

“And I Saw”

A Commentary on the Revelation of Jesus Christ

By

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## Forward

I was sure that I would never write a book on the Book of Revelation, let alone spend four years teaching it in church. Decades ago, I wrote an article called “Prophecy Preoccupation” that summarized why. I grew up learning a Dispensationalist view of eschatology, and many churches in the region were Dispensationalist as well. Local Christian bookstores had a plethora of tomes espousing the latest theories of how current world history and expected events were “from the pages of Scriptures.” In many circles it was a major topic, *the* issue of the day, supplanting needed Biblical instruction on everything from basic doctrine to personal holiness. Everyone needed to be studying and teaching this, a sure sign of biblical maturity (implying this subject to be the next step called for in Hebrews 6:1-2).

Over the years I saw books predicting the imminent rise of the Antichrist, a one-world order, the end of the world, all based on that day’s news. Some functionally predicted dates for Jesus’ return, often hedged or so broad that when they failed they could claim to not be a false prophet. I saw people teaching the church to fear. Bar codes, tracking chips, the United Nations – the list could go on and on. The end was imminent. I saw an incredible number of Christians, who were following all this, living continuously in fear. Churches shunned anyone holding contrary thought and believers disparaged those calling for reconsideration of their understanding.

In following years, I occasionally returned to the Book of Revelation in my own reading and study. Yet I held to my determination that I would set aside this book in my ministry and focus on “more important” subjects and texts. A subject I taught in seminars, for years, was the area of properly interpreting scriptures: How we understand what the Bible is saying and the author meant. With teaching came increased personal consistency in applying rules of scriptural interpretation, to all passages of scriptures and all subjects within. It started a lifelong journey of digging deeper. I learned to be willing to set aside extra-biblical traditions and traditional thought to find and cling to the clear teaching of the Bible itself.

I discovered many Bible passages misused or ignored by Dispensationalists and others holding to competing stripes of eschatological thought. In recognizing these discrepancies, I kept making mental note to someday study this through while carefully applying rules of Biblical interpretation to all these Bible texts including the Book of Revelation.

Questions kept arising in ministry settings. I regularly heard people quickly and casually quoting Scriptures out of context in support of their pet eschatological views. This, and much prodding by a few individuals, finally caused me to agree to teach through a few starting chapters of the Book of Revelation. My personal goal, in so doing, was to faithfully exercise of all rules of scriptural interpretation. I knew setting aside learned presuppositions from my upbringing and related reading would be difficult. Allowing scriptures to interpret scriptures was the only way I was going to understand God’s word in Revelation.

Four chapters into the Book of Revelation, where I planned on stopping, I had become fascinated. Mostly because I was already seeing, in a nascent way, a growing picture different from the

disconnected view I had grown up with. I found a book not selling fear. In grand contrast, it offered a message of hope and assurance to God's church. Once I glimpsed this small portion of the great pattern and message of this book, there was no way I could stop without completing it. The following months and years took me on a journey through the entire Bible, as John so often alludes to other Scriptures. My computer programming background thrilled to discover the order and patterning that God had John intertwine into this book. This is not secret patterning or hidden messages. All is "hidden" in plain sight, open to discovery through detailed examination of the whole. The methodical pattern John used supports the entire message and is a primary key to understanding it.

The Book of Revelation presents itself as a whole, a unified message and revelation that flows from beginning to end. God clearly proclaims that He is sovereign over all events of history and reveals His eternal plan (a plan including an end and a new start again). Revelation is a message of hope for all believers. This is a great contrast to the Dispensationalist view that chops the book into pieces, examining small portions often apart from the whole.

Towards the end of my study, I read several works on Revelation spanning many viewpoints and a vast time frame. Many modern works held to Dispensationalism and Preterism, as these views are predominately modern. I spent more time on historical views, especially spanning back to the early fathers of the eastern and western church. I saw much that comes from viewing the book in sections (as the Dispensationalists commonly to do). Forced allegorical interpretation was far more common. It constrained and influenced church beliefs throughout the middle ages. On a positive note, I saw something encouraging. Teachers or writers looking at the book as a whole, noting unity throughout, were more likely to discover similar to what I had found. This was especially so when they did greater personal study, versus unquestioningly accepting earlier opinions.

I found that some of the earliest church fathers held to a form of premillennialism, a result of their cursory examination. Most of these early teachers barely referenced the book of Revelation. The few even commenting on Revelation chapter twenty, all looked at it as an isolated passage – as many do today. Most of my life, I was no different. I studied chapter twenty by itself and confidently, yet ignorantly, declared what the passage must be saying: everyone must recognize that it taught a literal, futurist, 1000-year reign of Christ on earth. From the inconsistencies of Dispensationalism, as a stopgap I nominally moved to embrace a form of historic premillennialism for many years. I finally recognized multiple weaknesses in the exegesis of these positions.

Six and a half years later, I believe all I have found through this detailed study. It might sound strange, but I'm pleased to say that I was wrong in what I once believed. When detailed study of Scriptures proves me wrong, in any area, this is good. I have long since come to the point where I will gladly set aside any former understanding and rest solely in what God has revealed. It's His word and its purpose is to change me.

For His Glory Alone!

Brent MacDonald (December 31, 2016)

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the believers of Grace Church Hermitage for diligently searching Scriptures with me during the study that led to this commentary. Thanks to my wife, Angie, for always providing a listening ear as I wrestled with wording and charts.

## Scriptures

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## The Sevenfold Sevenfold Outline of the Book of Revelation

1. Christ in the Church (Sevenfold Church) – Chapters 1-3
2. Book of the Plan for All History (Sevenfold Sealed Book) – Chapters 4-7
3. God’s Judgment through History (Sevenfold Trumpets) – Chapters 8-11  
(4 Trumpets of Physical Judgment)  
(3 Trumpets of Spiritual Judgment – The 3 Woes)
4. Sevenfold Themes of History – Chapters 12-14  
Story of the woman  
Story of the dragon  
Story of the male child  
Story of the holy angels  
Story of the fallen angels  
Story of the earthly kingdoms  
Story of the saints
5. Sevenfold Bowls of Wrath – Chapters 15-16
6. Sevenfold Theme of the Great Prostitute – Chapters 17-19  
The Adulterer  
The Blasphemer  
The Drunkard (of blood of Saints)  
The Rider  
The Fallen  
The One to Come Out From (Saints)  
The One Who is Thrown Down
7. Sevenfold Finale – Chapters 20-22  
Satan on a Leash  
Saints Reign  
Rebellion Quenched – Demise of the dragon  
Final Judgment (Eternal Life and Death)  
New Heavens and Earth  
New Jerusalem  
Righteous Judge

Others have recognized a sevenfold division in the Book of Revelation, similar to the primary divisions listed above. A basic outline of Revelation typically includes them. William Hendriksen, one such scholar and writer that used these divisions, presented a view of the Book of Revelation labeled "Progressive Parallelism." "More Than Conquerors" is his primary work on this subject. His "New Testament Commentary," completed by Simon J. Kistemaker following Hendriksen's death, encompasses the same viewpoint and similar material.

I don't hold rigidly to the divisions itemized above. I recognize these major divisions are seemingly in the Book of Revelation, and that a case exists for a further sevenfold subdivision, yet they are not rigid demarcations. Inflexibly holding to these breakpoints stands in the way of viewing the broader overlapping, repetitive, and expanding views that John experienced.

I regard the work of Hendriksen and Kistemaker to be the best published today, with great insight into the Book of Revelation. Only towards the end of my multiyear study of Revelation did I discover their existing idea of Progressive Parallelism and I have no intent to restate it. Likenesses exist with what I've presented here, mainly because both of us recognize John's use of overlapping imagery. I found it promising that diligent study into this book leads to common understanding on key matters!

Anthony Hoekema, writing on interpretation of the Book of Revelation, summarized Progressive Parallelism in this brief statement:

The system of interpretation of the book of Revelation which seems most satisfactory to me (though it is not without its difficulties) is that known as progressive parallelism, ably defended by William Hendriksen in *More Than Conquerors*, his commentary on Revelation. According to this view, the book of Revelation consists of seven sections which run parallel to each other, each of which depicts the church and the world from the time of Christ's first coming to the time of his second. ([www.the-highway.com/amila\\_Hoekema.html](http://www.the-highway.com/amila_Hoekema.html))

I find the "difficulty" in Hendriksen's Progressive Parallelism comes from his rigid tries to divide the book into seven, fully overlapping, time frames. He names this complete overlap "Parallelism." The second word, "Progressive," comes from his understanding of why the overlap exists:

Note that though these seven sections are parallel to each other, they also reveal a certain amount of eschatological progress. The last section, for example, takes us further into the future than the other sections. Although the final judgment has already been announced in 1:7 and has been briefly described in 6:12-17, it is not set forth in full detail until we come to 20:11-15. Though the final joy of the redeemed in the life to

come has been hinted at in 7:15-17, it is not until we reach chapter 21 that we find a detailed and elaborate description of the blessedness of life on the new earth (21:1-22:5). Hence this method of interpretation is called progressive parallelism. (Ibid)

I found the overlap, or repetition, was with a greater purpose, designed to give extra details or emphasis but also to provide an orderly buildup of importance. Overlapping parallelism gives reason for introductions occurring far after a character or feature has already appeared. For example, the beast is at war with saints in Revelation 11:7 but first emerges in chapter 13. Twice John has declared Babylon fallen (Revelation 14:8 and 16:19), but he describes her in existing glory in chapter 17. God removes “every mountain and island” from its place in Revelation 6:14, but they flee away in Revelation 16:20. It’s not uncommon for John to clarify introduced subjects and characters towards the end and not, as we think normal, at the beginning. John’s focus is first on earthly or physical. Later emphasis is increasingly on spiritual events, themes, or behind-the-scenes forces in the following examples or repetitions. There’s a general increase of emphasis and specifics in later events, especially as these episodes approach the end. The text often gives short coverage to early matters spanning the total time frame under consideration. Through expanding and reinforcing imagery, John reveals events from creation to the end. Many look at Revelation as focusing on events from the time of Christ until the end, missing this greater view. Events throughout all of history, indeed all of Scriptures, provide the spiritual underpinning and building imagery used by the Apostle. My developing view could also use same synonym “Progressive,” though I mean something different by it.

It’s not wrong to class my commentary on Revelation as a form of Progressive Parallelism. Those seeking an easy classification and comparison will surely do so. I hope this labeling will not hind people from reading it in its entirety. All I found needs to be in view rather than the narrower and restrictive divisions that limit the earlier proponents tagged with this same label.

If a unique label is necessary for my understanding of Revelation, I call it: “Overlapping Progressive Development.” This title isn’t as succinct or memorable as “Progressive Parallelism.”

In summary, John wrote what he saw and heard; specifically what God showed him to picture events, past and future. He often repeatedly reviewed the same events or time frame, sometimes narrowing his focus or expanding it, all with a purpose of providing extra details or significance. These details often build in importance. They move from a seeming, or primary, emphasis on physical events to increasing prominence of the spiritual underpinnings. An increase of emphasis and increase of material is obvious as events build toward the end and, of course, the new beginning.

## Revelation – Interrelated Passages

This chart provides a summary of how sections of the Book of Revelation interact with or reference rough periods of time. I say “rough” because John makes little effort to identify time frames precisely as this is not the purpose of the book. His goal is to layout, with enough detail, all that pictures what God showed him spanning broad periods of time. To accomplish this it was necessary for John to overlap with subjects already looked at, drilling down to provide expanded or increasing details. Sometimes, John viewed the same event in different ways many times.

Why did God give John multiple overlapping or mostly parallel views of the same events, sometimes seven times or with three or four examples? Numeric symbolism is unquestionably a foundational basis for the groupings. Three, four, seven, ten and twelve are the most used values in the Book of Revelation. This includes direct use of the number; other times the value appears by counting repetitions or overlaps of the material. Each restatement adds an emphasis which encompasses symbolic use of that value. For details on the symbolism of numbers, see the later section which visits this subject. The chart shows the primary overlapping sevenfold divisions and some of the most significant threefold and fourfold examples or subdivisions.

Revelation - Interrelated Passages		To His Servants (in the Churches): 1:1 - 20							The Scroll (Plan for the Ages/Seven Seals): 4:1 - 5:14							The Seven Trumpets: 8:1 - 9							The Sign							Three Examples/Explanations of Outcome of the Sign							To His Servants																																																																																																
Approx. Timeframe	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7																																																																																											
Creation-Fall	Loveless Church	Persecuted Church	Compromising Church	Corrupt Church	Deaf Church	Faithful Church	Lukewarm Church	Gospel	War	Four Horses	Flamine	Death	How Long?	Who Can Stand?	144,000	14 Tribes	Great Multitude Uncomfortable	Out of the Great Tribulation	Earth	Sea	Fresh Water	Light Sources	Woe 1	Woe 2	Woe 3	Woe 3	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7																																																																																						
Incarnation	2:1	2:8	2:12	2:18	3:1	3:7	3:14	6:1	6:3	6:5	6:7	6:9	6:12	6:15	7:8	7:13	7:17	8:7	8:8	8:10	8:12	9:1	9:13	9:15	11:1	11:14	11:18	11:19	12:1	12:3	12:2	14:20	16:2	16:3	16:4-7	16:8-9	16:10-11	16:12-16	16:17-21	19:21	20:10	20:11	22:5	22:6	22:12	22:13	22:14	22:15	22:16	22:17	22:18	22:19	22:20	22:21	22:22	22:23	22:24	22:25	22:26	22:27	22:28	22:29	22:30	22:31	22:32	22:33	22:34	22:35	22:36	22:37	22:38	22:39	22:40	22:41	22:42	22:43	22:44	22:45	22:46	22:47	22:48	22:49	22:50	22:51	22:52	22:53	22:54	22:55	22:56	22:57	22:58	22:59	22:60	22:61	22:62	22:63	22:64	22:65	22:66	22:67	22:68	22:69	22:70	22:71	22:72	22:73	22:74	22:75	22:76	22:77	22:78	22:79	22:80	22:81	22:82	22:83	22:84	22:85	22:86	22:87	22:88	22:89	22:90	22:91	22:92	22:93	22:94	22:95	22:96	22:97	22:98	22:99	22:100
First/Second Harvest	2:7	2:11	2:17	2:29	3:6	3:13	3:22	6:2	6:4	6:6	6:8	6:11	6:15	7:8	7:13	7:17	8:7	8:8	8:10	8:12	9:1	9:13	9:15	11:1	11:14	11:18	11:19	12:1	12:3	12:2	14:20	16:2	16:3	16:4-7	16:8-9	16:10-11	16:12-16	16:17-21	19:21	20:10	20:11	22:5	22:6	22:12	22:13	22:14	22:15	22:16	22:17	22:18	22:19	22:20	22:21	22:22	22:23	22:24	22:25	22:26	22:27	22:28	22:29	22:30	22:31	22:32	22:33	22:34	22:35	22:36	22:37	22:38	22:39	22:40	22:41	22:42	22:43	22:44	22:45	22:46	22:47	22:48	22:49	22:50	22:51	22:52	22:53	22:54	22:55	22:56	22:57	22:58	22:59	22:60	22:61	22:62	22:63	22:64	22:65	22:66	22:67	22:68	22:69	22:70	22:71	22:72	22:73	22:74	22:75	22:76	22:77	22:78	22:79	22:80	22:81	22:82	22:83	22:84	22:85	22:86	22:87	22:88	22:89	22:90	22:91	22:92	22:93	22:94	22:95	22:96	22:97	22:98	22:99	22:100	
Final Judgment Presentation of Bride Eternity	2:7	2:11	2:17	2:29	3:6	3:13	3:22	6:2	6:4	6:6	6:8	6:11	6:15	7:8	7:13	7:17	8:7	8:8	8:10	8:12	9:1	9:13	9:15	11:1	11:14	11:18	11:19	12:1	12:3	12:2	14:20	16:2	16:3	16:4-7	16:8-9	16:10-11	16:12-16	16:17-21	19:21	20:10	20:11	22:5	22:6	22:12	22:13	22:14	22:15	22:16	22:17	22:18	22:19	22:20	22:21	22:22	22:23	22:24	22:25	22:26	22:27	22:28	22:29	22:30	22:31	22:32	22:33	22:34	22:35	22:36	22:37	22:38	22:39	22:40	22:41	22:42	22:43	22:44	22:45	22:46	22:47	22:48	22:49	22:50	22:51	22:52	22:53	22:54	22:55	22:56	22:57	22:58	22:59	22:60	22:61	22:62	22:63	22:64	22:65	22:66	22:67	22:68	22:69	22:70	22:71	22:72	22:73	22:74	22:75	22:76	22:77	22:78	22:79	22:80	22:81	22:82	22:83	22:84	22:85	22:86	22:87	22:88	22:89	22:90	22:91	22:92	22:93	22:94	22:95	22:96	22:97	22:98	22:99	22:100	

## Revelation – I saw...

Imagine standing in a room, resting against one wall, with a series pictures on the three walls in front of you. The wall to your left has a few pictures each representative of some old events. The wall straight ahead continues with closer to the present, except there are a few more images representing those events. Finally, the wall to the right presents future scenes using far more images to do so.

How would you describe these images to someone who had never seen them? First you would have to make them aware the images progress from left to right, by wall, old to future. A problem arises that each wall contains multiple scenes, some with different views spanning the



same time frames. Which do you use to precede the first event on the next wall? A single example works, yet all are necessary for the big picture. Every image has detail, so you might choose to present an outline. This approach requires revisiting each image to provide extra or complete details. With following images, do you try to describe everything about it all at once? It may be preferable to focus on specific aspects and describe how this affects later images. Revisiting some images is necessary for each extra theme. You might make no mention of a picture unrelated to the theme under consideration. This risks someone misunderstanding the subject as referring to only a shortened time period unless they recognize the method you are using.

Presenting this picture is overwhelming, if only a single series of images spanning the beginning to the end. John's room is far more complex. There are multiple series of images. Some contain a narrower, more focused, view. Other sequences seemingly begin and end on only one wall (that right wall in particular). In a simple sense, this is what the Apostle John saw spanning history. He could turn and look at a particular wall. His gaze then directed to circumstances on earth or heavenly issues during the period in view.

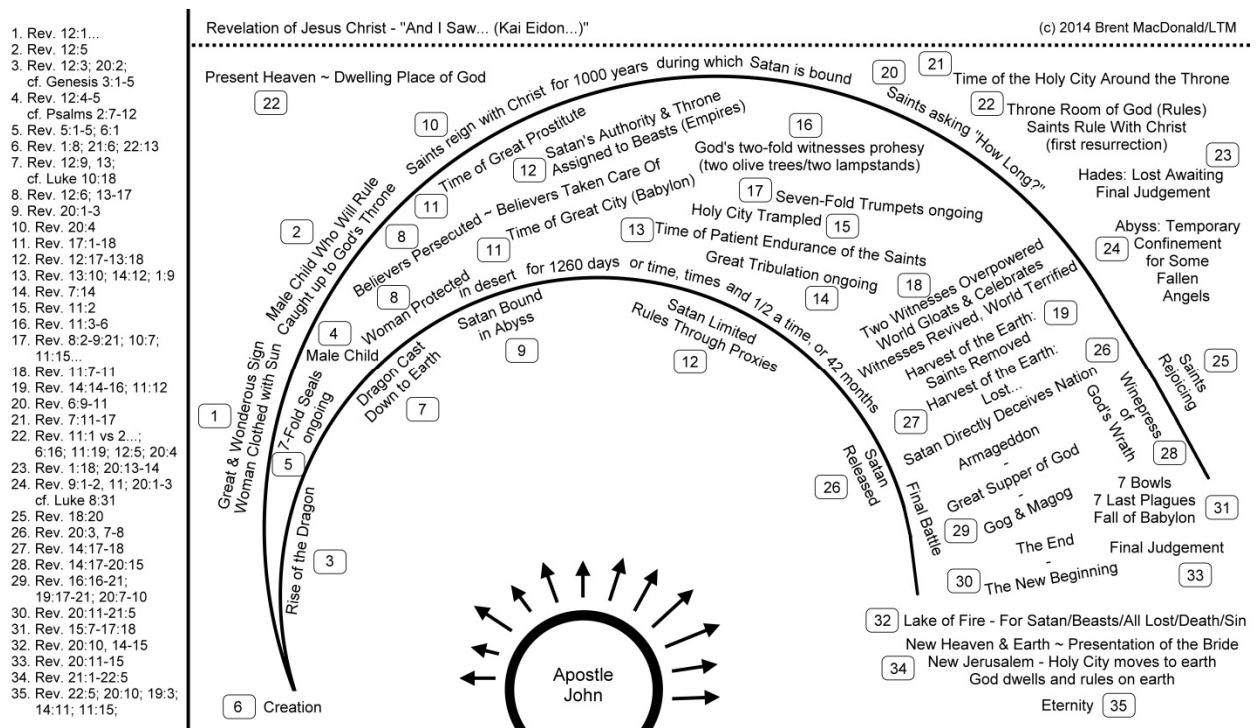
Mercifully, John was not alone for this task. Divine guidance identifies what images compose particular series. Specific instruction assured how many times he returned to the same series to highlight another theme. It resulted in a unique, yet intentionally complex, book of Scriptures. We must understand Revelation from a visual point-of-view, remembering God showed John these visuals. He repeatedly saw and recorded exactly what God pictured for him. Occasionally some scenes had sounds that John would also describe. In other circumstances, God gives narration through a divinely appointed doctent. Every detail John faithfully records, when allowed. Revelation abounds with looks-like and sounds-like statements as John describes the visual panorama before him. This remains true whether that portion is spanning broad periods of history or more narrowly focusing on a theme found only towards the end.

Nowhere in the Book of Revelation are we told John was personally viewing events of past or future history. He saw divinely crafted images that represented people, places and circumstances. This is the essence of God's sealed scroll providing the primary outline of most of Revelation. In the last century many speculated that John was "transported" into the future to watch events, by his own efforts describing them to his ancient audience. These speculators have John trying to understand everything from helicopters to television, claiming possible cryptic references to these in what John wrote. This is a fictitious scenario without supporting evidence. John saw and heard exactly what God wanted him to view and recall. God purposely had John painting a word picture of the imagery itself. For example, the devil is not literally a big red dragon with seven heads and seven horns and seven crowns (Revelation 12:3). But John

saw a series of images that featured creatures looking like this, each representative of Satan (Revelation 12:9). The imagery used visually expressed underlying truths and revealed what God wants us to know about the devil. This book features carefully planned use of allegory, figurative images, and even symbolic use of numbers.

Without question, the imagery John saw represents literal events spanning history, past to future, and real people and spiritual entities. Those past events happened and without question the future events will take place too. The vision God gave John, full of representative imagery, symbolism, and allegory, points to factual events, people, and results. John's context, settled within the book itself, forces interpreters of Revelation to understand it in this manner. Doing otherwise means not accepting what the text claims of itself. There's no coincidence that John uses the wording "I saw" more than thirty times in the Book of Revelation. Added direct statements, explaining some imagery, reveal intentional symbolism ("the woman you saw is..." Revelation 17:18). The text openly reveals key characters to be representative, showing intentional allegorical understanding of these figures and events.

The following graphic is my effort to show, in a simplified sense, the view of related images set before John throughout the Book of Revelation.



Dispensationalists, in trying to force a rigid linear timeline onto Revelation, create many differing scenarios. Their “excessively literal” straitjacket is to blame. One writer, aware of these inconsistencies, made the following observation:

What’s more, the “backbone” for all of this—the book of Revelation—frustrates its readers. It offers long pauses, contradictory timeframes and undisclosed declarations, and every time the end is announced, it never actually arrives. It is more apt to describe it as spiraling around an endpoint rather than marching toward one. It is, in essence, a text that defies any framework placed onto it. (Michelle Fletcher, “Blending into One: The *Left Behind* Movie, the Book of Revelation and the Rapture,” [www.biblicalarchaology.org](http://www.biblicalarchaology.org), 10/14/2015)

Rejecting one framework out of frustration, because it doesn’t work, does not automatically result in this author’s conclusion that none are workable. It merely means she hadn’t found it yet. How telling that she used the words “spiraling around an endpoint.” She came close to understanding that John does have a repetitive panorama here. Its end point is always in view – the presentation of Christ’s bride.

### **Revelation – And...**

A significant word found throughout the Book of Revelation is the Greek word “kai,” commonly translated as “and.” This little word appears 1121 times over 369 verses (1171 over 375 in Textus Receptus). It commonly means “and (a copulative, connector, or joiner).” By context, English renderings occasionally include “then” or “after that.” Sometimes Greek writers used the word for emphasis or intensity.

John’s Greek in the Book of Revelation is often derisively called “coarse” Greek, not merely being Koiné (or Common) Greek versus Classical Greek, but a poorer subset to the former. Translators normally rephrase texts to preserve their sense into English. They often look on the plethora of “ands,” that John used, as an artifact of this coarse Greek. They edited them out as words standing in the way of making short sentences and paragraphs in our more proper English.

Unquestionably, John liked massively long sentences, connecting clause after clause using “and.” Some translators drop the “and” to start new sentences, paragraphs and, worse still, chapters. Unfortunately this gives the English language reader a false perception of a new chapter, paragraph or sentence. They understand the seemingly stand-alone text as not

necessarily connected or flowing from what preceded it. This allows readers to see never intended divisions.

Other translators use “then” instead of “and.” Most people read this as a suggestion of chronological time, something unwarranted by the text in many circumstances (i.e. no context). It allows people to see a progression of time rather than a restatement of the former thought.

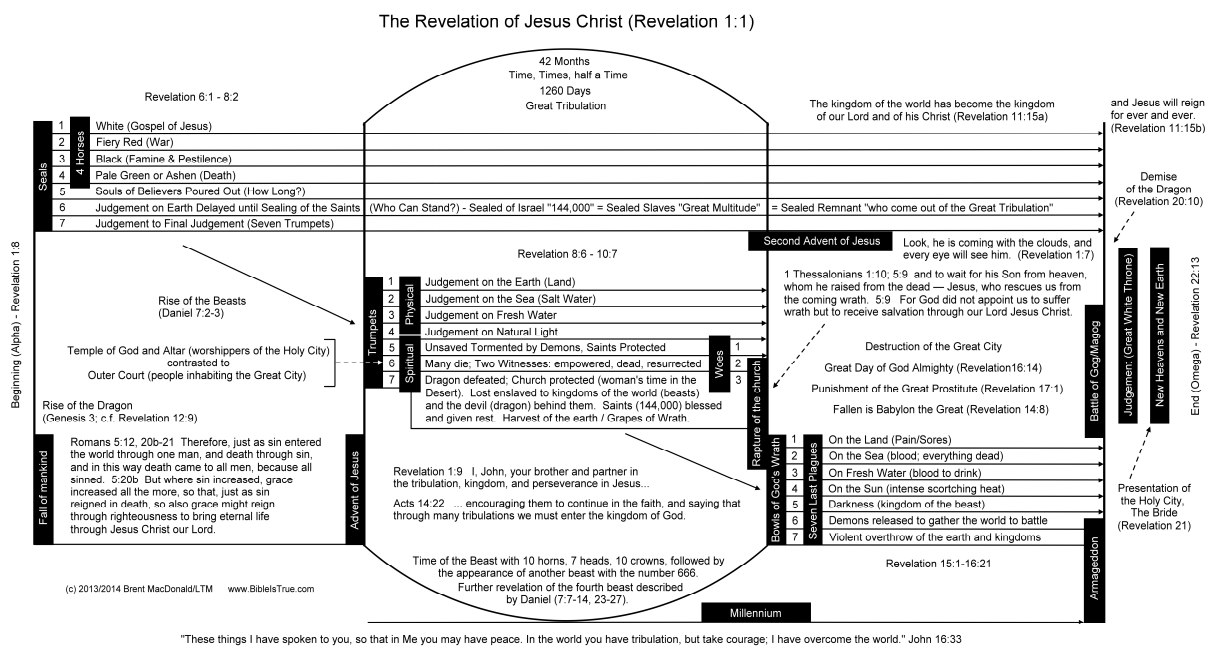
While it may make for poorer English, I believe that many translators do a great disservice in not allowing the Book of Revelation to show this vast array of connecting statements. These connectives may not be necessary in other simple and straightforward New Testament accounts, but the apocalyptic Book of Revelation is unique. Its method of using overlapping and repetitive examples to express visual imagery depends on viewing and understanding these joining words. To assure knowledge of continuing thoughts, I will often highlight places where “and” is absent to the detriment of understanding the passage under consideration.

## **Revelation – Time**

Time is casually in view in the Book of Revelation making our usual linear way of looking at events harmful to understanding the book. The last century, or two, saw many Dispensationalist attempts to create rigid linear timelines. Their efforts to precisely force all events of prophecy into this have affected interpretation of Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation.

As I have already mentioned; the visually representative view that John is employing, while showing real events at real times in history or the future, is broad. John’s gaze repeatedly crosses key happenings referenced in earlier passes through the material. Overlapping important and central events provides a general idea of when divergent time frames intersect. The same goes for non-divergent restatements to provide extra details or clarity. The included events are more important than specifically when they take place. Fixed beginnings and endings become unnecessary. Though John seemingly provides more detail allowing the reader to pinpoint the end.

The following chart for the Book of Revelation looks like a typical linear view. While it does show the passage of time from creation to eternity future, the horizontal distance does not represent rigidly fixed and equal periods of time. For example, creation to the coming of Christ is not equal to Christ until the return of Jesus. The period of judgment to the right is far briefer still. I provided this chart after the first two, because any understanding of this chart must be in light of the ideas presented in those former ones.



## Revelation: Extra-Biblical Terms

To a degree, most of the English language is extra-biblical since those exact words did not appear in the original Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic texts. The closest we get is where words are directly transliterated into English. They hold the same meaning. Secondly, we have some English words that fully capture the sense of the original term. In far more passages, understanding the entire meaning often requires using a phrase or sentence.

Beyond the text itself, we have created or adopted words to represent ideas found in the Bible. Millennium is one example. Unfortunately, this word carries much baggage. While the term merely means “thousand years;” a Preterist, an Amillennialist, and a Dispensationalist all see this word and understand something different by it. I cautiously and apologetically use the term on my charts and in this text. But I want to stress that it would be better for everyone merely to say “thousand years,” as the text does in Revelation 20:2, 3, 6, and 7. This allows the numeric value to keep its prominence and the reader to focus on John’s use of numbers and numerical symbolism throughout the book.

Extra-biblical terms are useful when they encompass the intended meaning and sense of the original idea. (For example, consider “omniscient,” “omnipresent,” and “omnipotent” when commonly used in regards God). Otherwise, using the term effectively misleads or detracts from the true meaning. When using words in this category, I endeavor to clarify or define my

chosen terms. Don't jump to a conclusion when you see such words on a chart, consider what I have said about it.

