured. The city is a cube of equal width, length, and height: 1,400 miles each way. Each part of the city is laid with the most beautiful stones and metals. Peter reveals the mystery of this beautiful description in 1 Peter 2:4-10:

4 As you come to him, the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him— 5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For in Scripture it says:

"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame."

7 Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,
"The stone the builders rejected
has become the capstone,"

8 and,

"A stone that causes men to stumble
and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the message – which is also what they were destined for.

9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

The very size of the city reflects a magnificence and munificence beyond comprehension. 1,400 miles cubed is approximately the size of the land mass settled by the descendents of Noah in Genesis 10. One must imagine that size cubed, as high as it is long and wide.

The transparency of the street is the same image used for the surround, before the throne in heaven, in Revelation 4:6: "Also before the throne, there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal." The beauty and magnitude of the city defies comprehension.

The Temple: the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (Revelation 21: 22-27)

22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 23 The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. 24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. 25 On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. 26 The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. 27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

That John did not see a temple confirms the spiritual nature of the Holy City. The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of this spiritual city. The spiritual nature of the Holy City is such that there need be no sun or moon for the glory of God give it light. An earthly kingdom or city would need the sun and the moon. Verse 11 has already taught that the Holy City shone with the glory of God. Through gates that will never be closed, the glory and honor that once belonged to the nations will be brought into it. Finally, nothing impure will enter into it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful. Those who enter the beautiful city will be those whose names are written in the lamb's book of life.

The church, the bride of Christ, is now the transcending and eternal Holy City.



22. The River of the Water of Life (Revelation 22:1-5)

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

The river of the water of life flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Jesus used this imagery during his earthly ministry, where he presented it as a promise to those who followed him. In John 4:10-14, Jesus encountered the woman at the well and during the conversation John recorded, "10 Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.'" The woman asked a question that focuses on the origin of living water,

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water ? 12 Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?" 13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

Therefore, the river of the water of life is the metaphoric equivalent to eternal life. Jesus spoke once again on the subject in John 7:37-38, "37 On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.'" The metaphor not only confirms eternal life but also makes the water of eternal life flow from within the true believers. John concluded in verse 39: "By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified." The very spirit of God flows from within Christians.

That the river flows down the middle of the great street of the city illustrates centrality of eternal life to the very nature of the Holy City. On each side of the river grows the tree of life, a metaphor for eternal life from the beginning where Moses recorded in Genesis 2:9, "9 And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." The tree was lost and eternal life with it when man sinned. Genesis 3:22-24 records:

22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." 23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

The story of man has come full circle; the tree and with it eternal life are his once more. In writing to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:7, the Lord called the tree of life, the paradise of God, "7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." God has restored the paradise of the Garden of Eden in the Holy City, the bride, the wife, the church of the Lord.

The tree bears fruit continuously, making it always available. The leaves heal the wounds of the nations. No longer will be any curse refers to the curse placed on man and woman when they sinned Genesis 3:16-23:

16 To the woman he said,

"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."

17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

The servants of God will serve him before his throne in the city. They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. God will give them light. And they will reign with him for ever and ever.

With these words of the angel, what the angel came for was complete. The words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophecy had sent his angel to provide the revelation. The completion of the revelation of God must soon take place. This verse reiterates the statement of Revelation 1:1-2 and signifies that when John is finished there will be no other revelation:

1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, 2 who testifies to everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

The last episode of John's revelation is the Lord's promise to come again.

The Coming of Jesus (Revelation 22:7-16)

7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

8 I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. 9 But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

10 Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. 11 Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

12 "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

16 "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

Great controversy surrounds this passage. Some say it is the Lord coming to reign a thousand years on this physical earth; some say it is speaking of his coming at the destruction of Jerusalem. These notes have resisted these notions in favor of dealing straightforwardly with the text and the context. There is not energy enough, nor time enough, to deal with contrary points of view.

As Jesus speaks, he begins with the exclamatory, "Behold!" The Lord repeats the statement in verse 12. This passage begins a predictive prophecy of his return. Up to this point, the revelation has been speaking forth to reveal God's mystery, hidden from the foundation of the world. However, in many cases, the disciples and later Christians struggled to understand the when and how of the Lord's return. In all cases, it is impending, and it remains so to all who live this short life on earth—a life described in James 4:14, "14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes."

The Lord's disciples raised the question of when he would come in Matthew 21:2, "After visiting the temple the Lord said, 'I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.'" In response, they asked two questions, "'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'" Matthew 24:3. Christ answered the first question about the destruction of the temple, and then in verse 30 began the answer to the second question, "What will be the sign of your coming at the end of the age?" In answer to this second question that described the event in verses 30-31:

30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. 31 And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

In verse 36-37, he described the uncertain but impending nature of his coming, "36 No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." In verses 42-44, he made this impending nature of his coming eminent for all who should ever live:

42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

In this context, it does not seem unusual that the Lord said at the end of the revelation, "Behold! I am coming soon!" A central theme of the revelation is to have your garments clean and be ready. Other passages that deal with the second coming are just as urgent. In 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18, Paul wrote:

15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Paul again portrayed the Lord's coming in 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 with an unmistakable suddenness that makes it eminent to all:

51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

If the Lord is coming soon, how much more so ought we to keep the words of the prophecy in this book.

Once again, John is so startled that he falls down to worship the angel (See notes on Revelation 19:10). Again, John is told that the angel is a like-servant with John, his brothers, and the prophets. Worship God!

The angel told John that he was not to seal up the words of the prophecy of the book even though the revelation is complete because the time is near. The condition of man is to continue until the Lord comes, as illustrated by the statement, "11 Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

The Lord exclaims for the second time, "Behold! I am coming soon!" When the Lord does come, his reward is with him, and all will receive according to what they have done. Paul had written almost these same words in 2 Corinthians 5:10: "10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." His power to judge is certain for he is Alpha and Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and End. These are all phrases that he used of himself in the first three chapters of the Revelation.

Those that have washed their clothes will have the right to the tree of life and entrance through the gates of the city. Clean clothes have stood for righteous acts of the saints. Others, outside the city are dogs. They are those "who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."

Jesus concludes with a statement of his authenticity and genealogy. He is the root of David, the bright and morning star. His testimony is for the churches.

The Invitation and Warning (Revelation 22:17-21)

17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

18 I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. 19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

20 *He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."*

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

21 *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen*

The spirit and the bride extend the invitation. The spirit with the word of God, his sword and the bride, the church, with her testimony of Jesus say, "Come!" Let those who hear the gospel say, "Come!" Let whoever is thirsty take the free gift of the water of life. This fitting conclusion to Christ's invitation reflects Paul's inspired truth written in Romans 6:20-23:

21 What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! 22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The warning in verses 18 and 19 may be only of this book, commonly thought of as John's Revelation, or they may be of the entire revelation of God from the beginning to the end. The context favors John's book. However, the Bible is replete with warnings against adding to or taking away from any of the scriptures. Paul wrote in Galatians 1:7-9:

Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

If anyone adds, to him will be added the plagues of this book. If anyone takes away, God will take away his share of the tree of life and in the holy city.

John's revelation ends with the most awe-inspiring and elegant words imaginable.

"Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.