### **Revelation – The Last Shall Be First**

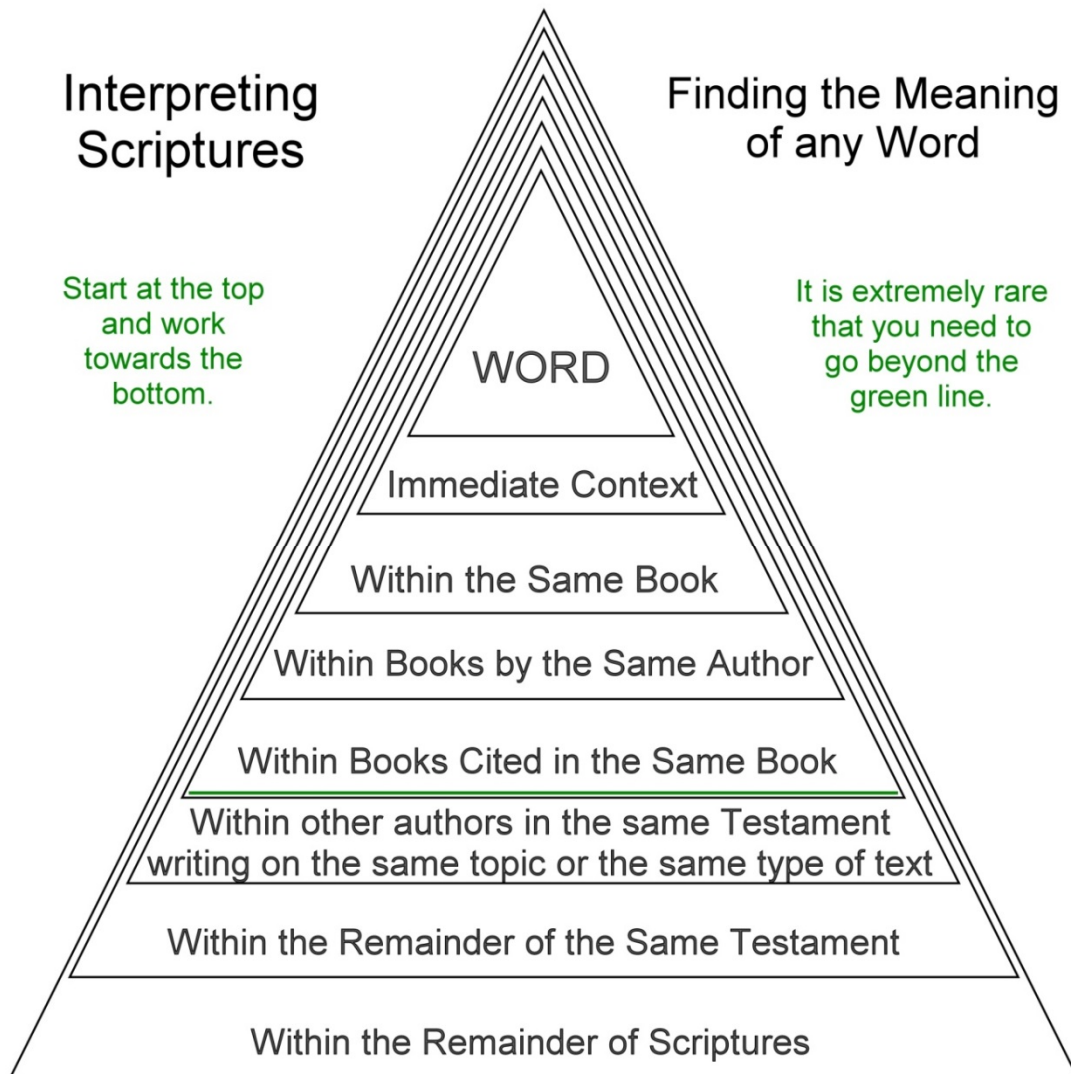
A key principle of Biblical Interpretation stems from our understanding of the Bible as a progressive revelation. God's revealed His word over many centuries. He gave it in his own timing and as necessary for the good of His people. The Bible never contradicts itself yet the Bible does provide expanded details in related or later passages. Specifically, God's final revelation is the New Testament. The Old Testament is to be understood and interpreted using this later clarification.

Passages in the Old Testament, that were a shadow of coming events, find detail in the New Testament through the words of Jesus and His apostles. Old Testament prophecies and events seemingly have one manner of interpretation by their immediate context. Clarifying New Testament passages then show a fuller, or more complete, meaning. And when God speaks in the New, it removes all speculation over meaning and purpose of the Old Testament passage.

Bible scholars, teachers and preachers regularly use this principle of progressive revelation... until, for many, they get to eschatology. Here, it seems, they abandon common rules of Biblical interpretation. Otherwise sound instructors of the word suddenly lose their interpretative minds. And yet, the rule still stands, the New Testament must interpret the Old.

The Book of Revelation, God's final word on eschatology and prophecy, must take first place. It shapes our interpretation of prior books, never the other way around. Dispensationalists especially use their understanding of Old Testament passages to drive their view of the Book of Revelation. This reversal is to their harm, preventing them from seeing the broader picture that God had in view. All too often I've heard people commentating on the Book of Revelation say "but this can't mean \_\_\_\_\_, because this Old Testament passage shows it applies to geographic (or the nation of) Israel". Would these interpreters rebuke Paul in similar manner? He revealed an expanded meaning of one of the Ten Commandments, showing more than geographic Israel was in view. Perhaps they would correct Jesus when He clarified Isaiah and David. He made clear that geographic Israel was not the fullness of term "the land". This practice of allowing the old to interpret the new must stop. Again, when the New Testament, or the Book of Revelation, makes something clearer, this divine illumination enlightens our understanding of all earlier passages. (I've detailed specifics on this subject in the Addendum section "Old Testament prophecies of the Land interpreted by the New Testament").

Revelation’s use of Old Testament Scriptures is unique to all the books in the Bible. John seemingly doesn’t directly cite any Old Testament passages, yet he assumes his readers have detailed knowledge of the Old Testament. Only seven instances are close enough some could argue they’re citations. John continuously uses imagery from the Old Testament; sometimes reworking those into new applications (consider the “two olive trees” of Zechariah). When John uses Scriptures, including Old Testament passages and New Testament writings, including his own, he does so by allusion or paraphrase. For a book that doesn’t directly cite other Scriptures, it unquestionably draws on Scriptures more than any other Bible book. On the Old Testament, John repeatedly alludes to these major and minor prophets: Joel (8 times), Amos (9 times), Zechariah (15 times), Jeremiah (22 times), Ezekiel (48 times), Daniel (53 times), and Isaiah (79 times). Add in Moses and David, with Exodus (27 times), and Psalms (43 times). Moses’ count not including at least 3 further references to Genesis!



## **Revelation – A tale of two rulers, two cities, and two women**

Three brief points provide a starting place for any study of the Book of Revelation. Recognizing these will enable you to appreciate themes encompassing the entire book. Specifically, a trio of unequal dualities is interwoven into the account of John's book:

God (the Creator) and His kingdom versus Satan (created) and his pretender kingdom

The Great City versus the Holy City (the only two cities ever in view in the big picture)

The Great Prostitute versus the Woman clothed with Sun, also called the Bride

## **Revelation – Contrast with Genesis, Completion of Genesis**

Revelation is fittingly the end of our Bible. In this book God wraps up a story line that began in the first book of the Bible. Genesis begins with God, who inhabited eternity past. It also features a creation of God that was "good," meaning perfect, but it doesn't stay that way. Sin comes into the scene, spurred by the Serpent, that fallen angel, who seeks to deceive all humankind. Humanity falls into sin, a state demanding one result – death. This turn of events did not surprise God. He had a plan in place, one He announces from the start, a Savior would come to the human race. From the beginning God's plan included redeeming a people for Him.

Revelation makes clearly all this was God's plan from the start. God wanted us to know He had, and has, a plan that He is working out. First, recognize that it's all about Him. The secondary, yet significant, theme is the Bride of Christ, the people He is saving. In this account we see God's constant protection of His people in contrast to His continuing judgment of the Prostitute (all who are not the Bride). Third, the book makes clear that an end is coming. While circumstances might look bad, and be bad, and possibly grow worse, there is an end. God calls His people to persevere and overcome to the end. Indeed, God enables them to do so. He makes holy all who endure, each never to sin again, now robed in Christ's righteousness forever.

In the end, God destroys all wickedness including all created item still tainted by sin. What remains was His plan from the beginning. Without question, the always existing uncreated God is there forever. The Holy angels, who stayed loyal to God, continue to serve in His presence. And with God forever is His church, the entirety of the one people He set about to save. For their benefit He fashions a new heavens and earth – paradise restored. God's plan for history is complete and eternity is just beginning. In the presence and protection of God His people live with Him for eternity. The story that began in Genesis ends on a triumphant note.



These days people want to take the Book of Genesis, especially the first few chapters, as being figurative, where there's no immediate reasons of context to do so. They choose this route because they believe it a necessary means to resolve some of what modern science claims to be the source and method of our origins. In contrast, the Book of Revelation clearly shows within its context that John was using looks-like statements and representative language to portray literal characters and events. The western church's majority view, of the past century or so, has been to try to force an excessively literal view on this final book.

This study of Revelation follows where the text leads. John, though speaking of literal events and personages unquestionably does so with figurative language – to interpret it otherwise is to go against the text itself. Any study of the Book of Genesis deserves the same respect, but I must leave that as the subject of another work.

## **Revelation – Representative or Descriptive Names and Titles**

### **God**

#### **The Father**

Alpha and Omega  
Beginning and the End  
Father (the Heavenly Father)

#### **The Son (Jesus)**

Alpha and Omega  
Beginning and the End  
Son of Man  
Son of God  
Lamb (who was slain)  
Male child  
Faithful and True  
Word of God  
Rider, on a white horse

#### **The Holy Spirit**

The Spirit  
Seven spirits of God (The sevenfold or perfect) Spirit

## **God's Called Out Ones (Church or Assembly)**

Seven Churches – Literal churches in the Roman province of Asia, each selected to be representative of all churches from the time of Jesus until his return.

Seven Golden Lampstands

Two Olive Trees – The entire church, Jew and Gentile

Two Lampstands – See Two Olive Trees

Two Witnesses – See the Two Olive Trees

Woman Clothed with the Sun – God's church

Sealed of God – A spiritual mark upon all believers

The Bride (His Bride) – The entirety of the church; see the Holy City

New Jerusalem – All believers are eternally citizens in the presence of God.

City of God; the New Jerusalem

Holy City; the New Jerusalem

Twenty-Four Elders – Representative of God's entire church Jew and Gentile.

Paradise of God – The new heaven and new earth, paradise restored; eternal home of God's church.

144,000 – Representative of the eternal twelve tribes of spiritual Israel (12 x 12,000); the entirety of God's true church; the sealed of God.

Multitude no one could count – the 144,000; the entirety of God's church.

They who come out of the Great Tribulation – the 144,000; the entirety of God's church.

Souls under the altar – Believers who have died for Jesus and are awaiting God to avenge them (those still crying out in prayer)

## **God's Angels or Messengers**

Angel – Likely human in regards to the literal seven churches. All additional passages contextually show them to be supernatural beings, all originally in service to God; some now in service to Satan (see Demonic Beings).

Four living creatures – Holy angelic beings in the presence of God

Michael – the archangel

## **Satan's Domain and Denizens**

Nicolaitans – Those having recognizably ungodly practices and doctrine.

Synagogue of Satan – Those who oppose and persecute the true church of God.

Jezebel – Usurper, false prophetess and sexually immoral; a type of the Great Prostitute

Balaam, followers of – Compromisers leading others into wickedness

Satan's Throne, place of – The world; see the Great City  
The Great City – The fallen world (in contrast to the City of God or New Jerusalem, or Holy City)  
Babylon – See the Great City  
The Great Prostitute – See the Great City  
Babylon the Great – See the Great City  
Outer Court – The world, Satan's domain.  
Sodom and Egypt – See the Great City  
Sea (beast comes out of) – Peoples of the Earth  
Earth (beast comes out of) – Peoples of the Earth  
Many Waters – Peoples of the Earth (peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages)  
Mark(ed) of the Beast – A spiritual mark on unbelievers (in contrast to the Seal of God)  
Gog and Magog – The people of the earth  
Beast, First – Empire (Daniel's last beast, fragmented remnant of the Roman Empire); exercises the Dragon's authority.  
Beast, Second – Empire, arises in time of the first beast of Revelation and works with it.  
Beast out of the Sea; the First Beast  
Beast out of the Earth; the Second Beast  
False Prophet – The Second Beast

### **Demonic Beings (Fallen Angels)**

Locusts – Demons  
Red Dragon – Satan, the Devil, the Ancient Serpent  
The (Ancient) Serpent – The Serpent of the Garden of Eden in Genesis; the Red Dragon  
Devil – The Accuser; the Red Dragon  
Satan – The Adversary; the Red Dragon  
Stars of the sky (as affected by the Dragon) – Fallen angels (demons).  
(The Dragon's) angels – Demons

### **Present Dwelling Place and Immediate Presence God**

Temple of God  
Throne (in heaven) – The place where God rules and judges  
Altar (in heaven) – Altar of Incense; where God hears the prayers of the saints in heaven  
Mount Zion  
Heaven

## **God's plan for the ages**

Seven Sealed Scroll

### **God's means for executing his plan for the ages**

White Horse and Rider – Gospel of Jesus Christ

Little Scroll – The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Fiery Red Horse and Rider - Wars

Black Horse and Rider - Famine and Pestilence

Pale (Green) Horse and Rider – Death

Golden Bowls Full of Incense – Prayers of the Saints

### **God's means of restraining wicked spiritual beings**

Abyss – A temporary holding place for some especially wicked and rebellious fallen angels (Satan/demons).

### **God's remaining timeframe for his church**

Great Tribulation – The whole tribulation, spanning from the time of Jesus until His return

42 months; the Great Tribulation

Time, Times, and Half a Time; the Great Tribulation

1,260 Days; the Great Tribulation

### **God's timeframe for temporarily restraining Satan and wickedness**

1000 years – a period spanning all or most of the Great Tribulation

Euphrates – Boundary between God's people and the nations

### **God's Day of Wrath or Judgment**

Bowls of Wrath, Seven – The Final Outpouring of God's Wrath on Satan's kingdom

Last Plagues, Seven – See the Bowls of Wrath

### **Final Battle**

Armageddon – final battle; God’s kingdom vs Satan’s kingdom  
 Battle of Gog and Magog – See Armageddon  
 Great Supper of God – See Armageddon

**Final Destination for the lost and rebellious and all wicked ideas**

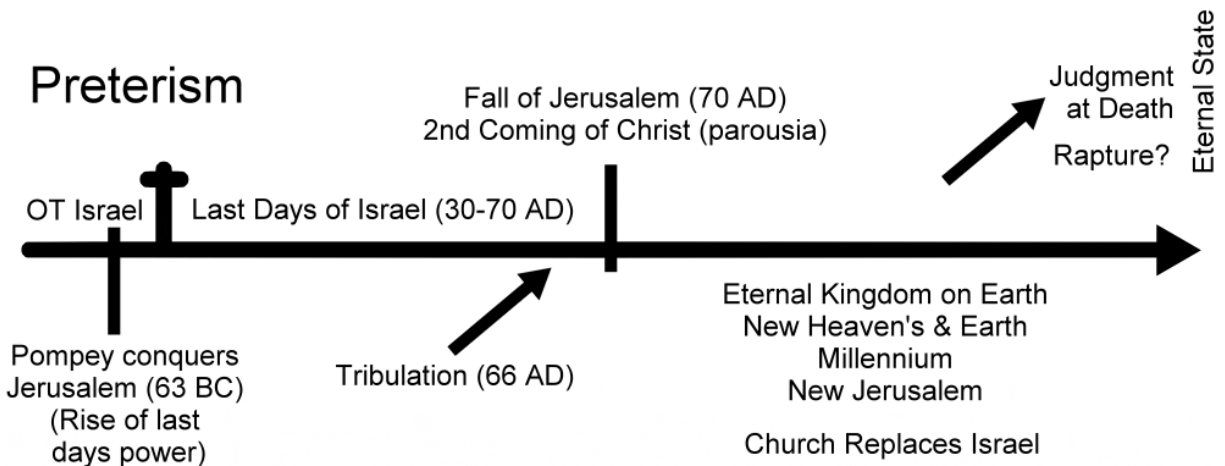
Lake of Fire – Final destination for death, beasts, Satan and all unsaved.

**The Outcome for the Saints**

Wedding of the Lamb – Whole church forever together with God

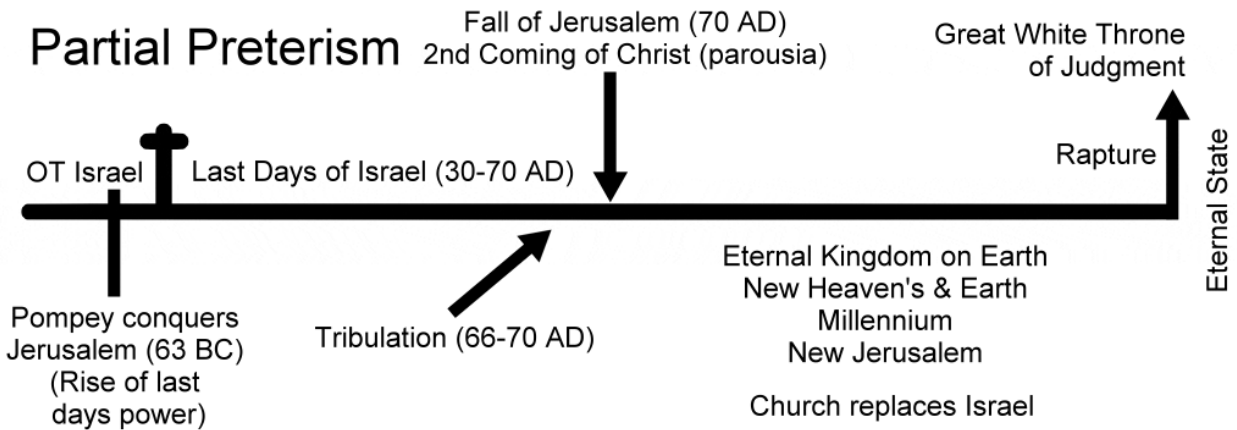
**Popular Views of Revelation**

The following charts and summaries are representative and are by no means exhaustive or exclusive. Within most portrayed positions there are various secondary beliefs potentially adjusting each of the charts. I can’t begin to cover each of those variations, nor are they necessary to this work.

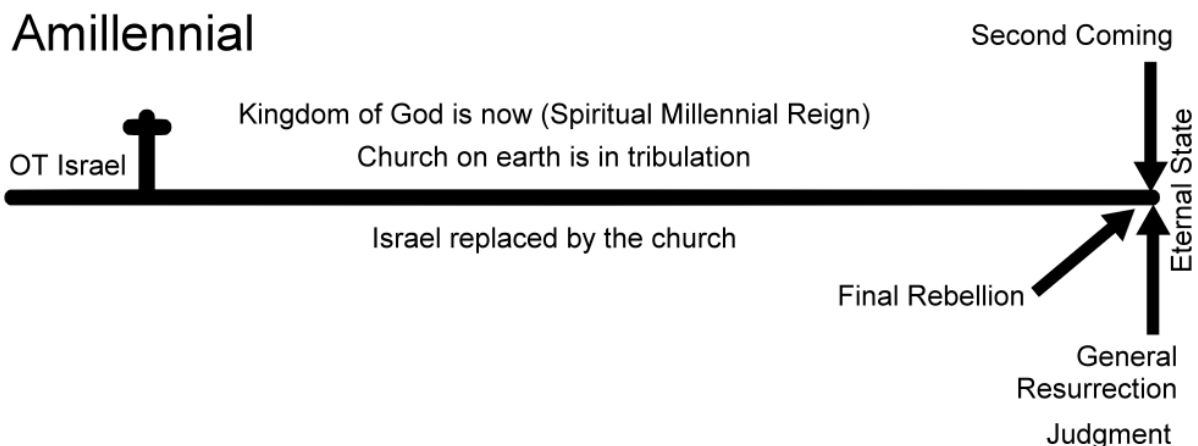


Preterism is an eschatological view holding all (or the vast majority) of last days references to refer to events which took place in the first century A.D. following the birth of Jesus. They associate most of those events with the period surrounding Jerusalem’s destruction (and the temple in 70). The word “Preterism” comes from the Latin word “praeter,” meaning “past” (or “praeterito,” meaning “the past”), as it holds past fulfillment of these prophecies. Specifically,

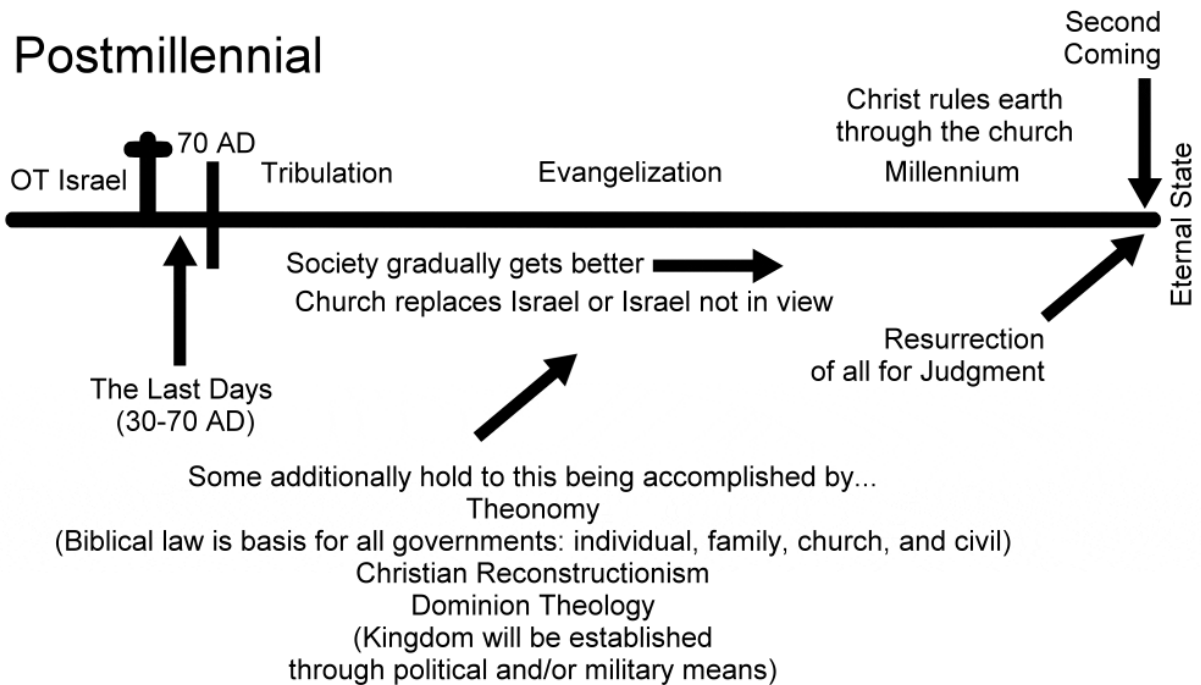
it interprets Revelation as having past or continuing fulfillment. Many Preterists are not true full Preterists, better represented by Partial Preterism (see next).



Partial Preterism finds fulfillment of most last days prophecies in the events up to and surrounding A.D. 70. It further holds that most of Revelation had past fulfillment, associating Babylon the Great (Revelation 17-18) with ancient pagan Rome or Jerusalem. Some adherents, separate the term “Last Days” from the “Last Day.” The last days refer to the last days of the Mosaic covenant, using 70 A.D. as a terminus. They view Jerusalem and the temple’s destruction as God’s judgment of the last days, a coming of Jesus Christ. In contrast, they consider the “Last Day” a future event. Only then, Jesus Christ’s final coming includes God’s resurrection of the just and unjust, plus the final judgment. Some partial Preterists accept the New Heavens and New Earth to be a literal recreation, as part of the everlasting state. My chart does not show this variant which replaces the covenantal (figurative) and continuing state of the present church on the chart. Partial Preterists commonly hold to a form of Amillennialism or postmillennialism.

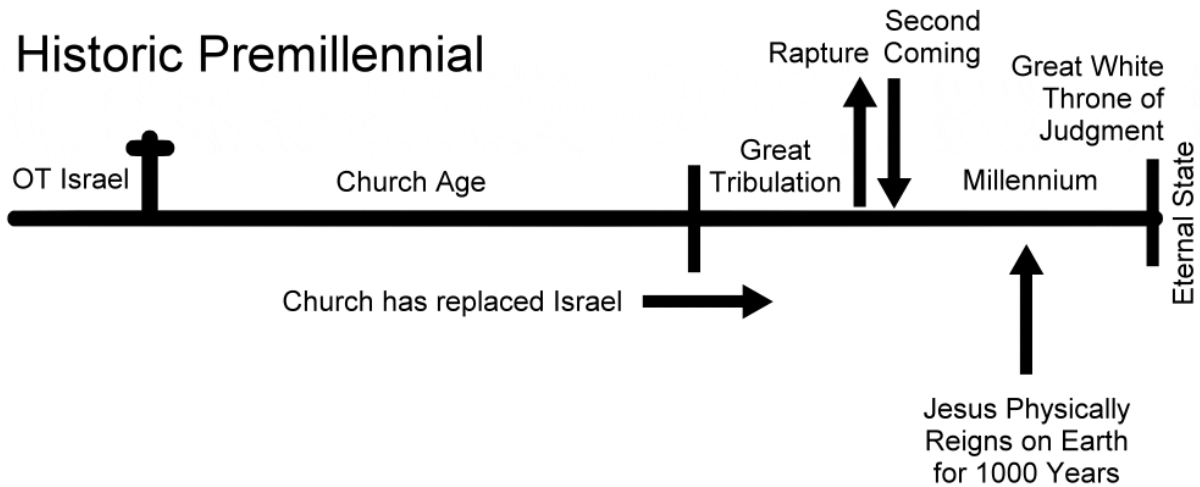


Amillennialism is an eschatological view holding that Christ now reigns through the Church. The “1000 years” of Revelation chapter twenty is a symbolic reference to the present time, spanning church history from Jesus until the end. The word “Amillennial” stems from Greek where “a” means “no.” This makes the title a negative “no millennial.” Therefore some prefer the term “realized millennialism” which becomes a positive statement of belief versus a negative. Amillennialists also hold that God bound Satan during this age, stopping him from preventing the spread of the gospel. Most Amillennialists hold to replacement theology (“supersessionism”), viewing Israel as the people of God in the Old Testament and the church as the people of God in the New Testament onward.



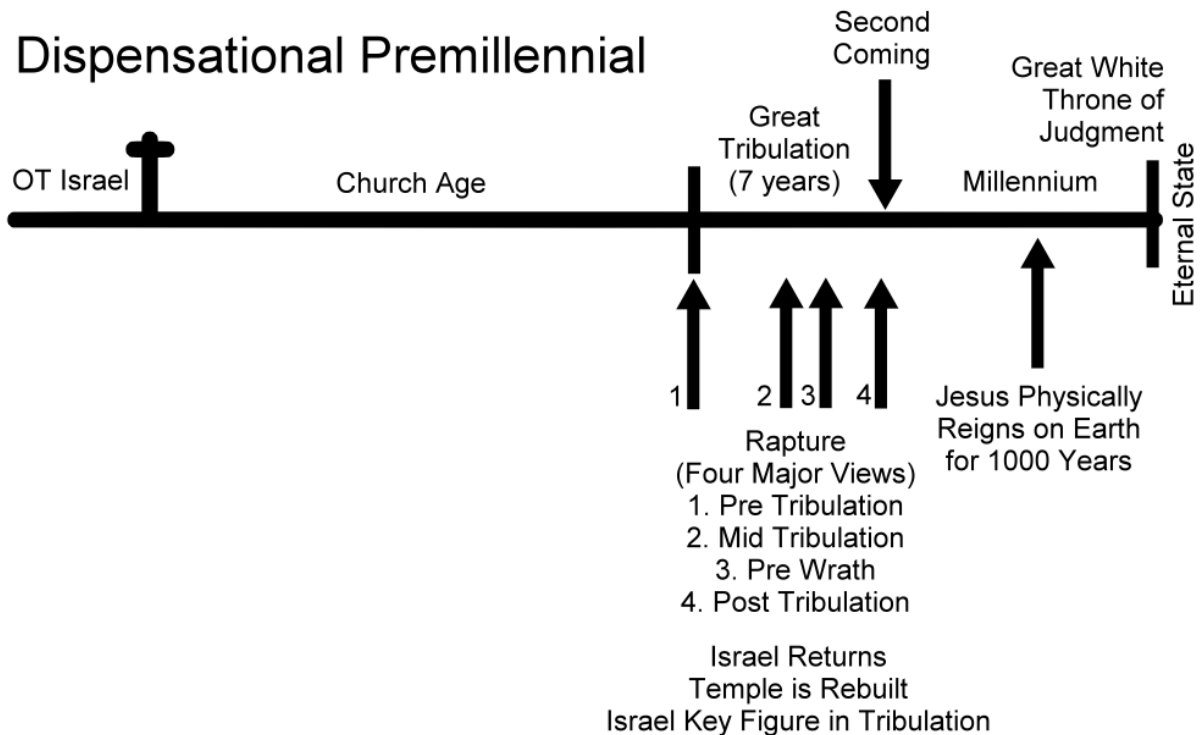
Postmillennialists hold the millennium as an era during which Christ reigns over the earth. The 1000 years does not need to be literal nor does there need to be a literal and earthly throne. God’s reign is through the gradual increase and spread of the Gospel. Evil continues during the Millennium, but gradually declines. The increasing influence of the gospel results in a more peaceful and prosperous world. Christ’s physical return, and the final everlasting state, comes only after Christianity has triumphed in the world.

## Historic Premillennial



The label "historic" distinguishes this from more recent forms of premillennial thought and highlights that many in the early church substantially held to this. It is post-tribulation premillennialism. It views the second coming of Jesus, the return of Jesus, as following the tribulation and before a thousand year reign on earth. Not every adherent agrees with the statement "the Church has replaced Israel." Others would claim "the Church was grafted into Israel and becomes part of true (spiritual) Israel."

## Dispensational Premillennial





Dispensational Premillennialism is a modern form of Premillennialism. Its earliest proponents were John Nelson Darby (lived 1800-1882 A.D.) and the Plymouth Brethren movement. Widespread circulation came through the popular (Cyrus) Scofield Reference Bible. In common with Historic Premillennialism they see the return of Jesus before a 1000-year reign on earth. When the second coming of Jesus occurs is the greatest difference, either before or during the Tribulation. Pre-Tribulation thought has been the predominate view and spread through many books and novels (including the Left Behind series). Dispensationalism hinges on their view of Israel, seeing Scriptures as sharply divided between the church and Israel, with even the New Testament having passages focused on national Israel versus the church. They hold that promises to Israel still await fulfillment, including a necessary future third temple in Jerusalem. They understand the church age as a spiritual parenthesis brought about by Jewish rejection of the Messiah by national Israel. Following the church age, God returns to His original plan, only then fulfilling all the promises they view as remaining for national Israel.

### **Biblical usage of Numbers and Numeric Symbolism**

Numbers, or numeric values, are commonplace throughout the Bible in the Old and New Testaments. Today we use numbers to describe literal quantities. In similar manner the authors of Scriptures reported factual quantities. Still, some numbers have no intent to be literal or represent a precise quantity. We sometimes round numbers for simplicity; sometimes ancient writers did the same. Some values are intentionally symbolic. Used symbolically, a number may still refer to a literal quantity but not always. With intent, the symbolic value conveys a sense beyond the literal number.

While symbolic use of numbers or quantities exists throughout the Bible, it reaches its peak in prophetic books and none greater than in the final book of Scriptures; the book of Revelation.

This study provides a basic understanding of the use of particular numbers in Scriptures as a whole and the Book of Revelation in specific. I'll leave it to others for a more exhaustive look at this subject. Since many use various terms for the study of numbers in Scriptures, for the record, let me say what this study isn't.

#1. This is not numerology. Numerology studies numbers, such as figures in a birth date, and their supposed influence on human affairs.

#2. This is not gematria (alt. gammatria), though it does include one scriptural example of this. Gematria is a cabbalistic (alt. Kabbalistic, Jewish mysticism) method of interpreting Scriptures

which substitutes a particular word for another word whose letters give the same numerical sum.

In fairness, more detail is required. Gematria is a Hebrew word adopted from a Greek word meaning “to reckon by numbers.” By the inter-testament period and onward, this practice had gained some following within Judaism. Immediately following the era of apostles, one Rabbi (Eliezer ben Jose the Galilean, writing around 130-160 AD) listed gematria as the 29<sup>th</sup> of 32 hermeneutical rules. While the extra-biblical Jewish books of the Talmud and Midrash use some gematria, it is far expanded and taken to extremes in the Kabbalah. Influence of this Jewish practice impacted some early church schools of thought. Irenaeus spends time (around 180) refuting some of the foolishness that stemmed from gematria in his work “Against Heresies” (see especially Book 1, Chapter 15).

Gematria has a fundamental problem. Regardless of patterns, likenesses, and perceived matches, the interpreter can embrace any wanted meaning. Believers, cults, and anyone with an agenda, readily misuse this ambiguity. This vagueness allowed a Roman graffiti artist to keep his lover’s name secret, while openly expressing his love for her. On the walls of ancient Pompeii he wrote “I love her whose number is 545.” Ignoring this, some current teachers embrace gematria as a legitimate form of interpretation.

This method of bible interpretation can almost randomly tie disparate and unrelated passages together. For example; one of God’s titles is Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). Take the Greek values for Alpha and Omega; they add up to 801. The Greek word “Creator” and “Dove” share this value of 801. Using gematria, they tie Romans 1:25 and Matthew 3:16 to those Revelation passages, solely because the first uses the Greek word for “Creator” and the second “Dove.”

A speculated example of gematria in Old Testament Scriptures comes from Genesis 14:14:

Genesis 14:14 When Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318 trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan. (NIV)

The given number of trained men happens to equal the value for the name Eliezer (1 + 30 + 10 + 70 + 7 + 200), mentioned a few verses later:

Genesis 15:2-3 But Abram said, "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram

said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."  
(NIV)

The imagined significance of this is boundless, with endless and subjective possibilities. In the entirety of Scriptures there is only one clear example intentionally employed gematria. The Apostle John penned this one instance in the book of Revelation:

Revelation 13:16-18 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. 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. (NIV)

Here the text clearly claims the 666 is the number of his name. This allows a general confirmation to the identity of this individual, but nothing specific. Merely having a value of 666 doesn't make anyone the beast of Revelation. The balance of the provided description becomes important and necessary. Only extra evidence combined with this gematria would enable identification of this entity. This presumes the author gave more information elsewhere to make such a specific identification, if that was his intent.

Foolish end-times speculation, related to gematria, includes:

A. The mark of the beast is "www." They provide the following method as their proof. The Hebrew letter Vav, with a numeric value of 6, is the equivalent to our "w." Therefore they claim www is 666. This is not correct or applicable to Revelation 13:16-18 for two reasons. The value of a name or word is the combined sum of the letters, not merely positioning them side-by-side. The abbreviation "www" has a correct value of 18. Many combinations do add up to 666. Not this one. Second, verse 17 clearly says that it is the number of a "name" and "www" is not a name. This is foolish and unscriptural speculation.

B. Barack Hussein Obama = 666. They got this from numbering his name in this fashion:

BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA  
123456 1234561 23456

A technique like this is not gematria; rather it is a random and inconsistent number pattern. Such methods easily arrive at the same value of 666 for other major individuals including Ronald Wilson Reagan.

C. One method created the following pattern: A=6; B=12; C=18, D=24, continuing in steps of six for the next letters, until: Z=156. With this table, "COMPUTER" makes 666:  $18+90+78+96+126+120+30+108 = 666$ . Many combinations arrive at 666 using the same chart, including "NEW YORK" and "DEUTSCHLAND".

D. The full name of Bill Gates, of Microsoft fame, is William Henry Gates III. This method and calculation uses his common identification of Bill Gates (III). By converting the letters of his name into their ASCII values (lowercase letters), and by adding 3, we get 666. The formula:  $b(66) + l(73) + l(76) + l(76) + g(71) + a(65) + t(84) + e(69) + s(83) + III(3) = 666$ .

Multitudes of such speculations are in circulation (try a web search), all equally foolish and without merit.

Many scholars make claims similar to this: "Caesar Nero (or as typically written Nero Caesar) was commonly known to have a name value of 666." They claim this was a subtle and veiled way of identifying this specific Caesar. Preterists employ such arguments because it makes at least a portion of the book of Revelation to be about first century events and perhaps history and not prophecy. Nero ruled from 54-68 A.D. in the middle of the first century. Revelation, by most signs, dates to around 95-96 A.D., written toward the end of the first century.

Adding to their Nero assumptions; a few early manuscripts have a variant to the 666 number. In these manuscripts of Revelation the number reads 616.

Manuscripts having this variant include: Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C04, circa 450 A.D.), the Old Latin version of Tyconius, an ancient Armenian Lectionary (Conybaere or Conybeare), and Greek Papyrus 115 (circa 225-275). The Codex Ephraemi even has the number 616 written out as words (specifically "six hundred and sixteen") and not merely as letters used for numbers (literally "616"). Irenaeus (who died in 202 A.D.) affirmed the number should read 666, but also reported that he knew of several scribal errors of the number including 616. [I provided a lengthy excerpt of his comments on this in my remarks on Revelation 13:18. Jerome mentioned one "probable solution" identifying Rome, or the Latins, as the last kingdom seen by Daniel, but recognized it as one of many possibilities. "Lateinos" in Greek:  $30+1+300+5+10+50+70+200=666$ ]. By the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, Jerome (who lived circa 347-420 AD) had adopted the 616 value. He believed 666 was an intentional substitute for 616 as an analogy with 888 (gematria for "Jesus" in Greek), or because it was a "triangular number," a sum of the first 36 numbers ( $1+2+3+4+5... +36=666$ ).

Those who claim “Nero Caesar” to be what the number 666 was pointing to cite the 616 as added proof. In Greek, Nero Caesar is the equivalent of “Neron Kaisar.” In Latin it’s “Nero Kaisar.” The first converts to 666, the second converts to 616. Having manuscripts with alternate values shows that someone may have “corrected,” or tried to clarify, a manuscript. The change might have resulted from later supposition over the historic figure John was referencing. Many “maybes” fuel this speculation. Spoiler alert: Manuscript evidence is inconclusive whether 616 or 666 is the original. This becomes one of the rare times we cannot clearly deduce the original from available textual evidence.

This speculation has a primary problem. To arrive at 666 or 616 they take the Greek or Latin spellings of Nero Caesar but then use Hebrew values for the letters. If John was writing a Greek book to a predominately Greek audience, the Gematria would logical be using Greek values. Besides, I found no evidence the early church recognized Nero in this number at all. It wasn’t until the 1830s that some German scholars began to promote this idea. (Commodianus, who lived circa 200-270 A.D., did try to associate a resurrected Nero, “raised up from hell,” with the second beast of Revelation – see his “The Instructions of Commodianus.” Yet this ancient association had no basis in gematria or the values of 666 or 616).

Speculation over what language to use for these gematria values has long existed. Victorinus was the earliest commentary writer on the Book of Revelation in the west (writing in the middle to late third century). He was a Latin writer, so this influenced his understanding:

For as far as belongs to the Greek letters, they fill up this number and name; which name if you wish to turn into Latin, it is understood by the antiphrase DiClux, which letters are reckoned in this manner: since D figures five hundred, I one, C a hundred, L fifty, V five, X ten,-which by the reckoning up of the letters makes similarly six hundred and sixty-six, that is, what in Greek gives teitan, to wit, what in Latin is called DiClux; by which name, expressed by anti-phrases, we understand Antichrist, who, although he be cut off from the supernal light, and deprived thereof, yet transforms himself into an angel of light, daring to call himself light. (Victorinus, Commentary on the Apocalypse, Chapter 13)

Other interesting gematria speculations in the New Testament include:

John 21:4-11 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. 6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large

number of fish. 7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. 10 Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." 11 Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. (NIV)

The fish in Greek is "ixthus" or "ichthys." The five Greek letters that comprise this word ("ΙΧΘΥΣ") add up to 1224, which is 8 x 153. Finding the 153 is significant (from verse 11), for those seeking it.

One final example of New Testament gematria speculation has an Old Testament tie-in:

Galatians 3:17 What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. (NIV)

Exodus 12:40 Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. (NIV)

The Greek word for "law," "nomos," has a gematria of 430. Israel received the law 430 years after they were in Egypt. The match of these two numbers is held to be significant, as usual, in some vague manner. Gematria speculation continues, filling volumes, and nothing is proven apart from opinion.

#3. This is not Bible codes: A belief there are secret messages hidden throughout patterns found in Scriptures. Many books exist to refute this imaginative and speculative method.

#4. This is not isopsephy (pronounced 'aiso-sefi'): Adding up the numerical values of the letters in a word to form a single number.

#5. This is not theomatics: A numerological study of the Greek and Hebrew, based on gematria and isopsephia, to prove the direct intervention of God in the writing of Scriptures.

Though sometimes mistakenly referred to by the previous terms, simply put, the following is merely a study on the uses of numbers in Scriptures. The Bible writers did not do this to be

secretive or hidden. Our view of these numbers must echo how the original readers interpreted them. [A modern example would be how someone in North America would commonly understand Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>. Yes, it is a literal day. Yet, any hearing this date automatically add extra significance, especially by those who are superstitious].

### **Three uses of numbers in Scriptures**

#### **- Literal (conventional specific and rounded)**

The Bible uses numbers in their literal sense to account for quantities of items and people throughout the pages of Scriptures. Notably God starts off the Bible by quantifying the days of Creation. Today, many claim this is nonliteral, or figurative. But nothing within the text, word-usage, or context says the author intended anything other than a literal understanding of these seven days of Creation.

The Bible regularly uses numbers to express literal quantities. Examples include: the number of daughters of Laban (two, Genesis 29:6), the number of years Jacob served for Rachel (seven, Genesis 29:18, 20), and the number of female goats Jacob presented Esau (200, Genesis 32:14).

Casual use of rounded values existed, even as we do today. For example: the circumference and diameter of Solomon's bronze sea (1 Kings 7:23 and 2 Chronicles 4:2). The text uses rounded numbers (which makes a calculated PI to only be a rounded 3, still a valid approximation). The census lists of Israel in Numbers chapter 1 are all rounded to the nearest hundred. In fact, Moses even uses a round number (600,000) when speaking to God about the people (Numbers 11:21) though he knew and recorded a more specific number (603,550) a few chapters earlier (Numbers 2:32).

Round number represent literal, specific, and finite groups. Estimating or making the value memorable through rounding does not, in any way, detract from this. We commonly do the same today. I might say call it a decade when in reality it has been 9 years and 3 months; my intent is to still suggest a literal passage of time.

#### **- Rhetorical (for style or effect)**

Occasionally numbers appear as a literary device within some Bible passages. Again, this is something we casually do today. For example, I might say something similar to, "I'll give you a thought or two!" I then might only give one thought, or perhaps three thoughts. My statement

is merely to give emphasis, showing that I strongly have an opinion I want to express. In such cases there is no intent for symbolic meaning or to represent literal amounts.

The book of Proverbs provides excellent example of a literary practice known as “X, X+1 parallelism”...

Proverbs 30:15b "There are three things that are never satisfied, four that never say, 'Enough!': (NIV)

Proverbs 30:18 "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: (NIV)

Proverbs 30:21 "Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: (NIV)

Proverbs 30:29 "There are three things that are stately in their stride, four that move with stately bearing: (NIV)

In each of these cases the author uses the numerical statement to intensify his expressed thought. Immediately following the “three to four things” statement of emphasis, the Hebrew writer then gives the four examples he had in mind. Another Biblical writer, using this style of emphasis, did so in a slightly different fashion.

Amos 1:3 This is what the Lord says: "For three sins of Damascus, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. (NIV)

Amos 1:6 This is what the Lord says: "For three sins of Gaza, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. (NIV)

Amos 1:9 This is what the Lord says: "For three sins of Tyre, even for four, I will not turn back [my wrath]. (NIV, see also Amos 1:11; 1:13; 2:1; 2:4; 2:6)

Amos has no intent to express the exact number of grievances against each nation or cited entity. The “three to four” expression is merely to intensify or stress the thought. As few as one example is then given. Yet, it does imply extra examples – there are many other unnamed sins.



Alphabetical numbering of a text is a related rhetorical form that also creates a progressive structuring of the text. The best examples come from Psalms. Psalm 119 is visibly twenty-two stanzas, one each for every letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The increasing numbering of the letters imparts the idea of a progression from the beginning to the end (A-Z) on his topic.

### **- Symbolic.**

Imagine reading a line of a modern text and seeing “IV” as part of a sentence. You may read it is being an abbreviation for “intravenous therapy” or, less likely, the Roman numerals meaning “four.” Other possibilities exist. The “I” could represent a pronoun referring to author or it could also represent the number “1.” On older typewriters a lowercase “l” could also represent the numeric value of 1. Nowadays it has become increasingly rare to use anything but numeric characters when expressing numeric values.

Unlike our modern practice, ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, commonly used letters to represent numbers. For example, the first letter of the Greek alphabet represented “1”, Beta “2”, Iota “10”, Pi “80” and Sigma “200.”

Similar to our use of Roman numerals in our recent past, context alone identifies whether the Greek, Hebrew or Aramaic letters represent numbers or letters. The ancients recognized a side effect of this numbering. Every word results in a numeric value even if there was no original intent. For example, the Greek word for “world (kosmos)” has a value of 600. Equally, all personal names have a representative numeric value. For example, Jesus in Greek has a numeric sum of 888.

People today try to read symbolism into all kinds of objects, with various forms of mysticism rooted in such a belief. The same took place even in ancient times, sometimes needing complex calculations, or secret knowledge, mysticism, and word games. Number symbolism in the Bible is typically different and visibly recognizable. The text usually explains the symbolism through common use or sometimes directly clarifies it. But being recognizable includes using numerical ideas common to the cultures of their time. Extra-biblical or near-eastern period literature, having the same potential readership, commonly features some of these uses of numbers. Commonplace use proves no intent to hide the symbolism; rather it has known public meaning.

Symbolic use of numbers includes *Hyperbole* (an extravagant but nonliteral figure of speech). Its occasional use in Scriptures signals the vastness of a number. For example:

Daniel 7:10b Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. (NIV)

Daniel did not intend for his readers to add up these numbers to arrive at a literal value. Rather, the goal was to express a vast and innumerable multitude, “hosts” as another text would describe the same scene (e.g. 1 Kings 22:19). Other hyperbolic examples include Psalms 68:17, Hebrew 12:22, Jude 14, and Revelation 5:11.

While many specific numbers are used symbolically (7, 10, 12, etc.,) not every use of that number is symbolic. Typically, the context makes clear the intent but seemingly not always. In a few Scriptural cases symbolic or literal use remains under debate. Perhaps the greatest example of this is Revelation 20:1-6, about a thousand year reign of Christ. The nature of this number drives a continuing controversy and division among those studying eschatology. Dispensationalists and Amillennialists best show the gap. One holds to a literal thousand-year reign and the other to a figurative thousand year period. While there is no perfect formula or method for resolving every disputed passage (which helps explain why they remain disputed), a few principles should direct the reader.

- 1) Consider the genre of literature in that particular passage. Poetic and apocalyptic passages may use literal values but they are typically more open to using many other types.
- 2) Is the surrounding passage figurative? Numbers found in a figurative passage are more likely figurative.
- 3) Is the number used symbolically elsewhere in Scriptures? Numbers used symbolically in one place in Scriptures often find similar use elsewhere in the Bible. This likelihood increases when employed within the same letter, or book, or specific author.
- 4) Does the specific author commonly use that number (or numbers in general) in a symbolic way. If so, consistency stresses the first consideration continues to be symbolic, unless immediate context shows otherwise.

## **Specifics**

The following examination of specific values is not exhaustive; rather these examples provide a summary and guideline for further study.

### **One (1)**

Many studies of number symbolism quickly start with higher values than one. Yet, within common use, it represents more than a mere single count. The Hebrew word for one is “echad” or “ehad,” and is pronounced “eck-awd”. A simplified definition of this Hebrew word stresses both the value and its symbolism:

A numerical adjective meaning one, first, once, altogether, only, the same.

Greek has multiple words which translate as “one,” for example “heis” and “mia”. Within their various uses all the meanings encompassed in the Hebrew word are still in view. Overall, the number one represents unity and primacy (i.e. first), plus it excludes difference. In passages where this representative meaning is part of the sense and understanding of the text, use of the number can (and typically does) simultaneously express the literal numerical quantity of one.

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (NIV, also Malachi 2:15)

Genesis 11:1, 6 Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. ... 6 The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. (NIV)

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. (NIV)

Ezekiel 34:23 I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. (NIV)

Zechariah 14:9 And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one. (KJV)

Matthew 23:8-10 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. (NIV)

John 10:30 I and the Father are one." (NIV)

Romans 12:5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (NIV)

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit. (ESV)

Ephesians 4:4-6 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (ESV)

## Two (2)

In contrast to the unity of “1,” the number two represents “another.” The extra emerges to complement or oppose the first. Unlike “1,” two affirms a difference or a division in some manner. The number two can reveal opposing or matching objects or ideas: first, a contrast (or division) and, second, agreement or unity (“both”; by two that are different).

Contrasts of two fill the Bible, for example:

- Light and Dark (Luke 11:35-36; John 12:35; Romans 2:19; Isaiah 50:10)
- First Adam, Last Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22, 45)
- Old Covenant, New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-32; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:8-9, 9:15)
- Jacob, Esau (Romans 9:13; Malachi 1:2-3)
- The Potter’s two vessels (Romans 9:21)
- Old Creation, New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)
- Two ways (Matthew 7:13 “broad” or “narrow” road)
- God vs. Man (Romans 3:4 “Let God be true, and every man a liar.”)

Unity of two, who are different, is part of marriage:

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. (NIV)

Unity extends beyond marriage, as expressed by Amos...

Amos 3:3 Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? (NIV)

Two different people agreeing are the minimum basis for judicial decisions, both in the Old Testament Law and in the church.

John 8:17 In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. (NIV, see also Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; Hebrews 10:28)

A last example, in the words of Jesus, pictures the twofold law of God, which is in complete unity even though each command deals with seemingly different matters (i.e. Relationship with God and relationship with humankind).

Matthew 22:37-40 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (NIV)

Other significant “twos” include:

- Jesus’ dual nature: Divine and Human (Fully God, Fully man. John 5:25, 27)
- Two types of people: Sheep and Goats (Matthew 25:32-33)
- Two Covenants (Testaments): Old and New (Luke 22:20; 2 Corinthians 3:6, 14)
- Two Ages: Present age and the age to come. (Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30)

### **Three (3)**

In the ancient Near East the number three already had an association with the sacred, apart from Judaism. Even the pagans saw significance in a number that had a beginning, middle, and end, which they felt represented an all-inclusive and ordered whole. Their common view of the universe was also threefold: underworld, earth, heaven. Further, the family unit was a foundation of early society, also a threefold unit: father, mother, and children.

Biblically, the number three represents divine perfection and completion. Only seven finds greater symbolic use than three in Scriptures.

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Three is the first of four perfect numbers.

- Three represents divine perfection and completion

- Seven shows spiritual perfection and completion
- Ten stands for ordinal perfection
- Twelve symbolizes governmental perfection.

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Threes appear in many ways throughout the Bible...

- God's uncreated attributes: Omniscient, Omnipresent, and Omnipotent
- God's uncreated and unified existence: Father, Son & Holy Spirit
- God's uncreated eternalness: Was, Is, Is to Come (Revelation 1:4; Revelation 4:8) or Yesterday, Today, Forever (Hebrews 13:8)
- God's created framework of time: Past, Present, Future
- God's created limits of human action: Thought, Word, and Deed
- God's created special creation: (Humans) Body, Soul & Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

Consider the threefold priestly blessing given in the Old Testament...

Numbers 6:23-27 "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 24 ""The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." ' 27 "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." (NIV)

This blessing has three parts, together representing complete and divine perfection. It is God's perfect blessing and it is God's complete blessing. It also represents God's triune name.

Other threes in Scriptures, directly about God, include:

- God's tri-fold Holiness (Jesus too!): holy, holy, holy (Revelation 4:8; Isaiah 6:3)
- Jesus' threefold office: prophet, priest, king.
- Jesus' heavenly identity: the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth (Revelation 1:5)
- Jesus' identity as savior: the way, the truth, the life (John 14:6)

Threes don't have to reference God specifically. Acts of God (direct or indirect) come in threes, suggesting perfect or complete action. Examples abound in the Book of Revelation:

- Three angels – Revelation 8:13
- Three plagues (fire, smoke, sulfur) – Revelation 9:18
- Three evil spirits – Revelation 16:13 (God sent these three spirits, released by the actions of the sixth angel acting on God’s behalf.)
- City split into three parts – Revelation 16:19
- Three gates (on each side of the city) – Revelation 21:13

This example of the use of “three” reveals a tri-part portion of God’s means of perfecting humankind:

- The excellent or better way (1 Corinthians 12:31): faith, hope, love (2 Corinthians 13:13)

In each of the preceding, though including symbolic use of the number three, it does not exclude the passage from referencing three literal objects, ideas, or beings.

Scriptures include many threefold signs. Consider these New Testament examples:

Matthew 26:34 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." (NIV)

Acts 10:11-16 [Peter] saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. 12 It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air. 13 Then a voice told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." 14 "Surely not, Lord!" Peter replied. "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." 15 The voice spoke to him a second time, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." 16 This happened three times, and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven. (NIV)

Jesus’ temptation by the devil (Matthew 4:1-11)

This style of threefold sign appears in the Old Testament, including Samuel’s call by God (1 Samuel 3:2-10) and Elijah’s raising a boy to life (1 Kings 17:21). A sign given in the Old Testament, yet fulfilled in the New is also worth examining. The greatest sign ever given, that Jesus personally applied to his death, burial, and resurrection, also used a value of three. Consider the sign of Jonah:

Jonah 1:17 But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights. (NIV)

Matthew 12:39-40 [Jesus] answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 40 For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (NIV)

This "three" represented a perfect and complete action by God, while simultaneously standing for a literal three days and nights as God planned and carried out.

Scattered throughout Scriptures are a host of triple references on the passage of time. These include three days, three months, three years and three different times (Genesis 40:12,18; Exodus 2:2; 10:22; 2 Samuel 24:13; Isaiah 20:3; Jonah 1:17; Matthew 15:32; Luke 2:46; 13:7; Acts 9:9; 2 Corinthians 12:8)

Finally, a phrase or word thrice repeated was also a method of expressing the highest degree (a superlative) in ancient times. This adds further meaning to passages such as Isaiah 6:3. The thrice repeated holy also expresses holy, holier, and holiest.

#### **Four (4)**

Four was a sacred number in many ancient cultures, including the pagan nations of the Near East. A primary association was direction, notably the cardinal points of the compass. Even thousands of years before Christ there are various references to the entire earth using phrases such as "the four corners" or "the four quarters."

Biblical use is similar, yet focused on God. The number four represents God's creation and all created objects. Fourfold illustration commonly describe earthly creation and items of this world. Yet, reference to created beings in the presence of God in heaven also employ similar.

Key examples of the number four include:

- Four seasons (Genesis 8:22)
- Four living creatures (Revelation 4:6; 4:8; 5:6; 5:8; 5:14; 6:1; 6:6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4)
- Four angelic/living creatures (Ezekiel 1:1-26; 10:9-14, 21; Revelation 4:6; 5:6,8,14; 6:1; 15:7; 19:4)
- Four angels (Revelation 7:1-2; 9:14; 9:15)
- Four corners of the earth (Revelation 7:1; 20:8; Ezekiel 7:2; Isaiah 11:12)



- Four winds (Revelation 7:1; Jeremiah 49:36; Ezekiel 37:9; Matthew 24:31)

The number “4” appears often in apocalyptic literature, perhaps because it deals so much with God’s final plan for His creation. Added “fours” found in the book of Revelation include:

- Tribe, Language, People and nation” (5:9)
- Praise, Honor, Glory and Power” (5:13)
- Sword, Famine, Disease and Wild Beasts” (6:8) [See also Ezekiel 14:21; Jeremiah 15:3]
- Peals of thunder, Rumbblings, Flashes of lightning and an Earthquake” (8:5; 16:18)
- Murders, Witchcraft, Fornication, and Thefts” (9:21)
- Peoples, Nations, Languages and Kings” (10:11)
- Harps, Musicians, Flutists and Trumpeters” (18:22)

In summary, four represents God's creation – as He made it and how it became. (The phrase “the one who lives forever and ever” directly highlights God’s uncreated nature and rule over His creation. Not coincidentally the phrase appears four times in the book of Revelation. See Revelation 4:9, 10; 10:6; 15:7).

Consider the fourfold terminology the Bible uses to describe the divisions of peoples on the earth. While the order and wording varies, the fourfold description remains.

#### Old Testament

- Territories, clans, nations, language. (Genesis 10:5)
- Clans, languages, territories, nations. (Genesis 10:20)
- Clans (KJV families OT:4940), languages (OT:3956), territories (KJV lands OT:776), nations (OT:1471). (Genesis 10:31)

#### Revelation (NT)

- Tribe, language, people, nation. (Revelation 5:9)
- Nation (NT:1484), tribe (KJV “kindreds” NT:5443), people (NT:2992), language (NT:1100). (Revelation 7:9)
- People, nations, languages, kings (Revelation 10:11)
- People, tribe, language, nation (Revelation 11:9)
- Tribe, people, language, nation (Revelation 13:7)

- Nation, tribe, language, people (Revelation 14:6)
- People, multitudes, nations, languages (Revelation 17:15)

Additional fours representing creation:

- Four kinds of flesh: man, animals, birds, fish (1 Corinthians 15:39)
- Four soils of man: path, rocky, thorns, good (Matthew 13:1-23)
- The contrast of old creation vs new creation of man (1 Corinthians 15:42-44)
  - perishable --> imperishable
  - dishonor --> glory
  - weakness --> power
  - natural body --> spiritual body.

More interesting fours in Scriptures:

- The four names of Satan in Revelation (Revelation 20:2).
  - Dragon
  - Ancient serpent
  - The devil
  - Satan
- The scope of our suffering (2 Corinthians 4:8-9)
  - Hard pressed, but not crushed
  - Perplexed, but not in despair
  - Persecuted, but not forsaken
  - Struck down, but not destroyed
- Judah was the 4<sup>th</sup> born (Genesis 35:23; Exodus 1:2), from which the Son of man would be a descendant (Genesis 49:10).
- Eve, the “mother of all the living (Genesis 3:20)”, is only mentioned by name four times through the Bible:
  - Genesis 3:20
  - Genesis 4:1
  - 2 Corinthians 11:3
  - 1 Timothy 2:13

## Six (6)

Six does not have any significant symbolic role in Scriptures. At most its position next to a significant number, specifically 7, perhaps suggests some significance by association. For example, in six days God created everything, but it was the seventh He rested (Genesis 1:1-2:3) and founded a Sabbath's rest. Some then try to associate six symbolically with man (misusing Revelation 13:18). Yet this does not find widespread use or uniform example throughout Scriptures (and the number in view in Revelation 13:18 is not about 6).

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Seven is the second of four perfect numbers.

- Three represents divine perfection and completion
  - Seven shows spiritual perfection and completion
  - Ten stands for ordinal perfection
  - Twelve symbolizes governmental perfection.
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## Seven (7)

Seven is a key number throughout Scriptures. Widespread use, in over five hundred passages employing a variation of this number, testifies to its significance.

Symbolic significance for the number seven didn't start with the Bible – most Semitic cultures already considered it a sacred number (e.g. even non-Israelite Balaam found significance in seven. See Numbers 23:1, 14, 29). Scholars continue to debate “Why?” One probable answer rests in ancient division of lunar months into four seven day weeks. Biblically, God set apart seven in the opening creation account. On this seventh day He rested when His creation was complete (Genesis 2:2). It is likely that later worldwide traditions recognizing a seven-day week came from a passed-on knowledge of this original seven day cycle. All subsequent use of seven then continues to be associated with the Divine. Other researchers have noted that seven is a combination of two significant numbers, namely 3 and 4. This association perhaps contributes to the significance of this number.

The Hebrew word for seven (“sheba,” 3 Hebrew characters) has a root meaning “to be complete.” This ties to the perfection implied symbolically through use of this number. The

same three Hebrew characters, in identical order, also compose a different word, with slightly different pronunciation. With different vowel pointers it now reads as “shaba.” This Hebrew word means “to take an oath” or “to swear.” Before vowel pointers, only context alone enabled the reader to discover whether the number or the action was in view.

To make an oath functionally was to “seven” oneself. Perhaps this symbolized that a person repeated it seven times to show that it was complete, a perfectly done deal.

Psalms 12:6 And the words of the Lord are flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times. (NIV)

Notice that David called the words of the Lord “flawless” or “pure words.” This perfection then equates to a sevenfold repeated action, namely refining silver seven times, meaning that it underwent perfect refinement. Symbolic understanding of the number likely translated into literal action in many passages. For example:

- Jacob served seven years to get Rachel (Genesis 29:20)
- Jacob bowed down seven times to his brother Esau (Genesis 33:3)
- Seven priests, carrying seven trumpets, marched seven days around Jericho, and even seven times the last day. (Genesis 6:8-16)
- Samson has a seven-day marriage feast. (Judges 14:12)
- Samson had seven braids of his hair. (Judges 16:19)
- David praise God for His law seven times a day. (Psalms 119:164)

Many passages show this direct tie to oath-taking as well:

Genesis 21:27-31 So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty. 28 Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, 29 and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?" 30 He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well." 31 So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath [lit. “seven’d themselves”] there. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

God used literal periods of seven to illustrate His perfect plan and timing:

- Ordination of Aaron’s descendants – seven days (Exodus 29:30, 35, 37)
- Feast of Unleavened Bread – seven days (Exodus 34:18)

- Woman's seclusion after giving birth – seven days (Leviticus 12:2)
- Feast of Tabernacles – seven days (Leviticus 23:34)
- Seven years of plenty and seven of famine in Pharaoh's dream (Genesis 41:29-30, 53).

God, also, used emphasis or repetition of seven in many of His commanded actions:

- Sevenfold vengeance on any who would kill Cain (Genesis 4:15)
- Seventh Day Sabbath of the law (Exodus 20:8-11)
- Seventh Year Sabbath of the Land (Leviticus 25:4)
- Day of Atonement, seven times sprinkling (Leviticus 16:14, 19)
- Purification for anyone or anything formerly unclean by infectious diseases including leprosy. (Leviticus 14:7, 16, 27, 51; 2 Kings 5:10)

As with the last example, sevenfold repeated action pictures completeness and extends into other Old Testament rituals and temple instruments as well. For example:

Leviticus 16:14 He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover. (NIV)

The menorah used in the temple had seven branches (Exodus 25:31-37; Zechariah 4:2)

1 Kings 7:17 A network of interwoven chains festooned the capitals on top of the [bronze] pillars, seven for each capital. (NIV)

It is in keeping with use of seven for completeness that has God portrayed as having seven eyes viewing the whole earth. God sees everything in its entirety:

Zechariah 4:10b (These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the earth.)" (NIV)

This imagery extends into the Book of Revelation. John's description portrays the Lamb as having seven eyes, plus there are many references to the seven spirits before the throne and sent out into the earth (Revelation 5:6; 1:4; 3:1; 4:5).

Revelation exceeds other books of the bible in use of seven symbolism. With seven's emphasis on God, plus perfection through completion, it needs to be in the Book of Revelation. This final book is all about the perfect finish to God's eternal plan.

### Examples in the book of Revelation:

- Seven churches (1:4)
- Seven spirits (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6)
- Golden lampstands (1:12-13; 1:20; 2:1,5)
- Stars (1:16, 20; 2:1; 3:1)
- Seals (5:1; 6:1)
- Horns (5:6)
- Eyes (5:6)
- Angels (8:2, 6; 15:1, 6-8; 16:1; 17:1; 21:9)
- Trumpets (8:2, 6)
- Thunders (10:3)
- Crowns (12:3)
- Heads (12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7, 9)
- Plagues (15:1, 6)
- Bowls (15:7; 16:1)
- Hills (17:9)
- Kings (17:10)

### Added sevens (by repeated example):

- Sevenfold praise in heaven [i.e. seven attributes] (5:12, 7:12)
- Seven beatitudes in Revelation [i.e. blessed are or blessed is statements] (1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, 22:7, 22:14)
- Seven times emphasis of the Lord's return [i.e. "soon"] (1:1, 2:16, 3:11, 22:6, 22:7, 22:12, 22:20)
- Seven times emphasis of "the word or words of God" (1:2, 1:9, 6:9, 17:17, 19:9, 19:13, 20:4)

The Old Testament and the New offer many other examples. Some are series of seven, including Hebrews 1:5-14. The author of Hebrews shows the completeness and perfection of his argument by stating seven specifics. He chose seven, though many more examples are available in the Old Testament proving the Son superior to the angels.

John, the gospel writer and author of Revelation, used an interesting series of seven even in his earlier book. Consider this verse about signs...

John 20:30 Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. (NIV)

John clearly says that Jesus did many miraculous signs, but gave seven specific references to signs in his gospel as representative of these. Interestingly he specifically numbered the first two so the careful reader would look for the following five.

John 2:11 This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him. (NIV)

John 4:54 This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee. (NIV)

In order of their completion, the remaining five of the specifically referred to signs are John 6:2; 6:14; 6:26; 9:16; 12:18 and John 2:18-19.

Matthew even notes that Jesus taught using “many” parables but then uses seven specific examples in one grouping:

1. Matthew 13:3 (The Sower)
2. Matthew 13:24 (Wheat and Weeds)
3. Matthew 13:31 (Mustard Seed)
4. Matthew 13:33 (Yeast and Dough)
5. Matthew 13:44 (Treasure in a Field)
6. Matthew 13:45 (Fine Pearls)
7. Matthew 13:47 (Net and Fish)

## **Eight (8)**

Eight, like six, finds its limited symbolic meaning because of its nearness to seven. Seven represents completeness and perfection, eight starts over. It becomes a number showing a new beginning. Old Testament practices and New Testament thinking incorporate this idea.

- Circumcision was on the eighth day (Genesis 17:12; Leviticus 12:3; Luke 1:59; 2:21; Philippians 3:5)
- Re-consecration following defilement during a Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:10)
- Presentation of one formerly unclean (Leviticus 14:10-11)

- Atonement after being unclean (Leviticus 15:28-30)
- Eight people came through the flood. (Genesis 7:13; 8:15, 18)

The early church often said that Jesus had risen on the eighth day. Tertullian, who lived circa 160-225 A.D., is a great example. Sunday is normally and naturally the first day of the week, but the early church stopped referring to it as first. It became the eighth day since Jesus rose on Sunday providing a new beginning.

Colossians 1:15 He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (NIV)

Those who knew 888 is the Gematria for Jesus' name readily embraced this significance of 8.

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Ten is the third of four perfect numbers.

- Three represents divine perfection and completion
  - Seven shows spiritual perfection and completion
  - Ten stands for ordinal perfection
  - Twelve symbolizes governmental perfection.
- 

## **Ten (10)**

Ten is, of course, the basis of our decimal system. Ten likely became significant early on because it is an obvious value arising from counting one's own fingers. Biblically, ten represents perfect order (as ordained by God) and complete cycles (implying that nothing is wanting). Within the books of the Law, this perfect order is perhaps best pictured by two prominent tens...

1. The Ten Commandments. All laws exist to uphold order, as do all Mosaic Laws. The Ten Commandments encompass and accurately summarize all the other Mosaic Laws. (Exodus 20:2-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21)
2. The Tithe. The Mosaic Law commanded this practice as an orderly way to set aside a portion of your increase (of produce and livestock) to provide for a family festival (a compulsory vacation! See Deuteronomy 14:22-29) and to provide for the poor



(Deuteronomy 26:12-13. Including the non-land owning Levites and priests. Numbers 18:21-30). Even earlier, with Abraham, it represented a perfect gift (Genesis 14:20).

Other significant tens in the Law include:

- God would not destroy Sodom if ten righteous were there (Genesis 18:32)
- Laban cheated Jacob by changes his wages 10 times (Genesis 31:7)
- Many details of the furnishings and equipment of the tabernacle included 10s. (Exodus 26; 27:12)
- There were ten generations before the flood (antediluvian patriarchs; Genesis 5)
- There were ten generations after the flood to Abraham (postdiluvian patriarchs; Genesis 11:10-28)
- God sent ten plagues against Egypt (Exodus 7:19-11:5)
  - o Water to Blood
  - o Frogs
  - o Gnats or Lice
  - o Flies
  - o Livestock
  - o Boils
  - o Thunder and Hail
  - o Locusts
  - o Darkness
  - o Death of Firstborn
- Ten tests of Israel in the wilderness after leaving Egypt

Numbers 14:20-23 The Lord replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. 21 Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, 22 not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times — 23 not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it. (NIV)

Selection of the Passover Lamb occurred on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month (Exodus 12:1-5), as was Jesus, our perfect Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7).

In Deuteronomy 23:3, ten is used to represent the whole existence of a nation (or family).

Deuteronomy 23:3-4 No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, even down to the tenth generation. 4 For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you. (NIV)

Beyond fulfilled generations portrayed by tens in the Law, Daniel uses ten when speaking about coming kingdoms. He has the final coming kingdoms, immediately before God's eternal kingdom, represented by ten toes on a statue. (Daniel 2:39-45). Much later the Apostle John would describe "the beast" as having ten horns and ten crowns, also picturing governing authorities during those final days. (Revelation 13:1-10. Also the scarlet beast: Revelation 17:3). This series of kingdoms rests on the red dragon that also has ten horns (Revelation 12:3).

As a complete cycle, significant use of ten is found in the Book of Revelation. Here the 10s often belong to satanic or worldly action. Early in Revelation John refers to "ten days of persecution (Revelation 2:10)." This ten shows a short, defined, complete time of testing. Its fullness comes from being a primary base in the decimal system. Its shortness comes from being a commonly used primary (or smallest) multiplier. As a basic multiplier it becomes part of vast (and often symbolic) numbers such as 1000 ( $10 \times 10 \times 10$ ) or 10,000 ( $10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10$ ) and even 10,000 times 10,000. That ten is attainable comes from multiple examples of completed testing or plagues that used this value (as noted above) in the Old Testament.

With 1000, 10,000 or  $10,000 \times 10,000$  representing vast amounts, anyone needing a contrasting small and attainable finite value logically would select ten. Ancient significance of ten showed in other nations as well, including the culture of the early captors of the Hebrews, the Egyptians. Here too it was a small primary and significant base versus other larger multiples of 10. Usage is similar in the early classical Greek acrophonic system, something that would later influence the Roman world. Not every nation in the world followed suit. Charles Dickens, writing in 1865 (All Year Round, Volume 12, page 132), noted the Aztecs used successive powers of 20, making 400 [ $20 \times 20$ ], 8000 [ $20 \times 400$ ], or greater, their larger multipliers. There, they would use 20 in the same fashion that John would use 10 as a primary base).

We can recognize John's use of numbers in the Revelation by context. His later symbolic use of large value multiples of 10 set the context to recognize his opening use of 10. He began by using contrasting small base values in a similar symbolic fashion. For many subjects in Revelation, John uses later clarification to explain the earlier. This order appears backwards for us.

[On the significance and figurative use of the value 10 in the manner employed by John; take note that others have recognized this Scriptural pattern as well. The Hendriksen-Kistemaker NT Commentary, on Revelation 2:10, footnotes others arriving at a similar conclusion: “Refer to the commentaries of Beckwith (pp. 254, 454); Greijdanus (p. 69); Hailey (p. 127); Hendriksen (p. 65), among others.”]

Tenfold examples are also in view throughout Scriptures. Consider how the Apostle Paul refers to the security all believer have in Christ. His tenfold example encompasses the completeness and perfection of this assurance.

Romans 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither (#1) death nor (#2) life, neither (#3) angels nor (#4) demons, neither the (#5) present nor the (#6) future, nor any (#7) powers, 39 neither (#8) height nor (#9) depth, nor (#10) anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV)

Later Jewish practice has ten playing a significant role (the first three as referenced by ISBE, 1979):

1. The name of God (Yahweh) was spoken ten times by the high priest on the Day of Atonement
2. A row of comforters for someone who was bereaved was comprised of ten individuals.
3. Ten individuals is a necessary minimum to constitute a congregation in a synagogue and also to be present for a wedding.

The Talmud found significance of ten in many places, including:

- Ten unique words used for idols
- Ten unique titles for a prophet
  - o Ambassador
  - o Faithful
  - o Servant
  - o Messenger
  - o Seer
  - o Watchman
  - o Seer of Vision
  - o Dreamer
  - o Prophet
  - o Man of God

- Ten unique designations for the Word of God
    - o Scripture
    - o Proverb
    - o Interpretation
    - o Dark Saying
    - o Oracle
    - o Utterance
    - o Decree
    - o Burden
    - o Prophecy
    - o Vision
  - Ten unique words for Joy
  - Ten trials for Abraham
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Twelve is the last of four perfect numbers.

- Three represents divine perfection and completion
  - Seven shows spiritual perfection and completion
  - Ten stands for ordinal perfection
  - Twelve symbolizes governmental perfection.
- 

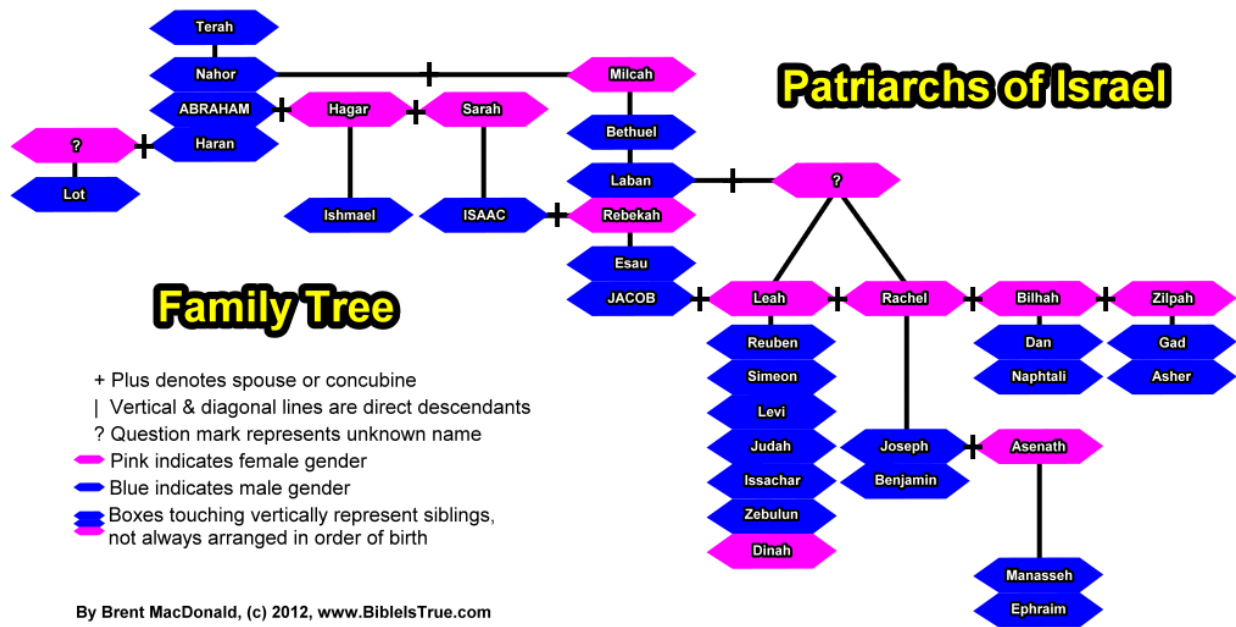
## **Twelve (12)**

The number twelve was significant pre-Israeli Mesopotamian cultures. This arose from having a twelve month lunar calendar (now incorporated into our solar calendar). This equally extended to the twelve symbols they employed for the Zodiac. The Babylonians originally had 12-hour days (later changed to twenty four). Counting approaches based on twelve may have arisen as easily as counting to ten. A person can easily count to 12 one hand by using their thumb only as a pointer and then number each finger bone on the remaining four (three segments on four fingers).

Philo of Alexandria (lived circa 20 BC-50 AD) specifically listed twelve as being one of four perfect numbers. (Notably, his view of perfect numbers matches scriptural use on three, ten

and twelve, but not seven. Instead of seven he listed four, perhaps because of its significance in representing the natural world).

Symbolism from other cultures may have influenced the Jewish use of 12. But, there is no question; its primary importance comes solely from a Biblical foundation. There were 12 original tribes in Israel, this based on the 12 sons of Jacob (e.g. Genesis 42:13).



Further, God told Abraham that He would bless his son Ishmael by making him the father of twelve rulers. This signified the greatness and perfection of the earthly nation that would arise from him (Genesis 17:20). [Notably, in the surrounding verses, God makes clear the spiritual blessing would fall to Isaac, who would be grandfather to the twelve tribes of Israel].

Later pillars (monuments), altars, and offerings would employ the number twelve, solely as a reflection of the twelve tribes.

Exodus 24:4 Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. (NIV)

Joshua 4:8-9 So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where

they put them down. 9 Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day. (NIV)

1 Kings 18:31-32 Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." 32 With the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two seahs of seed. (NIV)

Ezra 8:35 Then the exiles who had returned from captivity sacrificed burnt offerings to the God of Israel: twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven male lambs and, as a sin offering, twelve male goats. All this was a burnt offering to the Lord. (NIV)

The Levitical breast-piece – used for priestly decision making (Exodus 28:15) – also incorporated 12 stones.

Exodus 28:21 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. (NIV, verse 30 also)

Solomon's palace employed symbolism of 12 in association with the tribes.

1 Kings 10:20 Twelve lions stood on the six steps, one at either end of each step. Nothing like it had ever been made for any other kingdom. (NIV)

1 Kings 7:25 The Sea stood on twelve bulls, three facing north, three facing west, three facing south and three facing east. (NIV)

Other significant representative Old Testament groups of twelve include:

- Twelve spies representing Israel (Numbers 13:1-16)
- Twelve staffs representing leaders of Israel (Numbers 17:1-6)
- Solomon's twelve district governors over all of Israel (1 Kings 4:7-19)
- Twelve springs at Elim (in the Sinai) providing water for all Israel (Numbers 33:9)
- Twelve pieces of a concubine to alert all Israel (Judges 19:29)

In the New Testament, God surely reflected the tribes of Israel in the twelve apostles.

Matthew 10:1-5a He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. 2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him. 5 These twelve Jesus sent out... (NIV)

The Book of Revelation uses twelve repeatedly. Indirect association exists between these twelves and the primary twelve of the Old Testament, the tribes of ancient Israel. Where God chose twelve tribes as his physical Old Testament people in the Land of Israel (with a temple in Jerusalem), only some are true Israel part of the spiritual tribes (Romans 9:6). The New Testament, and Revelation, show the church grafted into this original twelve. There are only, eternally, twelve tribes comprised of all God's people – for "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:13-26). The New Testament church, by divine election, became part of the same spiritual Israel (and New Jerusalem). Again, all believers are part of the twelve tribes forever. In this New Testament imagery, twelve represents the completeness and perfection of God's election – an eternal nation.

Twelves in the Book of Revelation:

- Crown of twelve stars – Revelation 12:1
- Twelve gates in the New Jerusalem – Revelation 21:12
- Twelve angels at the gates – Revelation 21:12
- Twelve names of the tribes – Revelation 21:12
- Twelve foundations (twelve apostles) of the city – Revelation 21:14
- Twelve pearls (making up the twelve gates) – Revelation 21:21
- Twelve crops of fruit from the tree of life – Revelation 22:2

Finally, the Greek word translated "elders ("presbuteros")" appears throughout the Book of Revelation exactly 12 times (Revelation 4:4; 4:10; 5:5; 5:6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 7:11; 7:13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4).

### **Thirteen (13)**

This number has no historical symbolism from Bible times. In the centuries following it became a superstitious number, nominally based on this passage:

Mark 14:17-18 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me — one who is eating with me." (NIV)

Thirteen were present at the Last Supper, including the one who betrayed Jesus. Somehow this attribution, centuries later, became ominous and attached to the value thirteen. No such significance existed in Bible times.

### **Thirty (30)**

Thirty has multiple meanings. It represent the age for entering service or ministry. And, unrelated, it encompasses a defined time for mourning.

#### Service or Ministry:

Genesis 41:46 Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (NIV)

Numbers 4:3 Count all the men from thirty to fifty years of age who come to serve in the work in the Tent of Meeting. (NIV, also Numbers 4:23; 4:30; 4:39; 4:43; 4:47)

2 Samuel 5:4 David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. (NIV)

Luke 3:23 Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. (NIV)

#### Mourning:

Numbers 20:29 and when the whole community learned that Aaron had died, the entire house of Israel mourned for him thirty days. (NIV)

Deuteronomy 34:8 The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over. (NIV)

Genesis 50:2-3 Then Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father Israel. So the physicians embalmed him, 3 taking a full forty days, for that was the time



required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days [total]. (NIV)  
[Consider the math in this example: 70-40 for embalming = 30 extra days of mourning]

Thirty became the price of betrayal because of Judas' actions:

Matthew 26:14-15 Then one of the Twelve — the one called Judas Iscariot — went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I hand him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty silver coins. (NIV)

Judas' thirty similarly became forever associated with a place of mourning:

Matthew 27:3-10 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." 5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself. 6 The chief priests picked up the coins and said, "It is against the law to put this into the treasury, since it is blood money." 7 So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. 8 That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day. 9 Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: "They took the thirty silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, 10 and they used them to buy the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me." (NIV)

## **Forty (40)**

Forty is the number of testing or probation (in trials or prosperity). For the wicked or rebellious, the value associates with judgment or punishment.

- Forty days and nights of rain during flood – Genesis 7:4, 12
- Forty more days after mountains appeared – Genesis 8:6
- Forty years of eating manna on the Exodus, forty years of wandering – Exodus 16:35; Numbers 14:33-34; Psalms 95:10
- Moses on Mount Sinai forty days and nights – Exodus 24:18; 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 11, 25
- Forty days of spies exploring the promised land – Numbers 13:25
- Joshua's age when he explored the land – Joshua 14:7
- Multiple forty years of peace during time of the Judges – Judges 3:11; 5:31; 8:28; 31:1

- Duration of the rule of Eli – 1 Samuel 4:18; David – 2 Samuel 5:4; Solomon – 1 Kings 11:42
- Goliath taunted Israel for forty days – 1 Samuel 17:16
- Elijah’s flight to Mount Sinai was forty days and nights – 1 Kings 19:8
- Forty years of judgment on Egypt – Ezekiel 29:11-15
- Forty days for Nineveh to repent or face destruction – Jonah 3:4
- Jesus tempted by the Devil for forty days and nights – Matthew 4:1-2; Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-2
- Forty days of post-resurrection proofs of being alive – Acts 1:3
- Number of lashes for the guilty – Deuteronomy 25:3

## Seventy

Seventy is, of course, a multiple of seven and holds that symbolism with emphasis. Apart from that meaning it also represents a natural human life span.

Psalms 90:10 The length of our days is seventy years — or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. (NIV) [This doesn’t limit a human life span to seventy years, as this verse seemingly implies. Genesis 6:3 appears to be where God reset our maximum life span to a maximum of 120 years. Prior to the flood it had exceeded 900 years, but quickly fell to under 120 after the flood, excluding a few notable exceptions. For example: Abraham 175 (Genesis 25:7) and Sarah 127 (Genesis 23:1).]

Seventy is also the representative number of nations on the earth (as listed in Genesis 10). A form of this idea purportedly influenced an ancient legend about the Septuagint, a pre-New Testament translation of the Old Testament. The claim is that seventy scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek in seventy days for use by the seventy nations of the world (cf. the Letter of Aristeas, 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC). The common abbreviation for this translation is the Roman number for seventy (LXX). Making the legend uniformly about 70 likely explains the use of seventy and not 72, the exact number of translators according to Aristeas.

Some scholars believe Luke 10 represents a similar instance. In this account, Jesus sends out either seventy or seventy-two disciples (KJV, NASU, HCSB versus NIV, ESV, NET, CEV). They believe it is probable that Jesus picked this number to show that His message was for the whole world (i.e. the seventy nations of the world).

While not a primary issue here, the Luke 10 passage presents a difficult textual problem, yet one that does not affect doctrine at all. Great manuscript evidence exists for both renderings. In support of seventy...

Codex Sinaiticus (Aleph), Codex Alexandrinus (A), Codex Ephraemi (C), Codex Regius (L), Codex Freerianus (W), Codex Coridethianus, Codex Zacynthius, Codex Athous Lavrensis, Family 1 miniscules, Family 13 miniscules, the Majority Text manuscripts, and several church fathers

In support of seventy-two...

Papyrus 75 (P75), Codex Vaticanus (B), Codex Bezae (D), Uncial 0181, a scattering of isolated manuscripts apart from the previous mentioned Majority Text manuscripts, Latin manuscripts of the Vulgate and a few Old Latin, a few other ancient languages, a few ancient church fathers.

Many modern scholars now favor “difficult readings.” They believe scribes would be likely to assimilate a value that appears repeatedly in the Old Testament, namely groups of 70 (e.g. Numbers 11:16; Deuteronomy 10:22; Judges 8:30; 2 Kings 10:1, 6). Because 72 is a rare value in Scriptures and it has slightly weaker manuscript support, this becomes the “difficult reading.” Such thought proves nothing. Presume the scribes being aware of the Letter of Aristeas. His value of 72 translators of the Septuagint might be the influence, turning an original 70 into 72. Either value presents a possible case under presumed circumstances. I tend towards the value 70 because it is in keeping with repeated symbolic values common to Scriptures.

## **666 (or 616)**

See the earlier section on Gematria.

## **Multiples and Combinations of Symbolic Numbers**

Joint symbolisms or symbolisms needing extra emphasis sometimes combine imagery of two or more values. Multiples or combinations of smaller symbolic numbers are common.

For example: One thousand is ten with threefold emphasis ( $10 \times 10 \times 10$ ), a value then able to represent a multitude. Increase the imagery by combining it with 12 representing the apostles (or New Testament saints) and another 12 representing the tribes (or Old Testament saints). The result is ( $10 \times 10 \times 10 \times 12 \times 12 = 144,000$ ) a value used in the book of Revelation to

represent an innumerable number (Revelation 7:4-9). The final value expresses this symbolic terminology: a perfect multitude (10 x 10 x 10) comprised of a perfect number of Old Testament saints combined with a perfect number of New Testament saints. This makes 144,000 the ideal number to represent the entirety of God's eternal church.

As already mentioned, one thousand and its multiples can represent a large or innumerable amount. This sometimes appears as a rounded or hyperbolic number, other times as a purely symbolic value. For example: God shows His love to thousands of those who love Him and keep his commandments (Exodus 20:6; Deuteronomy 5:10; 7:9; Jeremiah 32:18). A day in His courts is better than a thousand elsewhere (Psalms 84:10). "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night." (Psalms 90:4, also 2 Peter 3:8)

## **Summary**

Any reader of the Book of Revelation unfamiliar with the symbolic use of numbers in Scriptures will struggle to understand this book. John commonly uses numbers with intent to invoke their symbolic meaning. Hosts of interrelated subjects appear in groups, especially of threes, fours, and sevens. Finding these intentional patterns unlocks a comprehensive view of ideas that John is purposely tying together. Separate the joined ideas, or view them as standalone passages, and there is a loss of meaning. Many competing and wild end-times views have arisen from this. The inspired symbolism and symbolic groupings is a necessary ingredient for understanding God's original meaning and intended message.

## **Section 1 – To His Servants (Slaves), prologue (Revelation 1:1-3:22)**

### **Section Introduction**

Most New Testament books are letters or epistles. Revelation also follows this format, something often overlooked as teachers focus on its apocalyptic style. It is first a letter intended for a contemporary audience. Epistles normally start by introducing the author and who they are writing to. This fully appears in Revelation 1:4 (compare this to similar in letters by Paul, Peter, James, and Jude). Finally, these letters commonly end with a benediction or blessing. This feature appears here in Revelation 22:21 (compare this to similar in all Paul's letters and even Hebrews). As a letter for readers in his day, John intended them to read and find understanding in His words.

Some believe someone other than John added the first three verses of Revelation as an introduction. They cite its third person reference to John as proof. I see it as an expansion of

John's formal introduction which begins in verse 4. John may have intentionally used third person to minimize himself and keep the opening focus on Jesus.

Revelation is a unique letter, or epistle; it is a prophecy (see Revelation 1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). The other New Testament letters contain prophecies but Revelation is a prophecy. Further, Revelation alone of these New Testament books is apocalyptic literature in style. Apocalyptic literature is a style that arose in the inter-testament period and remained popular throughout the first century. Many known examples from this period, from outside Scriptures, are available in English translation. Popularity of this style meant first century readers of John's book would understand features common to this literature. Revelation is the only New Testament book using this style.

Common features of apocalyptic literature, widely available in the first century, include:

- The books anticipate (or are during) a time of intense persecution of God's people.
- Angels are commonly interpreters and guides.
- Use of vivid images and symbols (including monsters and symbolic names and numbers).
- They portray a battle (or conflict) between good and evil.
- They focus on larger ideas rather than specific details or data. (Numbers and values intentionally mean a long time or a short time rather than a set number of days or years).

Western readers expecting a technical manual on the how and when of the end times miss the figurative nature of ancient Bible Land's apocalyptic literature. Literal events, individuals, and empires are in view but representative wording is the primary means of description. The result is a rich and visual imagery.

The Book of Revelation opens with God making clear that this book is specifically and fully about Jesus Christ. Its message is for "His servants (slaves)." Some hold chapters 1 to 3 to be almost separate from what continues in chapter 4 onward. In reality, this opening section begins themes developed throughout the book. These start chapters are a prologue that finish with a brief epilogue at the end of Revelation (22:6-21). Both are a seamless part of the complete message and theme spanning the entirety of this unique book.

In this opening scene we see Jesus and we see His servants (slaves) and we hear an urgent call. His servants, then alive or still to come, must sense this urgency. There is much for His people to do and planned events soon to happen. There are things that will shortly take place for every reader from then to the end. And we are assured that there is an end, one followed by a new start. God who inhabits eternity will have His people with Him forever.

This introductory piece of Revelation is unquestionably a letter for then functioning churches. But Revelation doesn't limit the message to only those churches. It's equally for every coming church. This includes every church until God's plan for the ages is complete and He finishes gathering His Bride around the throne.

#### "The Revelation of Jesus Christ"

Revelation 1:1-3 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. (NIV)

#### **Definition**

Revelation – This English word comes from the Greek word "apokalypsis" which carries in English as the word "Apocalypse." It means "an uncovering or revealing."

The book's title is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." This label is applicable to the entirety Scriptures. For example:

Luke 24:13-27 Now that same day [the day of the resurrection] two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. 15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him. 17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?" They stood still, their faces downcast. 18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?" 19 "What things?" he asked. "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. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision

of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." 25 He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. (NIV)

Luke 24:44-48 He said to them [the disciples], "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." 45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. (NIV)

John 5:37-40 And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, 38 nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. 39 You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, 40 yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (NIV)

John 5:45-47 "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. 46 If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. 47 But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?" (NIV)

Acts 3:18-23 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you — even Jesus. 21 He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. 22 For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.' (NIV)

Yes, all scriptures are a revelation of Jesus. This longer revelation is both perfect and partial. Throughout Scriptures we look forward initially to His first coming. We anticipate then realize

His temporary earthly ministry and then look to His second coming. Scriptures leaves us wanting more. Revelation reveals the fulfillment, the final wrap-up. This culmination includes the final revelation of Jesus who is eternal God, God made flesh, the Son, the Heir, the Lamb slain, the Lion of Judah, and Lord. We see the fullness of Jesus Christ; we don't get closer than this, at least in print. One day believers get to see the events and person Revelation reveals; we attend the glorious finish firsthand!

The Book of Revelation is the complete story of the Lamb and His bride. The Lamb chose for himself a bride, betrothed her, protects and cares for her, and spends eternity with her. All details progress from beginning to end, culminating with the wedding supper of the Lamb and presentation of His bride. Eternity awaits them together.

John is not the only writer in Scriptures to use the word "apokalypsis," it occurs eighteen times in the New Testament, seventeen outside the Book of Revelation, thirteen of them by the Apostle Paul. The next two verses show the first and final use of the word before Revelation. The former highlights the first coming of Jesus; His incarnation was a "revelation." The latter speaks of Jesus' second coming, also a "revelation."

Luke 2:28-32 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation [apokalypsis] to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." (NIV)

1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed [apokalypsis]. (NIV)

The title, Revelation, comes from the opening words of the book. A single word is inadequate as it does not tell us who. The next words make this clear; it is "The Revelation of Jesus Christ." Understanding the person, the focus of the book, is priority. His name is Jesus. This is His proper given name from His incarnation.

Matthew 1:1 A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham: (NIV)

Matthew 1:16 and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. (NIV)



Matthew 1:20-21 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (NIV)

He is the Christ. This is His title from prophecy.

Matthew 2:3-6 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: 6 "'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'" (NIV)

He is the Christ. This is His title as the son of David.

Matthew 22:41-46 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. 43 He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, 44 "'The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'" ' 45 If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" 46 No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (NIV, also Luke 20:41-44)

He is the Christ. This is His title as the Son of God.

Matthew 16:16-17 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." 17 Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven. (NIV)

Matthew 26:63-64 The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (NIV, also Mark 14:61-62)

John 11:27 "Yes, Lord," she [Martha] told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world." (NIV)

John 20:31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (NIV)

He is the Christ. This is His title as Lord.

Refer again to Matthew 22:41-46 (above)

Luke 2:11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. (NIV)

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (NIV)

It's not enough merely to know Him as Jesus; everyone must recognize and embrace Him as Messiah and Lord. Consider one man's progression during an encounter with Jesus as recorded in the gospel of John:

John 9:1-38 As he [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." 6 Having said this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. 7 "Go," he told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam" (this word means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. 8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, "Isn't this the same man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, "No, he only looks like him." But he himself insisted, "I am the man." 10 "How then were your eyes opened?" they demanded. 11 He replied, "The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see." 12 "Where is this man?" they asked him. "I don't know," he said. 13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man's eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. "He put mud on my eyes," the man replied, "and I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This

man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath." But others asked, "How can a sinner do such miraculous signs?" So they were divided. 17 Finally they turned again to the blind man, "What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened." The man replied, "He is a prophet." 18 The Jews still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man's parents. 19 "Is this your son?" they asked. "Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?" 20 "We know he is our son," the parents answered, "and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don't know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself." 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for already the Jews had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Christ would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, "He is of age; ask him." 24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. "Give glory to God," they said. "We know this man is a sinner." 25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" 26 Then they asked him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" 27 He answered, "I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples, too?" 28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, "You are this fellow's disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from." 30 The man answered, "Now that is remarkable! You don't know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly man who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." 34 To this they replied, "You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!" And they threw him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 "Who is he, sir?" the man asked. "Tell me so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said, "You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you." 38 Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

Continuing in Revelation 1:1: "which God gave him to show his servants (Greek: doulos) what must soon take place". "Servants" commonly appears in many translations, but a better word exists. God gave this revelation of Jesus Christ to Jesus for Him to give to His "slaves." A currently unpopular word, slave is a better translation of the underlying Greek word.

Revelation 1:1 The revelation of Jesus Christ that God gave Him to show His slaves [doulos] what must quickly take place. (HCSB)

## Definition

Doulos – A permanent servant, owned, and obligated to submit to their master’s will and direction. The term is applicable for voluntary, or involuntary, servitude and subservience. A majority was involuntary in the Roman world. “Slave” is the closest word available in English, which holds only a negative connotation in many languages and cultures, as being lowly or vile. In its Middle Eastern context an extra meaning, or emphasis, existed. Doulos was an important title when associated a king or ruler. High rulers or officials embraced this title; they were shamelessly “slaves of the king”. They served at his pleasure and under his direction; their powers and possessions existed for his service alone.

Ancient Rome and the Roman Empire was a slave society with the practice deeply woven into the fabric of everyday life. Slaves were property, the possessions, of their owners. Within the Roman world there were several ways a person could fall into slavery. As victor in many wars and conflicts, defeated enemies became their captives and sold into slavery. Also, slavery was a possible punishment for failure to pay debts or for other criminal convictions. Unlike racial slavery, common to American practice, Roman slavery was a possibility for any and every race. Not all were used for manual labor. There was demand for skilled and educated Roman slaves, commonly used as tutors for children or for clerical work.

An estimated one-quarter, or more, of the population in Rome and Italy, from 200 B.C. to 200 A.D., comprised of slaves (some think one-third!). As legal nonpersons, they could not own anything, legally marry, or have legitimate families. Some owners allowed their slaves to marry and raise families. Others perceptibly amassed some personal possessions, yet legally all a slave held was the property of their master.

Some slaves had valued positions and never sought freedom. Many slaves (of all types) resented their subservient status, leading to desertion and notably some collective revolts. A captured runaway would have an iron collar fastened on them, directing what to do with the slave wearing it if they escaped again. The best known mass revolt took place from 73-71 B.C., when the gladiator Spartacus escaped with seventy slaves. He amassed an army that eventually grew to 90,000 freed slaves (other sources say up to 120,000). At the inevitable crushing of their rebellion, Rome crucified 6000 surviving slaves along the Appian Way, a major road leading into Rome.

Paul commonly called himself a slave of Jesus Christ. He defined our slavery, the slavery of all humanity, in the book of Romans.

Romans 6:16-18 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves [doulos] to the one whom you obey — whether you are slaves [doulos] to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves [doulos] 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 [doulos] to righteousness. (NIV)

In another sense, believers are more than slaves, as Jesus reminded his disciples...

John 15:15 I no longer call you servants [slaves], because a servant [slave] does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. (NIV)

God, in making His Revelation available to us, His slaves, shows that He also now calls us friends. In the words “which God gave him” we see that Jesus receives this revelation from God. He afterwards gives it to His slaves, and in doing so makes it His own revelation. Both the object and content of this revelation is Jesus. His revelation is, to Him, both objective and subjective.

Jesus here shows that, while equal to the Father, He is also subordinate to Him (He does His father's will and speaks His father's words). The Apostle John had previously expressed this same truth in his gospel:

John 12:49-50 For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. 50 I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say." (NIV)

John 17:6-8 [In the middle of Jesus' prayer to the Father for all believers] "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. 8 For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. (NIV)

“What soon must take place” has been a point of discussion, debate, and division throughout church history. What time frame is this statement depicting? Popular views include...

- 1) The time of the writing of the book (i.e. the first century, which can include the Preterist view)
- 2) A broad view of church history (i.e. a historicist view)
- 3) Only the end of the age (i.e. a futurist view)
- 4) Principles or ideas that apply equally to all-time (i.e. an idealist view)

Which view is correct? Though some will claim my response as an evasion, I believe the text and overall context show that it includes all four! Each is not automatically a mutually exclusive view. As we continue through Revelation we'll see that four major views arose because there's some Scriptural truth in each. This isn't to say that everything each position holds is correct; application in some passages is mutually exclusive. Too often a few potentially valid interpretations become the basis of rigidly trying to force that one view on all remaining passages.

### **The four major views or approaches of end-time prophecy**

**Preterist** – Revelation's prophecies have occurred already, fulfilled in our far past, shortly after John's own time. They believe Revelation was future prophecy, when written, but it's history from our perspective. Full Preterists see all of Revelation in this way. Partial Preterists place portions of it in the past and some still future to us – especially the final chapters of Revelation which some see looking forward to Christ's second coming.

**Historicist** – Revelation is a prewritten account of unfolding history from John's time until the world's end. Present-day is somewhere amid Revelation's account, though most Historicists see today as near Jesus' return. This has been Protestantism's traditional position.

**Futurist** – Almost all of Revelation's prophecies still await future fulfillment. Most futurists claim everything after chapter four belongs to a short period of time immediately before the return of Jesus. Across North America, in its Dispensational form this has become modern Protestantism's majority view.

**Idealist** – Revelation visions don't need specific fulfillment. These are grand dramas showing spiritual realities and transcendent themes – including good versus evil, God versus Satan, saints versus worldly powers, and Christ's final victory. Fulfillment may be spiritual or recurring throughout history; regardless believers in all ages can apply these prophecies.

Revelation is unlike Daniel's future prophecies which were "sealed up" until the future.

Daniel 12:4 But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge." (NIV)

Daniel 12:9-10 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. (NIV)

Revelation offers great contrast to those passages of Daniel. The New Testament audience must be reading and studying these prophecies. The text provides specific reason for this urgency: "the time is near (i.e. Revelation 1:3)." Twice John states this for emphasis, at the start and end of his book.

Revelation 22:10 Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. (NIV)

How do we understand "near?"

Focusing on the first three chapters of Revelation, which includes the letters to the churches, unquestionably the Book of Revelation is depicting the time of the writing of the book (view #1). These were letters to seven real churches in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). The events and circumstances described in each letter were readily recognizable to the referenced churches. They easily would see themselves in these letters.

Historicists (view #2) dogmatically try to make these letters only apply to a broad view of history. They must ignore other valid uses (especially #1) to do this. Their broad views of history can never be specific. Yet, some have tried to set specific dates for dividing history. Their efforts are typically heavily influenced by their view of where their present-day church fits into this history, trying to prove when "the end times" began. Seventh-Day Adventists, such as Ellen White, and the Worldwide Church of God, especially Hebert W. Armstrong, both made belief in a historicist view of the churches of Revelation dogmatic. Proponents trying to do this often use widely differing evaluations about when periods began or ended, though most agree on the earliest eras.

There's no doubt that God bound a greater view of history bound to these letters, only extra to their primary sense (#1) and not in place of. The reader must view them as broad and inexact time periods. Recognizing historical trends becomes easier as more history passes. Only at

history's end will we have full certainty. That's why most historicists claim their present era the final days of history (and has done so for centuries).

Typical historicist perspective:

- 1) Church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7) - The loveless church, represented by the late and post Apostolic era of church history to 100 A.D.
- 2) Church at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11) - The persecuted church; the martyrdom era of church history 100-313 A.D.
- 3) Church at Pergamos (Revelation 2:12-17) - The compromising church; the married-to-the-world era of church history 313-1000 A.D.
- 4) Church at Thyratira (Revelation 2:18- 27) - The corrupt church; the pre-Reformation church age 1000-1517)
- 5) Church at Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6) - The dead church; the Reformation church age 1517-1730
- 6) Church at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13) - The faithful church; the Missionary church age 1730-early 1900's
- 7) Church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22) - The lukewarm church; the church of the Apostasy, or falling away of believers: period early 1900's-present

These time periods are, admittedly, from a mostly western perspective. Many historicists like to cite accurate parallels between Revelation and events in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, as proof of the correctness of their position, at least for earlier eras. Some suggested parallels appear more than coincidental. Yet, well beyond those early periods, eastern churches, such as the church of Korea or China, might have trouble recognizing offered divisions, especially for 6 and 7. Historicists' lack of agreement on these periods is a major downfall to rigid historicist beliefs.

The futurist view (#3), placing Revelation's events only into the future, does a disservice to the immediate sense of the book (see Revelation 1:1, 3; 22:6, 10). This disservice is greatest in the beginning letters to the seven churches. The opening chapters unquestionably were letters to real and living churches in their day. The early church affirmed this primary context of the text. Some take only the events after chapter three to be fully futurist, allowing for the opening letters to have a differing viewpoint. The most extreme position has full futurists holding that "all seven churches—as groups or attitudes—exist concurrently just before Christ returns."

Most futurists follow the historicists in claiming their present era is the final days of history. When some speculated events fail to happen, futurists often must reevaluate and remake their



beliefs. In the last century, one key Dispensationalist belief demands everything to happen in the generation following Israel becoming a nation. While they have constantly redefined “a generation,” over decades, should the Lord not return by 120 years out, they will need major reinterpretation.

Unquestionably, some events in the book of Revelation are future, especially the final judgment. Only diehard full “Preterists” reject this. Symbolically or by allusion, Preterists see first century events in the entirety of the book of Revelation.

The idealist view (#4) sees only principles or ideas expressed in these opening letters for all churches. Such a viewpoint does not necessarily exclude the other views. Unquestionably, worldwide, at any given time since Pentecost, there are churches matching characteristics of these churches. Holding to an idealist position does not have to deny their literal existence in history. The churches of Revelation can be simultaneously literal and representative. God used this style of teaching throughout the Bible, providing historic examples applicable to us through time.

Romans 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.  
(NIV)

A question remains for every church and each believer today: Which Revelation church represents what you are? Regardless of your answer, the same solutions are still available for today’s church. God’s answer was sufficient in the first century and remains so until the last. This timeless message to His servants (slaves) is current and relevant. It’s pressing truth for John’s day. It is urgent truth daily until His bride is complete and present around the throne.

This returns us to the statement “What soon must take place.” Failing to understand the present and continuing nature of this phrase, some make an absurd claim. They claim God is a liar because it all hasn’t happened in two thousand years. Consider that God stresses it “must take place” and it will in His timing. If the text is unfolding events spanning a wide passage of time, from the time of the apostles until the end, “soon” needs only reference the earliest events in the sequence.

2 Peter 3:3-9 First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. 4 They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." 5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens

existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 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. (NIV)

Both the beginning (Revelation 1:3) and end of Revelation (22:10) stress “the time is near.” When the reader arrives at this latter passage they are aware that John is now revealing details relevant to Daniel’s earlier prophecies. In Daniel’s time, God directed Daniel to seal up those revelations until the time of the end (Daniel 8:26). One portion of Daniel’s vision was most disturbing to him. His greatest concern was the final kingdom, the feet and toes, in his statute prophecy. The days of this final fragmented kingdom were looming, as Rome (the kingdom represented by legs of Iron) soon began to fail. Daniel’s vision spanned many kingdoms over a long time frame, some near some far away. So too Revelation spans a vast time frame, begin with events quickly approaching. Yet, its highpoint is a special focus on finally revealing this last kingdom of man and the following, victorious, eternal kingdom of God. At last, the time had arrived for the unsealing of Daniel’s word. God did this through one final revelation for the rest of time.

“To his servant [slave] John”

Even as Jesus made known the revelation God gave Him, so too Jesus used (and uses) others to proclaim it to us. And, similarly, He uses us to proclaim it to others (i.e. Romans 10:14-15). In sharing, if it faithfully expresses God’s meaning and intent, it is His word (or Revelation). In a technical sense, only God and Jesus (firsthand) are revealers; angels and Christians are conveyers (second-hand) of that revelation.

#### **Definition**

Angel – (Greek: Angelos). A messenger. An individual representing, or speaking for, another individual. The messenger may be human, demon or angel, as determined by context (e.g. “An angel of God” or “The devil and his angels” or “John’s messengers”). Most translators use the English word “angel” only when it refers to supernatural beings and use the equivalent “messenger” when referencing humans.

Not only did Jesus speak directly to John, through many parts of Revelation the speaker is a messenger (literally an angel) of God: “He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.”

Many universities, seminaries, and other higher education institutions embrace the view that this John – the individual commissioned to write down these Scriptures – was not the Apostle John. They claim it to perhaps be some other unknown “Elder John,” stressing John did not call himself an apostle here. Such a view would enable them to deny the Apostle Paul’s authorship of Philemon, since he failed to identify himself as an apostle in that letter. They fail to consider alternate reasons for such an intentional omission. Even as Paul intentionally uses an alternate title “prisoner”, John here uses “slave” (translated by NIV as servant). In contrast to this glorious revelation of Jesus Christ, John was not about titles to impress man or have authority; he embraces a title showing full submission to his Lord. The book focuses on Jesus alone.

The early church uniformly ascribed Revelation to the Apostle John. Examining the supporting evidence for this would take a major rabbit-trail at this point. Instead, know with certainty acceptance of the Book of Revelation in the canon of Scriptures hinged on its apostolic authorship. Early witnesses to Revelation’s authorship include Irenaeus (around 180 AD), Clement of Alexander (died 215 AD), and Tertullian (died 220 AD). Two of the earliest:

Justin Martyr (lived circa 103-165 A.D.), writing as early as 135 A.D., was part of the church at Ephesus – a receiving church of John’s letter (i.e. Revelation 2:1). He clearly stated the book of Revelation was by the Apostle John. This testimony, from a significant place and time, demands high standing in any consideration of evidence.

Another early witness is Papias of Hierapolis (lived circa 70-155 A.D.), from a town 22 km from Laodicea (near Colossae, mentioned in Scriptures at Colossians 4:13). When speaking of the apostles – specifically Andrew, Peter, Philip, Thomas, James, Philip, Thomas, James, John and Matthew – he called them “the elders” or “the presbyters.” Some claim a following statement of his, about John, to be for a different “elder John.” But all he was doing was again adding the earlier given title of “elder.” That same sentence includes reference to a second non-apostolic individual. Papias used the title to clarify, in contrast, that this was the Apostle John. His witness, in fact, confirms the John of Revelation was an apostle.

Revelation 1:2 who testifies to everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John stresses what other Scripture writers also make clear, that they were all eyewitnesses to the events they wrote about.

Luke 1:1-2 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, 2 just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. (NIV, Luke writing under Paul's authority as an apostle.)

2 Peter 1:16 We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. (NIV)

It's not only in Revelation that John highlights his eyewitness status; he repeatedly does so in his other works. Consider one of his short letters...

1 John 1:1-4 That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. 2 The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. 3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. 4 We write this to make our joy complete. (NIV)

1 John 4:14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (NIV)

So too in John's gospel...

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (NIV)

Internal evidence supports our knowledge of common authorship of Revelation and the Gospel of John. John's distinctive choice of wording shows itself in a comparison between selections from his gospel and the Book of Revelation.

John clearly refers to Jesus as the Word of God:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (NIV, consider also 1 John 1:1)

Revelation 19:13 He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. (NIV)

John calls Jesus the Lamb of God (this is something unique only to the New Testament books of John and Revelation):

John 1:29-36 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! 30 This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. 33 I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' 34 I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God." 35 The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. 36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (NIV)

Revelation 5:13 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!" (NIV)

Revelation 7:9-10 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." (NIV)

Revelation 7:17 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." (NIV, see also Revelation 5:6, 8, 12, 6:1, 3, 5, 7, 16, 7:14, 12:11, 13:8, 14:1, 4, 10, 15:3, 17:14, 19:7, 9, 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 22:1, 3 – a total of 30 occurrences in Revelation)

The apostle John, alone, refers to Jesus as both the Word of God and the Lamb of God!

Revelation 1:2 who testifies to everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (NIV, see also Revelation 1:9, 20:4)

In verse 2, John is also stressing that what he was writing “the word of God,” equal to the “testimony of Jesus Christ.” The two are inseparable. John clearly knew that he was recording God’s word – the book he was writing came with the authority of God.

Verse 3 begins the seven “blessed” statements, or beatitudes, found in the book of Revelation.

#1. Revelation 1:3 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. (NIV)

This is John’s first “blessed” statement in the book of Revelation. It is not two statements as the English wording implies. The entire sentence is one unified thought. Sometimes people casually say there is a blessing in reading the Book of Revelation. This is not true. God’s blessing rests on readers who hear it and take it to heart. In other words, God blesses all true believers!

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (NIV)

John’s words “to read” and “to hear” are in present tense, implying this must be continual and not merely a onetime past event. His words, “the time is near,” apply less to following events and more to individual instruction for all later readers. When you read, remember “the time is near.” Hear the message and take it to heart. The coming events of Revelation are, of course, presented as near too (see also Revelation 22:10). The time frame they encompass spans from then until the end.

For reference, the remaining six of the seven “blessed” statements in Revelation are:

#2. Revelation 14:13 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." (NIV)

#3. Revelation 16:15 "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." (NIV)

#4. Revelation 19:9 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." (NIV)

#5. Revelation 20:6 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. (NIV)

#6. Revelation 22:7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." (NIV)

#7. Revelation 22:14 "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. (NIV)

Verse 4 begins the section commonly known as "the letters to the seven churches":

Revelation 1:4-6 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. (NIV)

Here John properly starts his cover letter for the seven churches to which sections of this book are directly and specifically addressed, each found in the Roman province of Asia. For the record, the seven literal churches of Asia Minor (now modern Turkey) are:

- 1) Church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:1-7)
- 2) Church at Smyrna (Revelation 2:8-11)
- 3) Church at Pergamos (Revelation 2:12-17)
- 4) Church at Thyratira (Revelation 2:18- 27)
- 5) Church at Sardis (Revelation 3:1-6)
- 6) Church at Philadelphia (Revelation 3:7-13)
- 7) Church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14-22)

Seven churches. Excessive emphasis sometimes surrounds this value, tied to claims making all numbers in Revelation *only* symbolic. Regardless, there is symbolism in the selected numbers.

This imagery is interwoven through the entire book. At the same time, this symbolism does not detract from a possible simultaneous literal use of the number, as appears here with these literal seven churches. It reveals God's sovereignty and planning, in that He selected seven representative churches. Seven is a number that represents completeness or perfection. This number (7) will appear in many places throughout the Apocalypse (Revelation).

John opens his greeting with "Grace and Peace to you..." This is the most common apostolic greeting recorded in the New Testament. It is a particular favorite of Paul (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; Titus 1:4; cf. 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Philemon 3), and used by Peter (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2). (Consider also John's use in 2 John 3, more similar to Paul's form in 1 and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy). This brief statement is a short and direct expression of the priestly blessing given in the Old Testament. It focuses on all believers, whom God has put his name on, being recipients of God's grace and peace through Jesus Christ:

Numbers 6:22-27 The Lord said to Moses, 23 "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: 24 ""The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." ' 27 "So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them." (NIV)

In Revelation, this grace and peace comes from three. First up:

"from him who is, and who was, and who is to come"

This description applies to Jesus, even as the author of Hebrews proclaimed:

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (NIV)

Though possibly Jesus, John is specifically applying it as a title of the first of the Triune God, the Father. Here he draws on statements that God used of himself throughout Old Testament, also specifically applied to the Father in the New Testament.

Exodus 3:14 God said to Moses (at the burning bush), "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (NIV)

Psalms 90:2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (NIV)



James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. (NIV)

“From him who is, and who was, and who is to come.” John uses this as a direct equivalent to the title Daniel employed in his end times vision. The heavenly father is “the Ancient of Days”:

Daniel 7:9-10 "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. (NIV)

John makes clear that grace and peace, as invoked in his blessing, come from three who are a coequal unity. The next, the second, he specifically referred to is:

“and from the seven spirits before his throne”

Some speculate the seven spirits refer to the seven angels (or messengers) later in focus in association with the seven churches. This interpretation is improbable. Grace and peace comes from God and John is clearly invoking three (who are coequal) as being the source of this blessing. Wherein this second reference comes between the Father and the Son (verse 5), it only logically leaves the Holy Spirit. Also, in coming imagery, angels (or messengers) appear as “stars” not as “lamps” (Revelation 1:16, 20). Later reference to the “seven spirits” uses “lamps” or “torches (ESV)” (i.e. Revelation 4:5).

Benny Hinn presumably used this passage as the basis for one of his most bizarre “revelations”. He claimed that God revealed to him the trinity had nine within it. Under pressure from other believers, even within the word-faith and holiness movements, Benny Hinn later retracted this claim. (So which was in error, Benny Hinn or God who He claimed as the source of his revelation? One portrays God as a liar; the other reveals Benny Hinn as a false prophet). His retraction morphed into later clarifications which do not do much better: Hinn later claimed that each in the trinity has a body, soul, and spirit; therefore he was speaking of the nine separate parts of the Trinity. Related quotes...

"Each one of them is a triune being by Himself... there's nine of them" (Benny Hinn, TBN, October 3, 1990).

"God the Father is a person separate from the Holy Ghost. Totally separate. ...Do you know that the Holy Spirit has a soul and a body separate from that of Jesus and the Father? ...God the Father then is a triune being within Himself. He's a person, He has His own Spirit, He has a soul. ...A soul is my intellect. ...God thinks. ...separate from the Son and separate from the Holy Ghost. ...God the Father is a separate individual from the Son and the Holy Ghost, who is a triune being who walks in a spirit body and He has hair...has eyes...has a mouth...has hands" (Orlando Christian Centre, October 13, 1990).

So why are seven spirits picturing the Holy Spirit? Visual imagery fills the book trying to make known spiritual ideas that are often hard for us to understand. Drawing on symbolic use of numbers, adding seven to the Spirit provides a descriptor. He is the perfect Spirit of God. In fact, another valid translation of the Greek appears in the Complete Jewish Bible:

Revelation 1:4b Grace and shalom to you from the One who is, who was and who is coming; from the sevenfold Spirit before his throne; (Complete Jewish Bible)

Again, sevenfold implies completeness. This occurs with seven attributes, an allusion to an Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah. On the coming Messiah, he proclaimed:

Isaiah 11:2-5 The Spirit of the Lord (#1) will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom (#2) and of understanding (#3), the Spirit of counsel (#4) and of power (#5), the Spirit of knowledge (#6) and of the fear of the Lord (#7) — 3 and he will delight in the fear of the Lord. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. (NIV, numbering in parenthesis added to identify the seven attributes)

It's common belief the seven branches of the Menorah, or candle stand, used in the tabernacle and temple represents this same sevenfold Spirit. The center receptacle represents "the Spirit of the Lord." The 3 branches to each of the 2 sides symbolize the remaining. The menorah uses God-given design, based on the heavenly one (Hebrews 8:5), afterwards revealed to Moses.

Exodus 25:31-40 "Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft; its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms shall be of one piece with it. 32 Six branches are

to extend from the sides of the lampstand — three on one side and three on the other. 33 Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand. 34 And on the lampstand there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. 35 One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair — six branches in all. 36 The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold. 37 "Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it. 38 Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. 39 A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories. 40 See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain. (NIV)

John's use of the imagery of Isaiah chapter 11 makes his order of the Trinity logical as well. Rather than place Jesus as second, he mentions the Holy Spirit (as did Isaiah) and then the One on whom this Spirit would rest.

Revelation 1:5-6 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.

Leaving Jesus, the Son, to last also enabled John to further expand on who Jesus is. While not addressing the Holy Spirit; Daniel, too, introduced the Father first and then the Son.

Daniel 7:13-14 "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. (NIV)

John's greeting continues with a summary description of the Son. Jesus is...

"the faithful witness,"

The prophesied faithful witness, descendant of David...

Psalms 89:35-37 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness — and I will not lie to David — 36 that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; 37 it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." (NIV)

Isaiah 55:1-4 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. 4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. (NIV)

The perfect witness of truth and the Father...

John 3:11-12 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? (NIV)

John 18:37 "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." (NIV)

“the firstborn from the dead”

Acts 26:22b-23 I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles." (NIV)

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 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. (NIV)

Colossians 1:18 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. (NIV)

“the ruler of the kings of the earth.”

Psalms 72:8-11 [Messianic prophecy] He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. 9 The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. 10 The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. 11 All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. (NIV)

Proverbs 8:15-16 [Said of God] By me kings reign and rulers make laws that are just; 16 by me princes govern, and all nobles who rule on earth. (NIV)

Daniel 7:13-14 [Again, said of the Son of Man] "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. (NIV)

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (NIV)

Ephesians 1:19b-23 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. (NIV)

Revelation 17:14 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." (NIV)

“him who loves us”

John 13:1 It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love. (NIV)

John 15:9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. (NIV)

Galatians 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. (NIV)

Ephesians 2:4-5 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. (NIV)

Ephesians 5:1-2 Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (NIV)

1 John 4:10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (NIV)

“(him who) has freed us from our sins by his blood.” Some manuscripts use the word “washed” instead of freed, especially from the Textus Receptus manuscripts. The NASU presents it as “released us.” The two ideas are compatible, God washing (or cleansing) implies His freeing us or releasing us.

Zechariah 13:1 "On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. (NIV)

Acts 20:28 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. (NIV)

Hebrews 9:14 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! (NIV)

1 Peter 1:18-20 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. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (NIV)

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. (NIV)

“(Him who) has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.” God makes us into a “royal priesthood”, appointed by Him, belonging to Him, and serving Him forever.

Exodus 19:5b-6 [Promise to God’s covenant people, to which God has grafted us in] Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (NIV)

Isaiah 61:1-6a The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. 4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. 5 Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. 6 And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. (NIV)

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. (NIV) [Priests offer sacrifices to God. As NT believers our sacrifices are out of love not mandated by law]

1 Peter 2:4-9 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. (NIV)

Revelation 5:9-10 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." (NIV)

Revelation 20:6 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. (NIV)

How are we priests? Even as Jesus was not eligible to be a priest or high priest in the line of Aaron (as He was not a descendant of Aaron), neither are we (especially us Gentiles). Nor is that Mosaic priesthood now necessary as it was only for the first covenant and in conjunction with now abolished temple worship. We, like our high priest are priests in a different line, not one that is hereditary but one that is appointed:

Hebrews 4:14-5:10 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. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. 5 Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. 4 No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." 6 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." [On Melchizedek, see Genesis 14:18] 7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud



cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (NIV)

Hebrews 7:26-8:6 Such a high priest meets our need — one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. 8 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. 3 Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. 4 If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already men who offer the gifts prescribed by the law. 5 They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven. This is why Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: "See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." 6 But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises. (NIV)

1 Peter 2:9-10 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. (NIV)

“to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen”

Psalms 72:18-19 Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. 19 Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. (NIV)

Philippians 2:5-11 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 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! 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. (NIV)

1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

2 Peter 3:18 But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen. (NIV)

Jude 24-25 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— 25 to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. (NIV)

Revelation 4:10-11 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." (NIV)

Revelation 5:11-14 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. (NIV)

Now and forevermore, for eternity, Jesus is Jesus. There is no time-based limit to every quality and praise ascribed to Him, as with some earthly ruler. Honor, glory, and power continue forever without end.

### **Definition**

Amen – From the Hebrew root word “sure.” The Greek word stems from the Hebrew and later into English. It keeps the same overall meaning: “I agree,” or “Let it be so,” or “So be it,” or “Truly.” Believers use it to express agreement with God: “Your will be done.”

Use of the word “Amen” becomes agreement with objective truth (truth fixed by God, rooted in whom He is). Note this English translation of Isaiah:

Isaiah 65:16 Whoever invokes a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth [literally “God of Amen”]; he who takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth [literally “God of Amen”]. For the past troubles will be forgotten and hidden from my eyes. (NIV)

Matthew 5:17-18 “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. 18 I tell you the truth [literally “Amen”. KJV: For verily I say unto you], until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. (NIV)

John, quoting Jesus, uses it as a double statement many times...

John 6:47 Verily [literally “Amen”], verily [literally “Amen”], I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. (KJV)

John 6:47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. (NIV)

Jesus is using Amen as a statement of unconditional and unchangeable belief – in other words, of truth (objective truth fixed by God). Anyone who does not recognize the full sovereignty of God does not understand what they are saying when they use the word “Amen.” Believers can only say “Amen” if they believe in and trust God to act as He wills.

The Bible examples use of amen by individuals and groups. In gatherings of believers it expresses shared agreement. For example, after David gave a Psalm of Thanksgiving (towards the end):

1 Chronicles 16:34-36 Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. 35 Cry out, "Save us, O God our Savior; gather us and deliver us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name, that we may glory in your praise." 36 Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Then all the people said "Amen" and "Praise the Lord." (NIV)

Biblically we understand all New Testament believers to be priests under our high priest, Jesus. What Old Testament prophecy shows the Messiah was to be a priest? (His priesthood is part of the threefold, prophet, priest and king, typically used to reference His authority and roles). Consider both David and Zechariah:

Psalms 110:4 The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (NIV) [The context of this verse comes from Psalms 110:1 which Jesus applied to himself: Matthew 22:42-46, Mark 12:35-37. Further, Scriptures directly apply Psalms 110:4 to Jesus in Hebrews 7:17]

Zechariah 6:12-13 Tell him this is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the Lord. 13 It is he who will build the temple of the Lord, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.' (NIV)

Returning to Revelation, John continues speaking about Jesus...

Revelation 1:7 Look, he [Jesus] 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. (NIV)

“Coming with the clouds”

- Invokes Old Testament imagery of our Sovereign Lord:

Psalms 97:1-6 The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. 2 Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the

foundation of his throne. 3 Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. 4 His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. 5 The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. 6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. (NIV)

Daniel 7:13-14 "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. (NIV)

Nahum 1:3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. (NIV)

- Alludes to many prophecies of the New Testament:

Matthew 24:15-35 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel — let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath. 21 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now — and never to be equaled again. 22 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. 23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time. 26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28 Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather. 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. (NIV)

Luke 21:20-34 "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. 22 For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written. 23 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! There will be great distress in the land and wrath against this people. 24 They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. 25 "There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. 26 Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. 27 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." 29 He told them this parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees. 30 When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. 31 Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near. 32 "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 33 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (NIV)

Acts 1:6-11 So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from

you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 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. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words. (NIV)

Revelation 14:14-16 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. (NIV)

Matthew 26:63-66 The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." 65 Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. 66 What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered. (NIV)

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

This statement takes us to an Old Testament Prophecy:

Zechariah 12:10 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. (NIV)

Believers mourn because we see, with sorrow, our sin as causing His death; nonbelievers mourn because they see the personal consequences of their sins.

2 Corinthians 7:9b-10 For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. 10 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. (NIV)

This prophecy appears to have a dual fulfillment, at Jesus' first coming and at His return:

John 19:33-37 (Fulfilled in Jesus' first coming.) But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. 34 Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. 35 The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. 36 These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," 37 and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced." (NIV)

Matthew 24:30-31 (Jesus will fulfill this at His second coming.) "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. (NIV) [Full Preterists say this was a second fulfillment shortly after His first coming. Some partial Preterists understand a partial past fulfillment plus another future facet.]

The next verse differs from its preceding and following verses, prompting independent examination.

Revelation 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." (NIV)

The context is clear: this verse ends a summary emphasis on Jesus Christ by showing His unity with God the Father – that He is one with the Father. Dispute exists over who is speaking in verse 8, whether God the Father or Christ the Son. Settling who takes us to the textual evidence...

Who uses the title "I am" throughout Scriptures? The Father:



Exodus 3:11-15 But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain." 13 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" 15 God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation. (NIV)

Jesus (the Son):

John 8:51-59 I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death." 52 At this the Jews exclaimed, "Now we know that you are demon-possessed! Abraham died and so did the prophets, yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death. 53 Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died, and so did the prophets. Who do you think you are?" 54 Jesus replied, "If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. 55 Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." 57 "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" 58 "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" 59 At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. (NIV)

Both God and Jesus claim the title "I am." This brings us to the next words in our Revelation passage: "the Alpha and Omega." Consider who uses this title throughout Scriptures. The Father:

Revelation 21:5-7 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. (NIV)

Jesus (in the synonymous form “First and the Last”):

Revelation 1:17-18 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. (NIV)

Revelation 2:8 "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. (NIV)

Revelation 22:12-13 "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. (NIV)

Again we see similar or parallel terms for both Jesus and the Father. First evidences are ambiguous. This brings us to the last title in Revelation 1:8, “the Almighty.” Finally, textual evidence points towards one; the Father:

Genesis 17:1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. (NIV)

Psalms 24:8-10 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. (NIV)

2 Corinthians 6:17-18 (Referencing the Old Testament) 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (NIV)

Revelation 21:22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty [the Father] and the Lamb are its temple. (NIV)

The Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 9:6 refers to Jesus as “Mighty God,” seemingly a similar or parallel title with “the Almighty” for Jesus. Yet, they are not direct equivalents. Significantly, all later use in the Book of Revelation, in the form of “God Almighty” or “Lord God Almighty,” is universally about God the Father.

Red-letter Bibles often place the words of Revelation 1:8 in red, crediting them to Christ, but it's likely these are words directly from the Father. This statement becomes an opening reference point to compare the marks of Deity which Jesus justly claims for Himself through this book. Remember that Jesus expressly claimed to come from God, speaking the words of His Father and doing His work.

John 3:34a For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, (NIV)

John 14:6-11 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." 9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? 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. 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. (NIV)

It shouldn't surprise us that we would struggle to recognize exactly who is speaking, at times, within this text. This shows the almost inseparable closeness of Son and Father. They have one message. Consider again this messianic prophecy of Isaiah calling Jesus "Mighty God." God the Father sets up Jesus' reign and eternally continues it. In this passage, the Father's given title is the "Lord Almighty" or "Lord of Hosts" in some translations. The Greek text literally says "Yahweh of Hosts." Lord Almighty is a good translation of the underlying idea:

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. 7 Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. (NIV)

Returning to Revelation, the apostle John provides a secondary introduction of himself. Once again He stresses His identification with all God's children, rather than any position of authority such as "apostle."

Revelation 1:9 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. (NIV)

Consider the importance the modern church has placed on titles for authority figures. In many circles failure to employ titles is a sign of disrespect. In the least, many feel such omission inappropriate. Commonplace labels include:

Father (Roman Catholic, Orthodox)  
Holy Father  
Pope (means “father”)  
Pontifex Maximus (high priest, literally “greatest bridge-maker”)  
Cardinal (Roman Catholic)  
Reverend (“worthy to be revered”)  
Most Reverend (Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican)  
Patriarch (“chief father”, Assyrian, Orthodox, Catholic)  
Doctor  
Reverend-Doctor  
Bishop  
Archbishop  
Vicar  
Primate  
Metropolitan  
Canon  
Curate  
Archpriest  
Monsignor  
Pastor  
Elder  
Deacon  
Junior Deacon  
Archdeacon  
Prophetess  
Prophet  
Master Prophet  
Evangelist  
Minister  
Missionary

Professor  
Brother (Protestant, but only of leadership)  
Sister (Protestant, but only of leadership)

If anyone deserved a special title, it was the aged and esteemed apostle John. Yet he went by the simple title “brother.”

Some churches flee titles to the extreme. They (including some Brethren or Brethren-like churches) use only “brother” or “sister” as common titles for all within the church. Most recognize offices of authority within the church (including apostle, elder and pastor, teacher). Yet, they believe the overall message of the New Testament shows that we address one another as equals before God, with the only scriptural titles being “brother” and “sister.” So are all other titles wrong?

Matthew 23:8-12 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. (NIV)

This passage does not exclude referring to someone as a “prophet,” a “disciple,” an “apostle,” etc. This appears many times in the gospels alone, including the book of Matthew (10:1, 2, 41) and elsewhere (e.g. Acts 13:1; Acts 14:23; Romans 1:1; Galatians 1:1). Through every use of these titles, they legitimately refer to the office of the referenced individual. This also does not ban a person from calling their immediate male ancestor “father.” Rather, this is a focused prohibition banning titles as a means of pride in spiritual matters (especially in the church). The verses immediately prior focus on those who would seek glory from any means; using methods that make them out (or show them) spiritually superior to others:

Matthew 23:1-8 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: 2 "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. 4 They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. 5 "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; 6 they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; 7 they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' (NIV)

The issue in Matthew is humility. Yes, God gave apostles and elders specific duties and responsibility for care of the church, but they are not to seek personal exaltation through titles. The officeholder should be recognizable through their correct and just administration of their duties rather than by need of an honorific title. Put another way, general use of a title describes what a person is doing. Labels do not magically turn individuals into something they are not. And they should never promote one believer over another.

Ephesians 4:11-13 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. (NIV)

The early Christians used *common* and *functional* terms to describe themselves and their relationships. Some of these terms are "brother," "beloved," "fellow-worker," "laborer," "slave," "servant," "prisoner," "fellow-soldier," and "steward." Of course there were prophets, teachers, apostles, evangelists, leaders, elders, and deacons within the first churches, *but these were not used as formal titles for individuals*. All Christians are saints, but there was no "Saint John." All are priests, but there was no "Priest Philip." Some are elders, but there was no "Elder Paul." Some are overseers, but there was no "Overseer John." Some are pastors, but there was not "Pastor James." Some are deacons, but there was no "Deacon Peter." (Alexander Strauch, a writer and shepherd in Littleton, CO. *Biblical Eldership* [1995] pp. 302-303)

Paul legitimately referred to Luke as a "doctor," for that was his training and profession. He didn't use it to raise Luke's stature within the church. The apostle mainly used it to identify the specifically referenced Luke to his readers.

Colossians 4:14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. (NIV)

Consider how far many modern churches have distanced themselves from Biblical example in awarding formal titles. Nowadays creative labels, some compounded for emphasis, regularly advance the stature of a chosen few leaders.

In contrast, only two terms widely apply to believers in Scriptures, whether the individual held an office or not. While descriptive metaphors, these become applicable titles:

Brother and sister –

Matthew 23:8 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers.

Romans 16:1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. (NIV)

Philemon 2a to Apphia our sister (NIV)

James 2:15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. (NIV)

Paul refers to Timothy and Onesimus as “a son,” implying himself “a father” (1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Timothy 1:18; 2 Timothy 2:1; Philemon 10). Such wording appears to violate Matthew 23:9, but it does not. Paul clearly focused this spiritual relation as being “in Christ” or “in faith” a state brought about by God, using it as a metaphorical descriptor rather than an exalted title.

When issuing a formal statement for the church, the apostles and elders simply addressed themselves as “your brothers”...

Acts 15:23 With them they sent the following letter: The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia: (NIV)

At times, the apostles found it necessary to use their descriptive label, or title, to describe the task God had given them. Yet, nowhere do we have the apostles using honorific or superior titles to exert influence or advance themselves. Consider Peter. He could have called himself “a super-elder,” “Chief Elder,” “an apostle over elders,” or (by Roman Catholic theory) “the Bishop of Rome.” The scriptural reality was far different; in a letter to other elders he wrote...

1 Peter 5:1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, (NIV)

Exalted titles were never to be part of Christ’s church. The person who boasts in his title has missed Christ’s message for the church; we boast in Christ alone (i.e. 2 Corinthians 10:17-18).

Galatians 6:12-15 Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. 14 May I never boast

except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. (NIV)

Jude 4, 16 For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. ... 16 These men are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage. (NIV)

The titles “brother” and “sister,” properly applied to all believers, boasts only in the Lord. He alone is the source and power behind all of us becoming His children and joint heirs with Christ (c.f. Romans 8:17).

John 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (NIV)

Returning to Revelation chapter 1...

Revelation 1:9 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.

In this verse, John reveals his common experience with the whole church. We all have in common:

- Brother & sisters (the church is a family)

Luke 18:29-30 "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God 30 will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life." (NIV)

John 20:17 [After the resurrection] Jesus said [to Mary Magdalene], "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (NIV)



(The significance is not firstly that we are family with each other, rather how we are family with each other. We are made brothers of Jesus!)

Hebrews 2:11-12 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises." (NIV)

(Consider the next verse in light of knowing that we are firstly brothers with Jesus and the example he gave to us!)

1 John 3:16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (NIV)

- Suffering (literally: tribulation, trouble, persecution). Note that suffering is part of God's will.

Firstly for His son...

Isaiah 53:1-12 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify

many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (NIV)

Also, the Apostle Paul and all believers...

Acts 9:15-16 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." (NIV)

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (NIV)

Romans 8:17-18 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. 18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. (NIV)

1 Corinthians 12:24b-27 But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (NIV)

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. (NIV)

1 Peter 1:3-9 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while 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. 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. (NIV)

1 Peter 4:12-19 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. (NIV)

Romans 8:35-39 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." 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. (NIV)

2 Timothy 3:12-13 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (NIV)

- And kingdom (Not merely “heaven” but also God’s present kingdom, something often less recognizable)

Matthew 6:25-34 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? 27 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28 "And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29 Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (NIV)

- Patient endurance (perseverance or steadfastness)

Romans 15:5-6 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)

1 Peter 5:7-11 Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 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. 10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. 11 To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

John did have a specific in verse 9, seemingly unique to him:

- He “was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”

### **Definition (Place)**

Patmos – Patmos is an island in the Aegean Sea, located about 40 miles off the coast of Turkey (Asia Minor). It has a land area of just over 13 square miles (34 square kilometers), with its highest point not exceeding 900 feet above sea level. Today, it is a Greek Island having voluntarily joined Greece in 1948. Historical sources (such as Pliny and Tacitus) tell us that it was common for the Romans to send their prisoners to islands.

Emphasis rests on the reason not the specific place: “Because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.” Where John went, or where we are, makes no real difference if it's for similar reason. We should be willing to be wherever God would have us to be, whether by compulsion (as was John's exile) or voluntarily. Every plan we make should be subject to change on short notice as God wills!

James 4:13-15 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 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. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (NIV)

Revelation 1:10 On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet,

This is the first reference to the resurrection day, the first day of the week, as “the Lord's Day.” Unquestionably every day belongs to the Lord, but John wanted special emphasis on one day. Believers held it in special significance. The reason why the church began meeting on the first day of the week was because it was the Lord's Day, the day of the resurrection.

Speculation and unwarranted emphasis often go with the phrase “in the Spirit.” Some, seeking a formula, often note that Peter and Paul were in ecstatic states when the Lord spoke to them through visions. (Peter in a trance on the roof of Simon the tanner in Joppa, Acts 10:9-10, Paul similarly so in the temple of Jerusalem, Acts 22:17-19). Here John appears fully alert, in complete control of his senses (he sees, hears, writes, and more). The meaning is far simpler than a contrived procedure. Believers must listen to the Spirit. Moreover, they must agree with

the Spirit. They must be open to learning all He reveals about God. As part of the triune God, the Spirit reveals all truth and especially the message of Jesus.

John 16:12-13 "I [Jesus] have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (NIV)

John 14:25-26 "All this I [Jesus] 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. (NIV)

We should follow John's example on every Lord's Day and be "in the Spirit." We come seeking to hear what the Spirit has to say, to learn of Jesus, and to focus on knowing the truth.

Revelation 1:10-11 On the Lord's Day I [John] 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." (NIV)

John likens the voice he heard to an instrument, using sounds-like imagery. It didn't literally make a noise like a trumpet. It was like a trumpet in some respects, while still heard as a voice speaking a human language:

Revelation 1:10b I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

In ancient times a trumpet heralded an important message. This voice in Revelation sounding like a trumpet brings emphasis that an essential message is coming. The Ten Commandments at Sinai is another major instance. Not coincidentally, at this important juncture the people also heard a trumpet sound.

Exodus 19:16-19 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. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. (NIV) [Also Exodus 20:18]

Consider also a trumpet's association with the return of Jesus (Matthew 24:31 & 1 Thessalonians 4:16) – it makes a trumpet sound something worth paying attention to!

In John's case, there is an important message, a specific command stating what he must do. There is no question he must heed this directive from God. All believers must heed God's commands. Though John appears startled by the heavenly voice he does not question the charge which follows.

Revelation 1:11 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."

#### **Definition**

Biblion (bib-lee-on) – A Greek word for book, or specifically a scroll, as was the common form of books in the first century. A Greek synonym of Biblos.

The Divine message now specifically identifies the seven churches referenced in verse 4. Listed are seven real churches, all churches John has worked with previously before his exile. Regardless, the letters which follow are not seven separate messages. The overall message is unquestionably for all churches. Note the command to send "what he sees" on a single scroll (a "biblion") and send it to all seven. Revelation is one unified book. The implied purpose is a message equally necessary for all churches. Inclusion in Scriptures expands this to all later churches too, the church represented by these original seven. There's one indivisible message for Christ's bride.

The instruction to write "what you see" includes the immediate image before his eyes but also all future parts of the apocalypse as well.

Revelation 1:12-16 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.

The disciple John responds to the voice speaking by turning around. We don't know if he recognized the voice right away, perhaps in its glorified state sounding even more regal than that which he remembered (now like a trumpet. i.e. Revelation 1:10). Regardless of if he immediately recognized the voice; he continues his account not with an outright statement of whom the speaker is, rather with a description of the sight he was witnessing.

John once walked with Jesus and was part of Jesus' inner-circle of disciples. In his gospel, he identified himself in manner giving glory to Jesus, as "the disciple Jesus loved." He wasn't singling himself out as loved by Jesus more than other disciples, rather he was awed by the fact Jesus loved him so much. His self-title stresses this love Jesus had for him. Consider a few episodes of John's life with Jesus during his ministry years...

John was the one reclining closest to Jesus at the last supper:

John 13:23-24 One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. 24 Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means." (NIV)

John was the one Jesus entrusted the care of his mother too:

John 19:25-27 Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," 27 and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (NIV)

Following Jesus' resurrection, John was among the first to hear the news and visit the tomb:

John 20:1-9 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. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!" 3 So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. 4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. 5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter, who was behind



him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. 9 (They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) (NIV)

After the resurrection, Jesus met with John (and Peter) at Galilee:

John 21:4-10 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. 5 He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. 6 He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish. 7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. 8 The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. 9 When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. (NIV)

Rumor held that Jesus told John that he wouldn't die:

John 21:17-25 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. 18 I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" 20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" 22 Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." 23 Because of this, the rumor spread among the brothers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" 24 This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. 25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I

suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (NIV)

John was not like modern writers and speakers claiming bodily visits with Jesus. Mary K. Baxter (author of *A Divine Revelation of Hell*) and Benny Hinn (who has declared on television to have met with Jesus many times) are notable examples. They, and others like them, claim casual visits from Jesus – as though a visit with a best friend. John, who actually knew Jesus intimately, was obviously in awe of what he was seeing. This was no nonchalant buddy-buddy meeting; this was John seeing his resurrected and glorified Lord in his natural setting – the glory of heaven.

“And I turned to see...”

#### **Definition**

Kai – The Greek word “kai,” commonly translated as “and,” is a significant word found throughout the Book of Revelation. This little word appears 1121 times over 369 verses (1171 over 375 in the Textus Receptus). It usually means “and,” a copulative, connector, or joiner”. Context allows added meanings, specifically: “then” or “after that”. Occasionally the Greek word appears solely for emphasis or intensity.

John turns “to see.” The text provides perhaps the greatest clue and guide for how to view the balance of the Book of Revelation. John is seeing volumes, much of it simultaneously. He cannot describe it all in a single sentence or brief statement; he sometimes needs pages to describe all that is filling his sight. Following statements are not always linear in time. (Worse still, they often appear broken up into a series of seemingly unconnected sentences in English). John returns many times to the same event, describing a single sight, using multiple statements. To do this, John often uses excessively long sentences. He joins the picture before him with a host of statements using the Greek word “kai” – a word he uses over 1100 times in this book. I will often highlight John’s use of this joiner throughout the book, highlighting where English translations have dropped it for readability. Its loss is often harmful to understanding the scene John is describing.

Fortunately, in this next part of verse 12 and verse 13, the translators used “and,” showing a continuation of the same sight.

Revelation 1:12b-16 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.

John uses Daniel to describe Jesus, clearly seeing Him as the One fulfilling this prophecy of old.

Daniel 7:13-14 "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. (NIV)

Significantly, John saw Jesus. This sighting of his Savior contains important details. Jesus was standing among seven golden lampstands and in his right hand He held seven stars (v16). This figurative imagery describes something real. Jesus, himself, a few verses later gives the meaning, so the John would clearly understand. The scene was representative of fact.

Revelation 1:20 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)

In verses 12 to 16 God provides a temporary mystery, with no intent for it to remain a permanent mystery. The text itself reveals the solution. The lampstands represent churches and the stars are angels or messengers.

#### **Definition**

Angelos/Aggelos –The Greek word for messenger, referring to one who is sent to announce, or proclaim, or bring a message. Translators commonly use “Angel” when speaking of a supernatural messenger from God. Context, alone, shows if it is a human or heavenly messenger.

The seven stars are the angels [“angelos”] of the seven churches. Three primary views exist on this passage:

#1. The seven messengers are the pastors of the seven churches. This is unlikely as the New Testament never promotes one “pastor” as lead over a given church. Scriptures repeatedly show individual churches led by a plurality of elders. Addressing this to an individual and not the elders (plural) would be out of character.

James 5:14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. (NIV)

1 Peter 5:1-3 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. (NIV)

#2. Seven messengers are taking the letters to the seven specific churches. Proponents of this view claim each individual letter is addressed to one specific human messenger. They believe it necessary for them to be human, inferring only human messengers could be accountable for those receiving the message. For example: Revelation 2:1, “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write.” The view of separate human messengers assigned to each church is dubious. The entire book is unified, written as one full message and then circulated to the seven churches.

#3. These are heavenly messengers – angels sent from God. This view recognizes the underlying spiritual scene behind God’s church through all history. God has always had angels looking out for His people. This is in harmony with Daniel’s account showing God’s angels tending His church.

Daniel 10:12-14, 18-21 Then he continued, "Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. 14 Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come." ... 10:18-21 Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. 19 "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said,

"Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength." 20 So he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? Soon I will return to fight against the prince of Persia, and when I go, the prince of Greece will come; 21 but first I will tell you what is written in the Book of Truth. (No one supports me against them except Michael, your prince.) (NIV)

I find this view most probable. God is entrusting his heavenly messengers, with great purpose, to safeguard this revelation to every church throughout history (including the seven literal representative churches). It needs not be literally seven angels, seven being representative of a perfect number of angels to complete God's task. Recognizing these as supernatural angels provides consistency of context. All further uses of the Greek word "angelos," beyond chapter 3 in the Book of Revelation, clearly refer to supernatural angelic beings. Apart from a distinct and specific earlier context, which is absent, the text warrants consistent use of the word. Though we don't see it with physical eyes, it is God's purpose that His angels work to build and strengthen His church through serving believers. This truth remains unchanged until the Bride is complete.

Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (NIV)

Jesus holding the seven stars (messengers or angels) in His right hand pictures the great authority He is giving them plus His protection of them. God assures they will complete their mission as though He did it with His own right hand. Consider what God does with his right hand...

Psalms 37:23-24 If the Lord delights in a man's way, he makes his steps firm; 24 though he stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand. (NIV)

Psalms 118:15-16 Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The Lord's right hand has done mighty things! 16 The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things!" (NIV) [Also Isaiah 5:25 on judgment]

"The seven lampstands are the seven churches."

The lampstands unquestionably reference the seven literal churches. They also represent all churches throughout time (God's church), again the symbolism of seven.

Lampstand are a fitting representation of the church. We are not the source of light, we bear (or carry) the light given us. Jesus alone is the light of the world.

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (NIV)

John 8:12 When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (NIV)

Notice that Jesus is among His church. He doesn't merely watch his church from afar; His involvement is intimate. His church wants to spend time with Him and He stays among them.

Matthew 18:20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." (NIV)

Matthew 28:20b And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (NIV)

Also, Jesus doesn't merely watch His church, from their midst He shepherds them.

Hebrews 13:20-21 May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

As our Great Shepherd, His presence among us is to bring comfort, security, and provision. The shepherd provides for His sheep.

Psalms 23:1-6 The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (NIV)

Isaiah 40:10-11 See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him. 11 He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young. (NIV)

Ezekiel 34:23 I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. (NIV)

John 10:11-16 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. 13 The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. 14 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— 15 just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (NIV)

Jesus shepherds His church and the church knows their shepherd. They know His voice and they listen to Him. How did John see this Great Shepherd in this heavenly vision? Look again at the description given:

Revelation 1:13 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.

A long flowing robe and a golden sash around his chest... Long flowing robes invoke a few possible images. The high priest in Aaron's line wore such a robe.

Exodus 28:31-35 "Make the robe [for Aaron, the high priest] of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, 32 with an opening for the head in its center. There shall be a woven edge like a collar around this opening, so that it will not tear. 33 Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them. 34 The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe. 35 Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he

enters the Holy Place before the Lord and when he comes out, so that he will not die. (NIV)

Exodus 28:4-8 These are the garments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve me as priests. 5 Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen. 6 "Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen — the work of a skilled craftsman. 7 It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. 8 Its skillfully woven waistband is to be like it — of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and with finely twisted linen. (NIV)

Jesus is High Priest, but His priesthood is not in the line of Aaron. John's description would cause the reader to think of a high priest. This high priest is different; He is a high priest in the line of Melchizedek. Jesus' sash is different from those of Levitical priests; it isn't interwoven with other colors. Pure gold is a fitting color for one who is High Priest and King.

The church should take comfort that our High Priest walks among His church.

Hebrews 4:14-16 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. 16 Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (NIV)

Returning to Jesus' clothing; the flowing robe and sash was common to an Old Covenant high priest but not exclusively. Judges and Kings used a similar wardrobe. First, consider Jesus' role as Judge.

John 5:26-27 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. (NIV)

2 Timothy 4:1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ... (NIV)



Angels carrying out God's judgment arrive in similar appearance. The angels sent forth from the heavenly temple of God, later in the book of Revelation, pouring out God's wrath on the earth, wear comparable fashion – especially the golden sashes.

Revelation 15:5-8 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. 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. (NIV) [A powerful angel in the book of Daniel is also described as dressed this way – Daniel 10:5 – perhaps this angel is one who serves again at the later task in Revelation]

Kings also wore long robes (for example; Saul in 1 Samuel 24:4). Gold is associated with kings, especially great kings such as Solomon (2 Chronicles 1:15; 8:18; 9:9, 14-21). Even daughters of the king wore robes interwoven with gold (Psalms 45:13). Gold is a color of royalty. Similarly, gold is a frequent sight in the heavenly city of the eternal King (Revelation 21:15, 18, 21). Altogether, John's description portrays the speaker as High Priest, Judge, and King.

John's vision contains a contrast worthy of consideration. Unlike our first parent's state in the uncorrupted Garden of Eden, without clothing (Genesis 2:25), Jesus appears fully clothed. While His clothing may be symbolic of His status, it doesn't detract from us understanding what John clearly saw: there is clothing heaven. Indeed, Isaiah's vision of God on the throne similarly portrays regal clothing:

Isaiah 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. (NIV)

Robes given to believers represent righteousness...

Isaiah 61:10a I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness... (NIV) [Also Revelation 3:4-5 & 22:14]

Many Revelation passages referencing saints show them arrayed in heavenly clothes.

Revelation 19:14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. (NIV)

Revelation 4:4 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. (NIV)

In fact, Jesus used this wording showing that our dress mimics His:

Revelation 3:4b They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. (NIV)

All through Revelation, nakedness describes the state of the lost (Revelation 3:17, 16:15, 17:16). Out of the goodness of God He robes us in His goodness.

2 Corinthians 5:1-5 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, 3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. (NIV)

Returning to John's overall view of Jesus...

Revelation 1:12b 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.

"Head and hair white like wool, as white as snow"

John's description portrays Jesus in wording almost identical with that found in the book of Daniel.

Daniel 7:9-10 "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. (NIV)

Daniel 7:13-14 show Daniel was describing God the Father. Why would Jesus' description be so close to one used to describe His father? He fully bore the family likeness! He came to reveal the Father in perfection and He did so in word and deeds.

Matthew 11:27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (NIV)

John 14:9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? (NIV)

John 17:5 And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. (NIV)

Consider also:

Colossians 1:15 He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (NIV)

Hebrews 1:3 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. (NIV)

If Jesus is a perfect revelation of the Father in actions and speech, should it surprise us that in His glorified state His appearance would also do so?

"His eyes were like blazing fire." Nothing escapes the gaze of our Lord.

Hebrews 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (NIV)

More on what God sees...

Psalms 44:20-21 If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, 21 would not God have discovered it, since he knows the secrets of the heart? (NIV)

Psalms 90:8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. (NIV)

Proverbs 15:3 The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good. (NIV)

Proverbs 15:11 Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord— how much more, human hearts. (HCSB, quoting Job 26:6!)

Also Psalms 139:1-12!

God sees and exposes motives (which we cannot and should not judge).

1 Corinthians 4:4-5 My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. (NIV)

A blazing fire is symbolic of both wrath and refining. Both the outpouring of God's wrath and His refining of saints has common purpose – God will purge His creation of sin.

Zechariah 13:7b-9 [A Messianic passage cited in Matthew 26:31 & Mark 14:27] "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. 8 In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. 9 This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'" (NIV)

Malachi 3:1-2 "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the Lord Almighty. 2 But who can endure

the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. (NIV)

For believers, this refining fire – though painful – is something that we want. God will purify His church.

Titus 2:11-14 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. 12 It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13 while we wait for the blessed hope — the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. (NIV)

Daniel 12:9-10 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. (NIV)

At a specific point God's refining stops. No need of further refining is necessary when all saints are with their Savior. Following that time this same "blazing fire" can only apply to God's wrath. The blazing fire only consumes rather than refines.

Revelation 19:11-15 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. (NIV)

Hebrews 10:26-27 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. (NIV)

Hebrews 12:28-29 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." (NIV) [Quoting next verse...]

Deuteronomy 4:24 For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (NIV)

Revelation 18:8 [Example in the future judgment of “Babylon the Great”] 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. (NIV)

Fire will consume this sin tainted universe, through the actions of its’ Creator, to make way for the new heavens and earth.

2 Peter 3:10-13 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. (NIV)

When we struggle with all the broken, damaged, and corrupted aspects of our lives, remember their final insignificance. In the words of a friend of mine “it’s all gonna burn!”

“His feet were like bronze, glowing in a furnace”

Isaiah 6:1-2 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. (NIV)

Unlike created beings which stand in the presence of God, covering their feet, Jesus’ feet stand visible. His feet are perfect (the symbolism of refined metal), having no need of covering. Even angels, though holy, cover their feet showing themselves created creatures versus the uncreated holiness of God. Jesus’ perfection is unique, as He who is perfect was perfected (as a man) through suffering.

Hebrews 5:7-10 During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a son, he learned

obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (NIV)

Hebrews 7:28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (NIV)

The church can rest assured that Jesus is perfecting us. With no other higher standard, we look to Jesus and see His perfection as our example:

Hebrews 12:2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV)

Note that Jesus' feet are strong ("like bronze"), prepared to subdue His enemies.

Psalms 110:1 The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (NIV)

1 Corinthians 15:25-26 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (NIV)

His voice is like the sound of rushing waters...

Living on the small island of Patmos, John would know the sound of rushing waters. A multitude of waves crashing ashore overwhelms all other sounds. This symbolism makes clear we are to be listening only to Jesus!

Isaiah 30:30 [In regards to judgment] The Lord will cause men to hear his majestic voice and will make them see his arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire, with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail. (NIV)

John drew on imagery straight out of the book of Ezekiel. Specifically, his description was of the returning "glory of the God of Israel"...

Ezekiel 43:1-2 Then the man brought me to the gate facing east, 2 and I saw the glory of the God of Israel coming from the east. His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory. (NIV)

Consider the power behind this voice. The day is coming that when He speaks even the dead will hear His voice and respond.

John 5:28-29 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out — those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned. (NIV)

Even God the Father made it clear to Jesus' disciples that everyone is to listen to His Son.

Matthew 17:5 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!" (NIV)

(Briefly skipping over Jesus' mouth) "His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance." Returning to the transfiguration, John, who had been present at that remarkable event, now sees Jesus' face in a similar way. Unquestionably, even as He now sees Jesus in heaven he would have remembered this glimpse from decades before.

Matthew 17:1-3 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. (NIV)

Perhaps John, seeing this, also was remembering an account he had heard from the apostle Paul. (Acts 8:14, 25 & Galatians 2:9 show that John stayed in Jerusalem for many years after the resurrection and would have been one of the apostles that heard Paul's account firsthand in Acts 9:26-27).

Acts 26:13-14a About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. 14 We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? (NIV)

Consider the brilliance our Savior's face. Its light removes need of a sun in the new heavens and earth. Isaiah prophesied this hundreds of years before John recorded the Book of Revelation...



Isaiah 60:19-20 The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. 20 Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. (NIV)

Echoing the passage in Isaiah, John (near the end of Revelation) says it this way:

Revelation 21:22-23 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. (NIV)

Consider this question... Will our faces shine like that of Jesus?

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (NIV)

John wasn't alone in longing to see Jesus in His glory. Way back in the Old Testament, Job expressed a similar wish and hope!

Job 19:25-27 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (NIV)

So, when we see Him, will our faces shine? Consider, Moses who uniquely got to speak with and spend time in the presence of God. Yet, Moses could not see God's face.

Exodus 33:22-23 When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (NIV)

Even without seeing the fullness of God, without seeing Him "as he is," consider what happened to Moses after seeing what he did.

Exodus 34:29-35 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was

radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. 34 But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord. (NIV)

Moses' face shone, but only with a fading glory. The longer he spent away from the immediate presence of the Lord, in the sin tainted world, the glory (and glow) faded.

Unless holy, no one can see God in all of His glory.

Hebrews 12:14 Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (NIV)

Only in our glorified, un-sin tainted state, will we finally be able to see the fullness of God's glory – to look on His face. Though scriptures aren't forthright in saying that we will have shining faces, it hints at it. With permanent holiness, such glory would never fade away.

2 Corinthians 3:7-18 Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, 8 will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? 9 If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! 10 For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. 11 And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! 12 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. 13 We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away. 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. (NIV)

Consider again this portion of what John saw...

Revelation 1:16b His [Jesus'] face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

Have you looked directly at the sun? I hope not. Its brilliance is literally blinding. Regardless of your wish to look, it can hurt to do so. I could be wrong, but here I see John struggling to look, straining to see details, wanting to look more, but partially turning away.

I see this as portrayal of what we believers do throughout this life. In our regenerate state we want to look at Jesus, but as we do it hurts (as He works to purify us, to make us holy) and we find ourselves looking away for a bit. This cycle repeats seemingly endlessly.

When you look to Jesus, what are you looking at? Do you seek Jesus' face or merely his hand? Do you want to spend time in His presence, earnestly desiring to see Him as He is? Or do you just look to Him for what he can do for you or give to you? I fear too many believers are so focused on His hand that they've missed His face. In contrast, Scriptures repeatedly directs us to seek God's face.

1 Chronicles 16:11 Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. (NIV)

2 Chronicles 7:14 if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (NIV)

Psalms 24:3-6 Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?  
4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. 5 He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Savior. 6 Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob. (NIV)

Psalms 105:1-4 Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. 2 Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. 3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. 4 Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. (NIV)

Consider also the priestly blessing of the Levitical priesthood...

Numbers 6:24-26 "The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." (NIV)

I don't believe it was accidental or incidental to John's account that he focuses last on Jesus' face. There was comparative insignificance to the earlier features. To look on Jesus' face mattered most.

Revelation 1:12b-16 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.

I intentionally covered the last two points of John's description of Jesus out of order. Without minimizing the need to look on Jesus' face, the immediately prior feature links to His face: His mouth.

"out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword."

The double-edged sword issuing from Jesus' mouth is clearly symbolic and drawn from other New Testament imagery.

Hebrews 4:12-13 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. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (NIV)

John's imagery is not identical with the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11, though related. Taken together they express the power of what comes from Jesus' mouth.

Isaiah 11:1-4 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. He will not judge by

what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. (NIV)

Isaiah used a rod from Jesus' mouth to express a sense of power, royal power to issue decrees and see them to completion. Isaiah wasn't the first to state the Messiah would rule with a "rod." Consider David before him...

Psalms 2:7-9 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 ["rod of iron" NASU]; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." (NIV)

Taken together, Psalms 2 and Isaiah 11 clearly show royal power coming from the mouth of Jesus. Isaiah then builds on that picture in a later Messianic passage.

Isaiah 49:1-2 Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. 2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. (NIV)

The rod is equal to a sharpened sword in the text, both carrying out similar purpose. Beyond features of a rod, which dashes to pieces and crushes in judgment (Psalms 2:9); the sword penetrates and reveals (Hebrews 4:12-13). All who sin justly fear the rod and the sword.

God arms believers with the same weapon – the word from His mouth. Later in the Book of Revelation, believers, called the "armies of heaven," come with our King and Commander to judge and pour out God's wrath.

Revelation 19:13-15 He [Jesus] 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. (NIV)

When accompanying Jesus, the sword only needs be in His mouth. In the present, until we enter the presence of our Lord, God individually arms us for the everyday battle. In the armor

of God every item listed has defensive use (Ephesians 6:11-17). One item stands apart, as it provides for both defensive and non-defensive action: our sword.

Ephesians 6:17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (NIV)

Like a good sword-fighter, who learns from a master, believers must learn to use and wield the sword in the manner displayed by our Lord and Savior. A misused sword is ineffective and possibly even dangerous to sword-bearer. In contrast, the word of God, used as God intends, is an unstoppable and effective weapon. It succeeds in doing everything God has purposed.

Matthew 24:35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. (NIV)

Isaiah 55:11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. (NIV)

John's overall description of our Lord and Savior, the Son of Man, shows One acting to purge and purify His church. Further, He judges all people, especially those who are persecuting His elect. This portrayal extends throughout the book of Revelation.

Revelation 1:17-18 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.

This passage shows John's awe and response to seeing Jesus – he "fell at his feet as though dead." Old Testament prophets, seeing the glory of Lord, had similar response. For example, Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 1:26-28 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 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. (NIV)

The disciples accompanying Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration had similar reaction when given a glimpse of Jesus' glory.

Matthew 17:5-8 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!" 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus. (NIV)

Consider that when we fall down we have nowhere to look but upward to Jesus. When the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration looked up "they saw no one except Jesus." Moses and Elijah, as important as they were, were merely fellow servants (literally slaves). Their significance pales in comparison to looking on Jesus. The Father made clear, in His words from heaven, the focus is to be Jesus: "listen to Him! (Matthew 17:5)."

Returning to John, who has fallen at the feet of Jesus as though dead, without any natural strength; Jesus places his right hand on him. Again, Jesus' right hand, which we considered earlier, is a symbol of favor, of power, and protection. Jesus gives John all the strength he needs. He sets him on his feet and prepares him for what he must do.

This right hand has always strengthened and upheld God's people. Consider Israel, into whom God grafts us (the Gentile church, see Romans 11:17-26):

Isaiah 41:8-10 "But you, O Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, 9 I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, 'You are my servant'; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. 10 So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (NIV)

Therefore, David could confidently say:

Psalms 29:11 The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace. (NIV)

The apostle Paul echoed similar belief through statements such as:

Philippians 4:13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (NIV)

2 Timothy 4:17-18 But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. 18 The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

Consider Revelation's text, focusing on Jesus' first words after placing His right hand on John.

Revelation 1:17-18 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.

Jesus words "do not be afraid" rest in God's ability to give us strength and to uphold us. With His continuous presence, why should we be afraid?

Hebrews 13:5-6 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." [Quoting Deuteronomy 31:6] 6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" [Quoting Psalms 118:6-7] (NIV)

Jesus reinforced His words of "do not be afraid" with proof of how powerful He is. He was dead but now He's alive forever. With the proven impossibility of his defeat or destruction, we unquestionably can rest in His assurance that there is nothing to fear.

So why do we still fear so much, whether circumstances, people, events, or whatever? Some would say we lack faith, but Scriptures (in fact, the apostle John) make it specifically clear. We are deficient in something bound to our faith, we lack love.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (NIV)

The more we love God, the more we trust Him. In perfect love we would do everything He asks, without question or doubt, because we know it pleases Him. Our love rests in His...

1 John 4:19 We love because he first loved us.



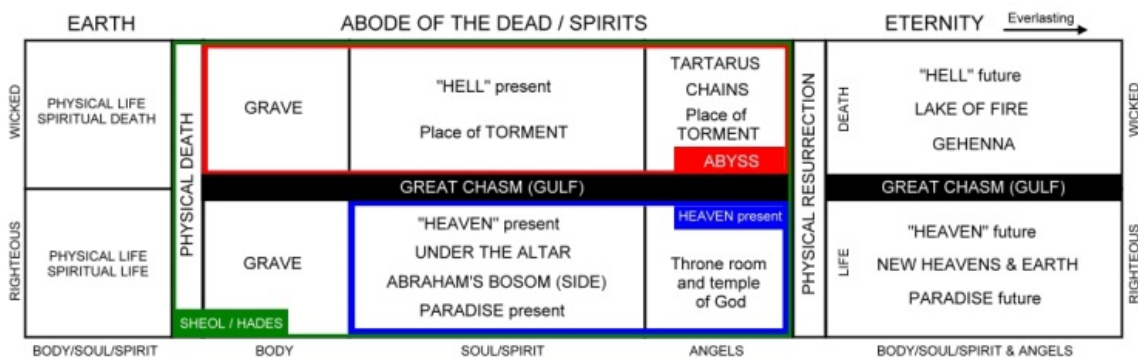
We know that in God’s love for us, everything He asks of us is good. Everything He allows to happen to us is good. More actively, all He does in our lives is good.

Romans 8:28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (NIV)

Are you afraid of what God has planned for your future? Our prayer always must be “Lord, increase my love.” Perfect love drives out fear.

Revelation 1:18b And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

When we think “keys” we merely think access; those with a key can enter. In ancient times, and in some modern cultures (for example: the present-day Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem), holding a key represents more than access, it represents power. The key holder had power to allow access or not. (About the previously mentioned church, a Muslim holds the key as a means of controlling competing Christian factions within the building).



Jesus holds the keys of the worst enemy we can think of: “death” (... called an enemy in 1 Corinthians 15:25-26). Verse 18 joins two terms, death is the condition and Hades is the place (the dwelling-place of the dead, equivalent to the Hebrew term “Sheol”). Some weave fanciful doctrines and stories around these. In their view, the devil holds the keys of death and Hades, then Jesus descends into Hell at his death and takes them back from the devil. (Some songs by Carmen, years ago, reflected this. He has Jesus fighting with and defeating the devil). This scenario has problem on many levels.

#1. Regardless of what popular culture, cartoons, and movies portray; the devil does not rule over death and hell (or Hades, the abode of the dead). When it comes to hellfire, it's the Devil's final destination – not to rule, but in punishment.

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. (NIV)

Jesus made it clear this everlasting fire chiefly exists for the devil and his angels.

Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (NIV)

#2. Scriptures nowhere show anyone holding the keys except Jesus. God is in control, past tense and currently. The Bible does speak of God giving *some* keys to others (at least temporarily):

- Key to the house of David – Isaiah 22:22 (contrast Revelation 3:7, now held by Jesus)
- Keys of the kingdom of heaven – Matthew 16:19 (given to the church under the authority of Christ)
- Key to the shaft of the Abyss – Revelation 9:1, 20:1-2 (held by angels under the authority and direction of God)

The only clear statement about the “keys of death and Hades” are Jesus’ unquestionable “I hold the keys of death and Hades!” Some, including noted pastor and author John MacArthur, hold the devil had these keys based on this passage:

Hebrews 2:14-15 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. (NIV)

1 Corinthians 15:25-26 looks to the future defeat of death and Hebrews 2:14 shows future destruction of the devil. Together they imply the devil's “holding the power of death” (“holds” or “possesses” is present tense) is not equivalent to holding the keys. Jesus’ announcement to John, that He holds the keys, is well before devil’s destruction. Even before Jesus died and rose again, Jesus stressed who had the power to cast into hell – God alone! The devil’s power of death is only physical death, not everlasting death.

Luke 12:4-5 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. (NIV)

Though unwarranted by the text, let me theoretically allow John MacArthur his assertions on this subject: the devil once held the keys. If true, his possession of them was because God chose to do so, and for a limited time. This aligns with other examples in Scriptures, keys temporarily given under God's authority. The rightful and supreme owner of the keys is Jesus.

Revelation 1:19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.

Jesus makes clear to John what the content of this book was to include: what he already saw, current happenings, and future events. The book unquestionably includes future prophecy. Prophecy declares what "will" be, not merely possibilities. This reflects a statement God made back in Isaiah.

Isaiah 46:8-10 "Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. 9 Remember the former things, those of long ago; 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. (NIV)

God alone knows everything from beginning to end, before it happens. Nothing takes Him by surprise and nothing will thwart His carrying out all He has purposed. If God reveals what will happen – we know without a doubt that it will take place.

There's no need to examine again the last verse of chapter 1, as we studied it earlier at the first sighting of the stars and the lampstand in Revelation 1:12-16.

Revelation 1:20 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.

This verse seemingly ends John's general introduction to the Book of Revelation. The chapter division artificially aids in this view. And yet, this introductory chapter is part of a greater opening section. God addresses the entire opening "To His servants." This grander introduction continues through to chapter three's end. The first chapter's thoughts and themes are present

throughout. Complementing this opening three-chapter prologue, God provides a final epilogue, also addressed “To His servants,” starting at 22:6 continuing until the end of the book.

Jesus now begins His specific message to “His servants,” a message to every church throughout time. Within this unified message He addresses sections to one of seven specially selected literal churches in Asia Minor. His selection of these specific churches was with intent; taken together they represent the condition and problems the church would face from then until His return. Make certain that you understand that this is a message for you today. God is speaking to all believers, each part of the one church of Jesus Christ (not bound by time or geographic location).

Revelation 2:1-7 "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. (NIV)

#### Details about the city Ephesus

- Located on the western shores of Asia Minor, about 300 miles east of Corinth
- A seacoast town. Yet, from its founding, Cayster (Kucuk Menderes) river silt has moved the coast outward. Even in Paul's day the city was about three miles from the Aegean Sea.
- Major seaport of the region (ranking with Antioch and Alexandria as the 3 greatest in the eastern Mediterranean). Ships from every nation would use this port.
- The local Roman Theater held 25,000 spectators (based on ruins; an ancient source claimed almost double). There were an estimated 250,000 people living in Ephesus in this period.
- Three land trade routes converged at Ephesus, including:
  - The Colossae - Laodicea road (traveling east)
  - The road to Sardis and Galatia (northeast)

- The Smyrna (north) main road
- Prosperous! Prided as being the commercial, intellectual and religious center of the Roman province of Asia. Never an official capital city, yet the Romans recognized it as "the first city" and granted it "free city" status.
- The Goths permanently destroyed the city in 262 A.D.

Religious features of Ephesus:

- The temple of Artemis was central to their religious life.
  - Greek: Artemis; Romans: Diana
  - Called one of the seven wonders of the ancient world
  - 343x164 ft., 100 column almost 60 ft. high, 36 beautifully carved
  - Inner Shrine had a statue of this fertility goddess (with many breasts)
- Worship included religious hysteria, formulaic magic and incantations, sorcery, astrology, and even sexual acts. Heraclitus of Ephesus, writing many years before (circa 535-475 B.C.), said "Their morals were lower than animals."
- Mingling of business and religion was normal and widespread (see Acts 19:23-28). Items sold included mini-statues (amulets) to hang around their necks, arms, and ankles.
- A small Jewish presence existed in the city. Its similarly small early Christian church began with a combination of Jews and Gentiles. From Paul's second visit:

Acts 19:1a, 8-10 While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. ... 8 Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. 9 But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. 10 This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. (NIV)

My introduction to Ephesians (<http://www.notjustanotherbook.com/ephesians.htm>), as found on our website, provides more details on the Book of Ephesians and Paul's earlier involvement with this important city.

Jesus opens this message to Ephesus, using the lampstand and stars in his right hand as imagery to remind them that He is among His church and that He protects and purifies it. He then says "I know." As we already saw in the introduction, there is nothing God does not know – if He says "I know" then it is a fact.

What did Jesus know? He begins with a positive; the true church could detect lies and mistruths. Jesus gives specific praise focusing on matters inside the church rather than outside it. His praise is for “not tolerating wicked men” found among them. Many of today’s churches have gotten good at not tolerating the world around us. Similar to isolationist monks, contact with the surrounding world is rare and seldom positive. Words of condemnation are about all they have for the world.

The apostle Paul taught the Corinthian church where they needed proper judgment.

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. 11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. 12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." (NIV)

In Jesus’ commendation of the Ephesian church, for dealing with wickedness, the provided example wasn’t (in this case) sexual immorality. Their challenge was false teachers and leaders, specifically some self-styled or self-claimed apostles.

Where many churches have gotten good at calling the world evil, as it is, far too many churches can’t recognize a false apostle, prophet, or leader. And when they do recognize one, they don’t know what to do with them, having no will to stop them.

### **How do you recognize a false apostle?**

- Jesus did not appoint or send them. An apostle, by definition, is “one who is sent,” with emphasis on the person doing the sending. Jesus sent all the original apostles plus Paul. They could validly call themselves “Apostles of Jesus Christ.” Examples of their sending:

Luke 6:13 When morning came, he [Jesus] called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: (NIV) [Also Mark 3:14]

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man [Saul/Paul] 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." (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

- They had not seen the resurrected Lord. Every true apostle met with Jesus following His resurrection.

1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? (NIV) [Also Acts 9:27]

1 Corinthians 15:7-8 Then he [Jesus] appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (NIV)

- They preach a gospel different from that preached by the original apostles. To recognize this requires knowing the true gospel and judging the words of the one speaking.

2 Corinthians 11:1-5, 13-15 I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. 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. 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. 4 For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. 5 But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those "super-apostles." ... 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. (NIV)

- Their focus was not Jesus' words. Apostles didn't have a new message, they faithfully proclaimed, explained, and lived the words of Jesus.

2 Peter 3:2 I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles. (NIV)

- They separated themselves from the true church (the standard being the Word of God alone). They expel people from the church for self-serving reasons and chiefly to keep themselves as number one. John used the word "antichrist" as a synonym for these false apostles and teachers.

1 John 2:18-20 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. 20 But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. (NIV)

3 John 9-10 I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. 10 So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church. (NIV)

Returning to Jesus' words, in His praise of the Ephesian church, which began this passage...

Revelation 2:2 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.

They examine or test those falsely claiming to be church leaders and teachers. It's not accidental "hard work" and "perseverance" describe this task, both are necessary for looking into pretenders to these important church offices. Many stop at the period following perseverance, as found in the NIV, believing the topic is complete. Here they will point out that they (or their church) are hard workers and suggest that perseverance means merely keeping up the hard work. This understanding is incomplete, making it wrong. The text ties far more together using the specific Greek word (kai) for "and." While it makes a long sentence in English (spanning three verses!), the New American Standard Bible gives a better idea of how the passage should read.

Revelation 2:2-3 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; 3 and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. (NASU)

Jesus praised the Ephesian church for their hard work and perseverance (or "steadfastness" or "patient endurance") in keeping the church pure. Accepting this as approving individuals would be difficult. This praise belonged to the church because together they were doing right in protecting the flock. This message belonged to the church collectively rather than any focus on



individuals. And yet, their corporate attention to God's word will show in their everyday lives (perseverance and good deeds being a personal calling).

Notice that perseverance (steadfastness) appears twice in that long Greek sentence. Enduring is cause for further praise. They "endured" for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ and "have not grown weary." A church focused on the perfect name and person of Jesus Christ will not grow weary of working to ensure all within will hear pure teaching of that name by people approved by God. A church with this focus will impact all individuals within her.

The society around this church was quick to repeat the slogan "Caesar is Lord." Regardless, the church was living out their unshakable belief that "Jesus is Lord." Unlike modern lip service, their sincerity came at a price. Sadly, too many churches (and believers) have "grown weary" and are no longer willing to do the hard work necessary to protect and safeguard the flock. In the name of inclusiveness and professedly keeping the peace they are willing to allow the name of Jesus Christ to fall into disrepute rather than to act. The Ephesian church stands in great contrast. When you care you act – and Jesus praised them for it.

Preventing false teachers from harming the flock meant keeping them from church gatherings and out of homes. Today, welcome mats are out for many false teachers into churches and homes, the latter often through media. Such welcome may be willful or through carelessness. Others recognize false teachers but reluctantly tolerate them, not wanting to stand against for fear of offending. In one of his earlier letters, John specific gave warning about being too welcoming.

2 John 7-11 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. 8 Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. 9 Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. 11 Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. (NIV)

Continuing in Revelation chapter two, Jesus interrupts His praise of the church at Ephesus for a brief, yet important, rebuke.

Revelation 2:4-5 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.  
(NIV)

The Ephesian church still loved the Lord; that was not in question. Something had happened; they had left (or fallen from) their first love. Love takes work, especially over time, but first love comes with passion! Even when a church (or believer) is doing right, it becomes easy to accept the status quo, forgetting the passion and zeal that should drive us. Have you ever noticed that you can see first love? Just watch a young married couple and they often stand out from that old (or “more mature”) married couple. You see their passion in even small and mundane matters.

The Ephesian church was still acting on their love, but they had forgotten the passion they once had. The danger is that actions without passion lead to vain repetition – and finally no one knows why. When this is the example for another generation (i.e. new believers), it looks dry and dead. Often those fallen into this state will do everything possible to quench those who haven't, because they make them look bad. Consider this issue another way; when someone is on fire for God (often a new believer) naysayers become a water-bucket brigade. More than once I've heard older sedentary church members advising young believers to have a little less zeal – assuring them that they'll understand why when they mature. Sadly, it's not so much the new believer matures; rather time and non-zealous example cultivates disciples. Oh, God's church would remember her first love! For those water-bucket brigades, the words of Paul will do...

Romans 12:9-11 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. (NIV)

The Ephesian church had started out well. At the beginning the apostle Paul had been among them (preaching house to house for three years i.e. Acts 20:20-21, 31). If anyone could give passionate example of a lasting and passionate first love, it was Paul.

Timothy succeeded Paul in being an elder at Ephesus. About a decade after Paul was first there, he was already writing Timothy warning that love needed to be the focus. There were already false teachers focused on myths, genealogies, and meaningless talk.

1 Timothy 1:3-6 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies

rather than God's work — which is by faith. 5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 6 Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. (NIV)

It appeared the church at Ephesus listened. Later, when the apostle Paul wrote to this church, he praised them for their love.

Ephesian 1:15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints (NIV)

What is first love? Jesus defined it well!

Matthew 22:37-39 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (NIV)

First love is a love that consumes every waking moment, a love that transforms the way we think and what we do! When Paul wrote his letter, the church at Ephesus was still showing their first love, living out their love for all the saints.

Decades later, the church at Ephesus had fallen. Not to the point of necessarily looking bad, for she was still doing what she needed to be. In contrast to what she previously was, she now looked different. Her zeal and passion was gone. Sadly, unless corrected, history has shown that loss of first love is merely a step towards becoming terminal. (Many churches have died this way. Dead on their feet, they fail to see they should be lying down).

Any church not passionately living out their love for God and their neighbor has lost its first love. This is not an “or” statement, “first love” includes visible and active love for God plus for our neighbors. What might have changed for the Ephesian church by John’s time writing Revelation? Perhaps this church was too focused on trying to keep the church pure. Purity is lacking when used as an excuse. The church must remain pure and love others.

Revelation 2:4-5 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. (NIV)

“Repent and do the things you did at first.” Reread Matthew 22:37-38! John follows this warning with clear outcome if they fail to act. Let every church be warned. All the programs, technology, choirs, bands, buildings and top dollar preachers in the world will not keep a church alive. Jesus alone does so. This church in Ephesus could have everything, but if they continued the downhill course that naturally follows losing their first love, Jesus said he would remove their lampstand. Simply put, they needed to turn around (repent) or they would die.

Jesus directly provided a key feature of the end times: the “love of most will grow cold.”

Matthew 24:9-14 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most [polus] will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (NIV, parenthesis and underline for clarification)

#### **Definition**

Polus – A Greek word commonly translated “most,” also meaning “many,” “mostly,” and “largely.”

Did you notice the cause of love growing cold as given in this Matthew passage? The problem was an “increase of wickedness.” Churches, especially, must guard against wickedness within; it’s the only way to keep love from growing cold.

It appears the church at Ephesus took to heart the message that John sent them, at least for a while. About a decade after John wrote Revelation, the early church father Ignatius wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus. He praised the church for their patient endurance and their resistance to lies. Ignatius gave specifics, noting some people from Syria had passed through their city bringing evil teachings but the Ephesian church had refused to listen. He recognizes their love, praising them for being of one mind with the apostles in the power of Jesus Christ.

Yet, a few generations after Ignatius, the church was gone. Jesus had removed their lampstand. Obviously they once again had lost their first love (it had grown cold) and they fell, never to rise again.

Perhaps to not discourage this church in Ephesus, rather than ending on a criticism, Jesus sandwiched His rebuke between His first praise and final praise.

Revelation 2:6 But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. (NIV)

What's a Nicolaitan? This is the number one question posed anytime I publicly reference this passage. Searching Scriptures for references to them provides only two mentions, both in the Book of Revelation. Following this passage, the second reference is in the letter to the church at Pergamum (Revelation 2:15). Neither text provides details on this group or sect.

Specifics on the Nicolaitans are unnecessary. Without knowing details of their practices, this passage still contains valuable instruction.

#1. The church could recognize them as having ungodly practices and doctrine, solely by what they had already learned. The rise of a similar group today is irrelevant. We must be able to recognize them by judging their practices and teaching by the revealed word of God – regardless of what name they go by.

#2. We are to hate what Christ hates. Consider the words of David, who God called “a man after my own heart (Acts 13:22)”...

Psalms 26:2-5 Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; 3 for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth. 4 I do not sit with deceitful men, nor do I consort with hypocrites; 5 I abhor [“hate” NASU] the assembly of evildoers and refuse to sit with the wicked. (NIV)

Psalms 101:3-4 I will set before my eyes no vile thing. The deeds of faithless men I hate; they will not cling to me. 4 Men of perverse heart shall be far from me; I will have nothing to do with evil. (NIV)

#3. We are to guard against all introducing practices and teachings that God hates.

Matthew 7:15-23 [Jesus warned of wolves among the flock] "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a

bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. 21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (NIV)

Notice that “by their fruit you will recognize them” does not mean “merely by their actions you will recognize them.” Big or fanciful results are not fruit. These wolves prophesied, cast out demons and performed miracles. Fruit is evidence of what God is doing in a person’s personal life...

Galatians 5:22-26 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (NIV)

And, as the Apostle Paul clarifies, fruit has to include their teaching:

Acts 20:28-32 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! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. 32 "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified. (NIV)

Immediately following his warning, Paul included the solution for the problem. He committed them to God and His word. God’s word (“the word of his grace”) is the complete and sufficient means for exposing wolves. God’s church clings to this alone. Peter gave similar warning:

2 Peter 2:1-3 But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. 2 Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. 3 In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. (NIV)

The warning is against made-up stories and false teachings. The cure: expose them by God's word ("the way of truth").

Old Testament warnings about false teachers and wolves acting as shepherds provide further insight into problems caused by tolerating their presence among God's people.

Jeremiah 23:1 "Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture!" declares the Lord. (NIV)

These wolves don't bring together God's people, they work to destroy and scatter. They are under God's "woe" – a certain warning that in their unrepentance they will perish. Ezekiel speaks to the same issue as Jeremiah in a longer passage:

Ezekiel 34:1-10 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? 3 You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. 4 You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. 5 So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. 6 My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them. 7 "'Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 8 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because my flock

lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, 9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 10 This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. (NIV)

God opposes these false shepherds, with their harshness and brutality against His sheep. They scatter and destroy. They use the flock as means of taking care of themselves. These pretenders harm the sheep in their pursuit of personal gain, saving the best for themselves. Again, when God says "I am against them" is to be under God's "woe," using the words of Jeremiah.

For the record; one ancient writer (writing circa 180 A.D.) claimed to know specifically who the Nicolaitans were:

The Nicolaitanes are the followers of that Nicolas who was one of the seven first ordained to the diaconate by the apostles. They lead lives of unrestrained indulgence. The character of these men is very plainly pointed out in the Apocalypse of John, [when they are represented] as teaching that it is a matter of indifference to practice adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. Wherefore the Word has also spoken of them thus: "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate." (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 1.26.3)

It's irrelevant if these are the Nicolaitans referenced in Revelation. Regardless of the reader's knowledge of the original namesake, clear instruction remains. The text provides broad warning against all whose characteristics are common to this group.

This letter to the Ephesian church finishes with a universal call specifically intended only for some.

Revelation 2:7 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.



“He who has an ear” presumes not everyone does. Jesus used identical wording after making some hard to understand statements, including parables, as recorded in Matthew (11:15 – about John the Baptist being spiritual Elijah; 13:9-16 – sower; 13:36-43 – wheat and tares). Jesus explained what He meant by His use of this phrase immediately following one instance in Matthew (following the parable of the sower):

Matthew 13:9-16 He who has ears, let him hear." 10 The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?" 11 He replied, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. 12 Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 13 This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. 14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "'You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. 15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.' [Quoting Isaiah 6:9-10] 16 But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. (NIV)

Simply put, God does not intent for everyone to understand His word. This message is specifically for those whom God has given “ears to hear.” The continuing words in Revelation, “let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches,” makes it clear the Holy Spirit has a message that He is giving to believers. Remember what the Holy Spirit teaches...

John 14:25-26 "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. (NIV)

John 15:26 "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. (NIV)

John 16:12-13 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. (NIV)

The message to the church at Ephesus, Revelation chapter 2, ends with...

Revelation 2:7b To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

Who overcomes? The answer is clear in scriptures, every believer.

1 John 5:4-5 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. 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. (NIV)

John is clear that all those who have saving faith in Jesus Christ overcome the world. His statement in Revelation presumes knowledge of his earlier assertion. Eternal life belongs only to the believer, the overcomer.

Matthew 25:46 [From the end of the account of the King separating the sheep and the goats in judgment, showing the difference between the wicked and the righteous] "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (NIV)

John 3:14-18 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son (NIV)

All recipients of God-given eternal life are future participants in the paradise of God. The right to eat from His tree of life belongs to each of them.

**Definition**

Paradeisos – Paradise. A word used for the Garden of Eden in the Septuagint (LXX), a Greek language translation of the Old Testament commonly used in Jesus' time by the Greek speaking world.

As a reminder, the original tree of life first appears in the original paradise; the Garden of Eden. John intentionally used this word to prompt his Biblically literate readers to think of this original paradise of Genesis chapter 2 and 3. The general Greek speaking world, even hundreds of years before Jesus, would have a partial understanding of this word. Without direct awareness

of the Garden of Eden, as defined in Scriptures, the word paradise meant a garden, or park, or enclosure. And not merely any ordinary park, one full of everything good and beautiful (as used by Xenophōn, circa 430 – 354 BC).

To refresh your memory on God's original Paradise...

Genesis 2:8-9 Now the Lord God had planted a garden ["paradeisos" in the LXX] 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. (NIV)

Genesis 2:15-17 The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden ["paradeisos" in the LXX] of Eden to work it and take care of it. 16 And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (NIV)

Genesis 3:1-8 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" 4 "You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. (NIV, "paradeisos" in the LXX for occurrences of the word "garden" in verses 1, 2 & 3)

Genesis 3:22-24 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. (NIV, "paradeisos" in the LXX for occurrences of the word "garden" in verses 23 & 24)

Sin caused humanity's ban from the tree of life. God originally only restricted Adam and Eve from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the Garden of Eden they could have eaten of the tree of life forever. But, after the fall, God's ban on eating from the tree of life displays His grace. It prevented humankind from living forever in our fallen state, or even (for a believer) in our redeemed state (but still clothed with corrupted and dying flesh). Who wants to life forever in this sin-tainted body? As human history unfolds throughout the pages of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, this ending book now reveals what happened to the tree. God transplanted it to the New Heaven's and Earth, the eternal and incorruptible Paradise of God. Here, the Lord's redeemed will eat and live forever. This new Paradise has one major difference from the original location. Sin can no longer harm, for it is no more; our redemption is complete and secure. Our spirit is alive, our soul renewed and our body resurrected incorruptible, never to die again. All believers gladly eat from the tree of life and live forever in the presence of our Lord and Savior. This is God's Paradise restored...

1 Corinthians 15:50-54 [Paul speaks to our necessary transformation to enter this final Paradise of God:] I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 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." (NIV)

Later John gives us a brief description of this Paradise restored. I believe this description is barebones. Only a limited description is possible because of our present sin-tainted state. Our condition prevents us from grasping the fullness of what is coming.

Revelation 21:1-4 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." (NIV)

Revelation 22:1-5 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. (NIV)

Revelation continues with another specifically addressed letter:

Revelation 2:8 "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. (NIV)

We return to a theme found earlier in Revelation. Jesus is the First and Last, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end (Revelation 1:8). Jesus is as eternal as His Father. Evidence that He shares this quality comes from similar wording, used for both, found throughout Scriptures. All this stresses that Jesus is God, part of the eternally existing triune God.

Psalms 90:2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. (NIV)

Isaiah 44:6 "This is what the Lord says — Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. (NIV)

Hebrews 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. (NIV)

The Old Testament prophet Micah, speaking of the coming Messiah (Jesus), stressed that He was from eternity.

Micah 5:2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (NIV) [Quoted and directly applied to Jesus in Matthew 2:5-6]

The eternal God taking on flesh and becoming a man culminates in the balance of Jesus' words. He "died and came to life again." The Apostle Paul highlights the same as part of a slightly longer passage:

Philippians 2:5-11 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. 9 Wherefore God has also highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: 10 That at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11 And that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Before moving forward in Revelation, it's necessary to focus on this pivotal event. Consider the significance of Jesus dying and coming to life again.

- Jesus' death and resurrection was God's plan from the beginning.

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, 5 to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons. (NIV)

Revelation 13:8 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. (NIV)

1 Peter 1:18-20 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. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (NIV)

Ephesians 1:4-6 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (NIV)

Titus 1:1-3 Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness— 2 a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, 3 and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Savior (NIV)

Revelation 17:8 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. (NIV)

- Jesus' death was necessary for salvation (animal sacrifices are not enough).

Hebrews 9:22-10:4 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness. 23 It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. 24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. 10:1 The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. 2 If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. 3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, 4 because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. (NIV)

Satisfaction of God's justice had only one perfect solution. Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection were the Father's plan:

Luke 22:39-44 Jesus went out as usual to the Mount of Olives, and his disciples followed him. 40 On reaching the place, he said to them, "Pray that you will not fall into

temptation." 41 He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down and prayed, 42 "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." 43 An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. 44 And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (NIV)

God revealed this specific plan, this solution many hundreds of years in advance:

Isaiah 53 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. 11 After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (NIV) [Also Daniel 9:24-26, Zechariah 13:7]

- Jesus' death was a public event, assuring widespread knowledge of these unique historical events.

Crucifixion, though public, was not unique. First century historian Josephus records details of this all too common practice. Romans had stripped the trees for miles around Jerusalem to



crucify all they captured trying to escape from the siege of Jerusalem (leading to the fall of the temple in A.D. 70). Crucified captives surrounded the walls of Jerusalem to send a message to those still inside. A slave revolt had an earlier Roman ruler (about 70 B.C.) crucify 6000 slaves along the Appian Way for almost 500 miles. Smaller-scale crucifixion was the standard deterrent for criminal acts and political dissent. Whether one or a few, Roman fanfare accompanied these executions, each typically in visible public locations, to assure everyone heard about it. Jesus' crucifixion was outside the walls of Jerusalem. Assuring publicity, the chosen location was near a gate, witnessed by everyone entering and leaving the city during a major Jewish festival.

Hebrews 13:12-14 And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. 13 Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. 14 For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. (NIV)

There's no question that Jesus died (contrary to those who claim otherwise). The Roman soldiers present were sure of it. The Roman governor and the Jewish high priest were sure of it. Devastated witnesses to it include friends and disciples of Jesus. Muslim claims that God switched Jesus for someone else is easily dismissed by the biblical record. Jesus died on that cross. Jesus didn't merely speak generic words on the cross; He spoke personal words identifying Himself as the speaker. Jesus' conversation with his close disciple, John, about His mother Mary, is key evidence.

If crucifixion was so common, how can I say that Jesus' death was unique? Consider all that accompanied it, which God supernaturally used to show this wasn't just another crucifixion.

- Jesus was innocent of all charges against him and repeatedly declared so. His was not the first, or last, death of an innocent man by Rome. What was rare was doing so after public declarations clearing Him. Secrecy and suppressed evidences normally accompanied executions of innocent people.

- Their primary witness and informant admitted the charged person was innocent:

Matthew 27:3-4 When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood." "What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility." (NIV)

- The governor's wife testified that Jesus was innocent. The governor, Pilate, knew He was innocent:

Matthew 27:19-24 While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him." 20 But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. 21 "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" asked the governor. "Barabbas," they answered. 22 "What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?" Pilate asked. They all answered, "Crucify him!" 23 "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" 24 When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" (NIV)

- Not only did Pilate find Jesus innocent, King Herod also did:

Luke 23:13-15 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them, "You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. (NIV)

- Widespread and unexpected darkness.

Mark 15:33-34 At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. 34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"-which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (NIV)

- Solar eclipses last for only a few minutes, plus they cannot happen during the time of the Passover. This was unlike any prior or following eclipse. The Greek biblical text goes out of its way to highlight that difference. The darkness fell – it happened at once, unlike the slow onset of a typical eclipse.
- Tertullian of Carthage (who lived 160-220 A.D.) confirmed this account. A church historian involved in early Christian apologetics, he wrote for Roman nonbelievers. Tertullian testified that record of this darkness appeared in official Roman annals,

effectively challenging skeptics to check the readily available archives.

- Lucian of Antioch, just before his martyrdom in 312 A.D., testified to the same. In his defense before Caesar Maximinus he appealed to Caesar to search the Roman records to confirm this unique darkness in association with the death of Jesus.

- Tearing of the temple curtain or veil.

Luke 23:44-46 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. (NIV)

Mark 15:37-38 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. 38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (NIV)

- The temple curtain was not thin, rather it was inches thick. It was modeled after the curtain first used in the tabernacle.

Exodus 26:30-34 "Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain. 31 "Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. 32 Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. 33 Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. 34 Put the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. (NIV)

- The veil tore from top to bottom, symbolizing God opening the way from heaven to humanity.

Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. (NIV)

- Earthquake and formerly dead people walking.

Matthew 27:50-54 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 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. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (NIV)

- Damage from this earthquake is still visible in Jerusalem to this day. Cracks in bedrock surrounding Golgotha testify to the violence of this earthquake.
- Widespread appearance of formerly dead people after the resurrection provided extra, late, confirmation of the uniqueness of Jesus' death and resurrection. There was nothing random about these resurrections. These are "holy people" – all were believers who had died (how recently we don't know). How long these people then lived is a detail the text does not provide. What is certain, like Lazarus, their resurrection was only temporary.

- Jesus' death did all He set out to do.

John 19:28-30 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. (NIV)

Many people, even in the church, don't understand how much Jesus' death accomplished. Some hold it merely provided a possibility, nothing being certain for anyone. But Jesus publicly made sure that all listening would hear "It is finished!" Jesus had laid down his life for his sheep. He made clear before going to the cross, exactly who He was dying for:

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (NIV)

Jesus' death and resurrection completed everything necessary to save His people from their sins. Remember what the angel told Joseph before he married Mary:

Matthew 1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." (NIV)

Finally, consider Paul's words on what the cross carried out:

Colossians 2:13-15 When you [who are now believers] were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, [notice the past tense, then the "how"...] 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Jesus' finished work on the cross provided forgiveness for the sins of every believer (past, present, and future)! There is no need for works-penance and indulgences or suffering in purgatory to somehow help pay for your own sins. If, by faith, you are a believer in Jesus Christ, full payment of your debt took place on the cross of Calvary.

- Something had to accompany Jesus' death: His resurrection from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:17-19 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. (NIV)

The world didn't need merely another "dead" teacher; it needed a savior who was everything he claimed to be. His resurrection proved this and that He had power over even the worst enemy; death. In Jesus' death he paid for our sins; in Jesus' life He lived the perfect life we could never offer the Father. Also, in Jesus' continued life in heaven, He is our mediator, intercessor, and high priest.

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (NIV)

Hebrews 7:24-26 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely [literally; entirely,

forever] those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. 26 Such a high priest meets our need — one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. (NIV)

- Jesus' resurrection gives us hope and assurance.

“He is risen!”

The substance of these words changed the world, specifically the lives of believers worldwide. In this claim rest the hopes of countless Christians of every tongue, tribe, and nation.

1 Corinthians 15:12-19 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. 17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. 19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men. (NIV)

To deny Jesus' resurrection is to reject a public historical event. Solid evidences supporting the historicity of this event abound. Application of any method trying to deny it would result in denial of almost all written world and American history. If we can accept any history, the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ is an historical fact!

God made certain that a multitude of faithful people would be witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Jesus' resurrection was as public as His death. Jesus specifically showed Himself to people who would be faithful witnesses. This list is full of people who knew Him before His death:

Women who witnessed the crucifixion (Matthew 28:1, 9)

The disciples (the 11 and extended, Luke 24:33-36)

Jesus' family (Acts 1:14)

Every apostle (1 Corinthians 15:7)

A group of over 500 believers at the same time!

1 Corinthians 15:3-8 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. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (NIV)

The resurrection wasn't some semi-secret event easily invented by a handful of conspirators; God provided more than enough witnesses to meet any legal demand of proof that Jesus was in fact alive. Years later, as Paul preached the death and resurrection of Jesus to Festus and King Agrippa, he could confidently assert:

Acts 26:25-26 "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. (NIV)

The king unquestionably was aware of these public events and the talk they garnered.

Consider the lives of those who saw the resurrected Lord and witnessed this miraculous event. Their testimony enabled the church to grow rapidly and exponentially throughout the known world. They weren't willing to give their lives over some dead teacher; they lived their lives in service to their living Lord.

Galatians 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. (NIV)

The church doesn't need one day, or weekend, each year to celebrate Jesus' death, burial and resurrection. Like those who were direct witnesses to Jesus' resurrection, our lives should bear witness every day to our confident assurance that "He is risen!" The reason the church started meeting weekly on the first day of the week (Sunday) was to remember and celebrate Jesus, the one "who died and came to life again."

The letter to the church in Smyrna continues with specifics:

Revelation 2:9-11 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. (NIV)

Immediately following Jesus' self-identification, as being "the First and the Last, who dies and came to life again," He begins: "I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich!" (Revelation 2:9a)

Afflictions – also translated as tribulations and persecutions. From the beginning God's church was warned and encouraged that they would suffer afflictions or tribulations.

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble [tribulation]. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (NIV)

Preaching the "good news" of the gospel comes with the warning that these tribulations must come. Consider how far removed this biblical message is from today's "God wants you to live in peaceful luxury gospel."

Acts 14:21-22 They [Paul and Barnabas] preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships [tribulations] to enter the kingdom of God," they said. (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, 3 so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them. 4 In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know. (NIV)

These circumstances teach us patience, endurance, and joy, plus, most of all, to cling to the Lord and take everything to Him in prayer.

Romans 12:11-12 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (NIV)



Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings [tribulations], because we know that suffering [tribulation] produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (NIV)

It's common for Christians to have it backwards these days. They're surprised when tribulations come; the more severe the tribulation typically the greater their surprise. In contrast, based on Scriptures, our normal expectation should be these hardships. We should reserve any surprise for times of peace – the longer the time of peace the greater our surprise.

After speaking of afflictions (or tribulations), Jesus immediately references their poverty. Poverty commonly accompanies tribulations but not always. Again, for many within the western church, poverty takes them by surprise. Many see prosperity to be a sign of God's favor and blessing. In contrast, the New Testament shows that God built his church with poor people, or those who became poor for the cause of Christ (including the disciples; Matthew 19:27). Well-off were the exception in the early church, rich was never the rule.

Have you considered the way the world uses money? It uses it to control and manipulate people. Money holds the world captive with an insatiable want for more. The rich young man who came to Jesus pictures the hold money has on people – they would rather have money than eternal life.

Matthew 19:16-26 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" 17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." 18 "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" 20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. 23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." 25 When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who

then can be saved?" 26 Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (NIV)

This account of the rich young man ends by pointing out that only God can free from slavery to money. The Bible often uses imagery showing humanity's slavery to sin, needing God to set us free to become slaves of righteousness. Similar imagery uses money as the slave-master.

Matthew 6:24 "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. (NIV)

The church (believers) should view money (and possessions) in a different light than the world. Material possessions should have no hold on us! They are merely God-given tools enabling us to do good (includes providing for our needs, our family, and to help others). As God's slaves, all He has given us belongs to Him. Our grateful response, the only proper response, sees us using it only for what He has said to be good. God's blessed with extra, beyond what we need to live and provide for our family, is with purpose. Our calling is to share, never to hoard. In the following parable and subsequent remarks, Jesus gave clear instruction to all believers: stop worrying and start sharing – our master provides what we need.

Luke 12:16-34 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 21 "This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God." 22 Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. 23 Life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. 24 Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds! 25 Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 26 Since you cannot do this very little thing, why do you worry about the rest? 27 "Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 28 If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today, and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! 29 And do not set your heart on what you will eat or

drink; do not worry about it. 30 For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. 32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (NIV)

Did you notice that Jesus, after speaking of the rich man, tells His disciples (Luke 12:22) that they shouldn't worry about the future or storing up? He specifically tells them to focus on seeking God's kingdom (which means living out the message of God's kingdom). Then, in case His disciples didn't get what this message meant for them, he specifically tells them "sell your possessions and give to the poor." Unlike how some choose to portray this account of the rich man and his barns, the message here wasn't just for the wealthy. This message was equally for those considered poor, namely most of Jesus' disciples and followers.

Personal observation, from our years of traveling across North America in itinerate evangelism, provides illustration. Some of the most generous believers and churches we met are ones many consider poor (and often belittled for their size by well-off churches). The apostle Paul saw the same:

2 Corinthians 8:1-5 And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. 5 And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. (NIV)

Paul, a few verses later, then uses wording similar to Jesus' in this letter (Revelation 2:9a I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich!), but Paul applies it to Jesus himself:

2 Corinthians 8:9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich. (NIV)

Jesus, who was rich, became poor so through His poverty we can become rich. "Rich" comes with no promise of wealth in this life. In these riches we recognize that our Master owns

everything! It's equally acknowledgment that we co-inherit everything with Jesus. Our wealth isn't this sin tainted stuff of this world, rather it's the incorruptible everything of the next. The apostle James said it this way:

James 2:5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (NIV)

Jesus summarized the contrast between poor and rich in this manner:

Luke 6:20-36 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. 23 "Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets. 24 "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. 25 Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. 27 "But I tell you who hear me [i.e. those who are poor]: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you. 32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

The message of this passage is similar to our previously examined passage of Luke 12 about the rich man and his barns. No one should distort either passage as claiming only poor people are saved or all rich are lost. Yet they do show that poor was the norm for believers. It is on this

basis the apostle Paul later issues direct command to the few well off individuals who had become part of the church.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 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. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (NIV)

A mark of believers in Jesus Christ is willingness to share whatever God has blessed them with. In much or little, they give generously for the cause of Christ. Simply put, slaves of Jesus Christ are willing to use all of His goods in whatever way their Master commands. Believer can afford to give freely because it's not ours to keep.

Poor should not be a bad word in the church and believers should never fear poverty – we have a Master who knows our needs.

“I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.” (Revelation 2:9b)

#### **Definition**

Synagogue – From the Greek word “Sunagoge,” an assembly or congregation. Synagogue comes from the word “Sunago,” meaning to assemble or gather together. It is a loose synonym of “church (Greek: ‘ekklesia’)”. Consider English translations of James 2:2, a verse featuring synagogue in Greek. Instead, we see “assembly” (KJV, NASU, ESV, NET) or “meeting” (NIV, HCSB).

Synagogue merely means “assembly.” John is likely using wordplay here. Satan means “accuser” or “adversary,” so he’s referring to a gathering of opponents who slander the true church. John’s use of a term tied to Judaism, namely “synagogue,” may be that many of those persecuting and opposing the early church were Jews. Scriptures show this was common (e.g. Acts 13:50; 14:2, 5, 19; 17:5; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). Only a generation after John, the account of Polycarp’s martyrdom records Jewish involvement in persecution of believers at Smyrna. (See “The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna: Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp,” chapters 12 & 13).

How could Jesus call Jews “a synagogue of Satan?” This sounds harsh for a people referred to in the Old Testament as the “assembly of the Lord” (literally “synagogue of the Lord” in the Septuagint Greek translation of Numbers 16:3; 20:4). The apostle Paul, a Jew, made it clear; not everyone claiming the title is a Jew.

Romans 2:28-29 A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. 29 No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. (NIV)

Based on this, while specific Jewish opposition may have been in view, John's wording allows broader interpretation. A self-declared Jew was one who claimed to be God's child, or part of His holy nation, but was relying on externals (including genealogies) or works to save. In superficial appearance they meet their claim, yet in truth they do not. A true Jew is a follower of God. Specifically, with Jesus' revelation, a true Jew is a believer in the Messiah – only believers in Jesus are inwardly Jews.

It doesn't matter what label people wear for their gathering, be it synagogue or church, any assembly not comprised of inwardly circumcised (true believers) is an assembly of Satan. And what does the assembly of Satan do? Like their father, the devil, they slander true believers (... slander is a form of lying. See John 8:44). Slander appears in dozens of New Testament passages as a mark of unbelievers (i.e. Romans 1:30) and false teachers (i.e. 2 Peter 2:10-11) and even the Beast of the Book of Revelation (Revelation 13:6). Not coincidentally this remark about slander follows the immediate context of recognizing their poverty. This brings to mind the words of James:

James 2:5-7 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong? (NIV)

In contrast, God's church is to be different:

Colossians 3:7-11 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in

knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. (NIV)

As Jesus told this church at Smyrna, He knows about this slander and the evil intents and actions planned by enemies of the cross of Christ.

“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.” (Revelation 2:10a)

While Jesus knows what is coming, He never said “I’ll stop it” or “I’ll keep you from it.” Rather, He said “do not be afraid.” In other words: trust in Him, He’s in charge and he’ll take care of you amid suffering. God gave these words to His people in the Old Testament and the same applies to His church today:

Deuteronomy 31:6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." (NIV)

Paul’s paraphrase encompasses the same idea:

1 Corinthians 16:13 Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. (NIV)

Hebrews cites Deuteronomy when speaking of unnecessary fears believers may have. Perceptions of poverty or not having sufficient are the context:

Hebrews 13:5-6 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." 6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (NIV)

Jesus tells us the devil will imprison “some” to test them. Notice the text only says “some.” It may be the devil doing it, yet God is still in control. The same God who doesn’t allow our temptation beyond what we can bear (1 Corinthians 10:13) will also not allow suffering beyond what we can bear. By His grace God spares some from the intensity of prison. Regardless, every believer’s expectation should be the possibility of suffering grief. All these trial serve God’s purposes:

1 Peter 1:6-7 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while 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. (NIV)

Why persecution (or tribulation) for 10 days? Ten is a symbolic number carrying the sense of neither long nor short, but with an attainable end. Tribulations (or persecutions) will come; we're called to endure them and always to keep in mind that it will end. Amid tribulation, it's easy to forget a decreed end is in view, either on earth or in eternity. Therefore:

“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10b)

All believers long for that day when we receive a crown of life. But to get there takes perseverance, endurance, overcoming – all words that describe the result of Christ living in us. We will get to the finish line by His grace and strength. Jesus' earlier words in Matthew flesh out this idea of standing firm to the end and what we will face on the way:

Matthew 24:4-14 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. 9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (NIV)

Again, God promises all believers (those who love Him) the crown of life that follows persevering under trial.

James 1:12 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. (NIV)



“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)

The letter addressed to the Smyrna church is a message to a specific group. Understanding belongs to those whom God has given ears to hear. It’s a message for His people. The provided sovereign comfort concerns eternity: The second death (the Lake of Fire) will not harm us.

Revelation 20:6 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. (NIV) [Also Revelation 20:14; 21:8]

The end of the second letter brings us to the third of the seven churches:

Revelation 2:12-17 "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. (NIV)

We could move past verse twelve as we covered its themes in the introductory verses of Revelation. We are, at least generally, already aware of the angel and church in Pergamum. Jesus’ description repeats details from Revelation 1:16, where we first hear of the sharp doubled-edged sword coming from His mouth. Repeated use of this phrasing provides emphasis. The same glorified Jesus, described earlier by John, is giving another specific message. I said “we could” move past verse twelve, but diligence warrants extra details about Pergamum. These are necessary to understand what characterized this ancient community. Even before Rome conquered it, it had been a prominent city, which likely influenced Rome into later making it a regional capital.

This city's name came into our modern English with a slightly different sound: "parchment," or even a closer sound in Spanish: "pergamino." This word reflects the primary industry of ancient Pergamum – where they prepared parchment animal skins for use as bookmaking material. (Ancient trade issues and embargoes prevented the import and sale of Egyptian papyrus throughout most of the Roman world).

Pergamum not only sold these parchment skins but they also became a center for learning, even having a library that eventually held over two hundred thousand volumes (scrolls). In modern terms it was a university town. Knowledge was prized and taught at this key learning center. This gathered knowledge also included religious materials. Pergamum was equally a religious center. To name a few, they had temples for:

Zeus Soter

Athena Nicephorus

Dionysos Cathegemon

Asclepius Soter [Asc-lep-ius]

The altar of well-known Zeus, found on a ledge in front of the temple to Athena, was about 40 feet high. While lesser known to us; the people worshiped Asclepius as the god of healing. He had widespread following by multitudes suffering from physical illnesses. His symbol was the snake. Following Rome's control of the city, it also became a center for Emperor Worship with temples dedicated to various Roman Caesars.

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## **Caesar is Savior**

Consider a set of marble inscriptions, dating to 9 BC, found in the agora (marketplace) of Priene (across the harbor from ancient Miletus in modern Turkey). One tablet proclaimed the beginning of the New Year, set to September 23<sup>rd</sup>, the birthday of Caesar Augustus. The second tablet then heaped praise on this emperor and self-proclaimed god:

Since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior [soter], both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance [epiphanein; "epiphany"] exceeded even our expectations, surpassing all previous benefactors, and not even leaving to posterity any hope of surpassing what he has done, and since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good news [evangelion; "gospel"] for the world that came by reason of him...

Beware when government and Caesars start using or accepting religious adoration of themselves, thinking themselves to be a savior and source of good news for all. The Apostles' message unquestionably was offensive to this government. I don't believe it a coincidence that God had them use the same terms to describe Jesus' appearance as the true Savior whose eternal gospel will never end. The church needs to be willing to speak the truth clearly in opposition to those who would distort God's truth and proclaim lies – especially in government.

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Revelation 2:13 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.

Pergamum's description includes a seemingly distressing revelation: this is home to Satan's throne. This knowledge does not bring despair, rather comfort:

- 1) Jesus knew this church and where they lived, even when in the worst possible place – and any place described as Satan's throne room would qualify for that. Undoubtedly wickedness abounded everywhere and perhaps the worst possible of all wickedness.

Unlike God, Satan is a limited created being and is not omnipresent. The devil cannot simultaneously be in two places. Such a limit makes it probable that Satan has a literal throne, in the spirit realm, at a specific place on earth. This location could possibly move throughout history. Satan's need for such a throne is reasonable as his empire perversely mimics God's kingdom at every opportunity. He wants adoration and worship plus to rule – and would want such a place for his minions to come and show homage.

An alternate, or dual, understanding exists for this statement “where Satan has his throne.” The overall context of Revelation provides insight that this specific church's message has application for all churches to the end of time. Those directly familiar with Pergamum might see Satan's throne in any of the pagan temples and altars in the city. This makes an important broader viewpoint more probable. Consider Satan's present condition. Following God expelling him from heaven; his place of rule (or throne) is the earth itself. This makes this statement, seemingly relevant to one church, applicable to all churches, because Satan is the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Ephesians 2:2). God knows where we live, this earth, where Satan lives.

Some might protest this broader understanding because of the later line, “in your city – where Satan lives.” This sounds specific to this city in Asia Minor. Yet, using overall context, this second statement also has a far-reaching meaning. In the entirety of Revelation only two primary cities are in view (the Holy City versus the Great City). The “in your city” then makes this a reference to the far-reaching “Great City” of the world.

Returning to Satan’s throne, keep in mind there are only two primary thrones in view throughout this book as well: Satan’s throne (Revelation 2:13 & 13:2), on the earth, versus God’s throne (Revelation 3:21 & 7:9-11, 15 & 19:4), in heaven. (Yes, there are 24 other thrones, representing the church seated with Christ [Revelation 4:4]. These represent the church seated with Christ, also seated with the Father, as referenced in Revelation 3:21. Only at the end, when the dwelling place of God is with men, does the throne of God move to the new earth with the bride, the new city – Revelation 22:1, 3).

This dual view, not failing to recognize the greater and comprehensive picture John is unfolding across this entire book, is preferable to a narrow Pergamum-only interpretation. Isolating this message from John’s broader picture is damaging. While all seven letters are for specific geographic churches, their selection was to aid in the greater message coming in the remaining chapters the book.

- 2) It’s possible to remain true to Jesus’ name in the face of the worst possible wickedness. Jesus praised the members of this church for doing so.
- 3) It’s possible to stay true to Jesus, even when people experience worst possible pressure to renounce their faith. Here the pressure included death. The intent of Antipas’ execution for his faith likely was to be an example compelling other believers to renounce their faith – to deny the name of Jesus.
- 4) The worst Satan can do, and then only if God allows, is kill someone. In the big picture, what permanent harm is that to God’s saints? Jesus warned His disciples of this:

Mark 13:9-13 "You must be on your guard. You will be handed over to the local councils and flogged in the synagogues. On account of me you will stand before governors and kings as witnesses to them. 10 And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. 11 Whenever you are arrested and brought to trial, do not worry beforehand about what to say. Just say whatever is given you at the time, for it is not you speaking, but the Holy Spirit. 12 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child. Children will rebel

against their parents and have them put to death. 13 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (NIV)

Matthew 10:21-33 "Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death. 22 All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. 23 When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. 24 "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! 26 "So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 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. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. 32 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. (NIV)

Why would the people of Pergamum want to persecute Christians? Or, further still, why would the Great City, then characterized by the Roman Empire, want to persecute Christians? Earlier when I listed gods they worshiped I mentioned Zeus Soter and Asclepius Soter. The extra title "Soter" given to both these pagan gods is the Greek word for "savior." The Christians in Pergamum understood there was one savior, Jesus Christ. Therefore, they could never accept either pagan god and would not even use their widespread titles. Caesar worship was a related problem. The common phrase among the people to honor Caesar was "Caesar is Lord." Christians recognized only one Lord, Jesus Christ, preventing them from uttering such a greeting. In a city with a prominent 40 ft. altar and hosts of temples, Christians gave reverence to none of these. They held there was no altar but Christ himself and that no building was a temple. Instead their bodies served as God's dwelling place (i.e. 1 Corinthians 3:16; 6:19). Rather than seeking Asclepius' favor and healing, Christians knew of only one Great Physician who is the source and sustainer of all life.

Last, in a city consumed with knowledge, Christians held that one book was greater than all two hundred thousand plus volumes in the Pergamum library. In fact, believers held their one book alone fully true and the basis to judge all other volumes.

Each issue individually was enough to cause persecution and ridicule; together they would have made living in Pergamum (or elsewhere in the Roman Empire) nearly unbearable for Christians. At a personal level, failure to accept invitations to attend feasts to the gods or Caesar would lead to shunning or loss of jobs or commercial opportunities. Not only would people consider them to be outcasts, they would call them such publicly, not believing them to be fit to live on this earth. A common charge against Christians was infidelity to Rome often filled with accusations of rebellion and perversion. The result was widespread persecution. The Christian church continued to flourish and increase in numbers despite persecutions, and likely because of them.

The text provides no specific detail into how the named Antipas died. It's doubtful he was the only believer executed in that place; most assume him a well-known example. Pergamum was a Roman administrative center and home to the Roman proconsul. Because this Roman official held final authority on whether any person lived or died, this was likely a government sanctioned death.

Rather than the previously mentioned public setting another possibility exists. Antipas may be a little known person who died for the testimony of Jesus. God intentionally chose Antipas forcing everyone to ask "who is this?" Without question multitudes have echoed this query throughout history. Why select a little known, or seemingly irrelevant, martyr? One answer is chief. Such use shows God is intimately familiar with each of His people, He knows them by name. The world's recognition is irrelevant. God knows His children.

Psalms 116:15 Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. (NIV)

Antipas was a "martyr." The modern era has seen unprecedented cheapening of this word. Radical extremists commonly claim their suicide bombers by this name. The same happens in other groups where they provide similar attribution to every death fighting for their cause.

Biblically, martyrs are different. A martyr is not one who seeks death, rather they continue to live for the truth regardless of what pressure or persuasion comes to bear. (See also the inset box for the word martyr, here translated "witness," in my section on Revelation 6:9).

Philippians 1:20-21 I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. 21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (NIV)

2 Timothy 4:6-7 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (NIV)

It's not dishonorable to flee persecution and to avoid death (as we read in Matthew 10:23). But it is wrong to deny the Lord as means of self-preservation (as we read in Matthew 10:33). Church history abounds with examples of people who have had to make this choice. Some flee to new places and lands; others caught or taken unaware continue to stand firm to the end by the power of Christ. The first choose to abandon their prior comfortable (or normal life) to continue to live for Christ in another place. The latter give up this earthly life and enter eternity, still in service to their Lord.

It's easy to say that a person should remain true to God even to death and to read of people such as Antipas who died for his faith. Our ease comes from being distant from such individuals, barely considering their humanity. I've said it before, but Foxe's Book of Martyrs should be compulsory reading for today's complacent church. Reading only a few of those accounts show the commitment believers had to the cause of Christ in the face of severe opposition and violent persecution. It testifies to the strength and grace God gives His children in such extreme circumstances. For the record, a few selected accounts spanning over 1200 years:

Upon the day appointed, Lord Cobham was brought out of the Tower with his arms bound behind him, having a very cheerful countenance. Then was he laid upon a hurdle, as though he had been a most heinous traitor to the crown, and so drawn forth into St. Giles's field. As he was come to the place of execution, and was taken from the hurdle, he fell down devoutly upon his knees, desiring Almighty God to forgive his enemies. Then stood he up and beheld the multitude, exhorting them in most godly manner to follow the laws of God written in the Scriptures, and to beware of such teachers as they see contrary to Christ in their conversation and living. Then was he hanged up by the middle in chains of iron, and so consumed alive in the fire, praising the name of God, so long as his life lasted; the people, there present, showing great dolor. And this was done A.D. 1418 A.D. [During the reign of Queen Mary I] (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)

In 1543, the archbishop of St. Andrews made a visitation into various parts of his diocese, where several persons were informed against at Perth for heresy [opposing the

Roman Catholic Church]. Among those the following were condemned to die, viz. William Anderson, Robert Lamb, James Finlayson, James Hunter, James Raveleson, and Helen Stark. ... the principal matter on which they were condemned was having regaled themselves with a goose on [Roman Catholic] fast day. ... Helen Stark was accused of not having accustomed herself to pray to the Virgin Mary, more especially during the time she was in childbed. On these respective accusations they were all found guilty, and immediately received sentence of death; the four men, for eating the goose, to be hanged; James Raveleson to be burnt; and the woman, with her sucking infant, to be put into a sack and drowned. The four men, with the woman and the child, suffered at the same time, but James Raveleson was not executed until some days after. The martyrs were carried by a great band of armed men... Every one [of the martyrs] comforting another, and assuring themselves that they should sup together in the Kingdom of Heaven that night, they commended themselves to God, and died constantly in the Lord. The woman desired earnestly to die with her husband, but she was not [allowed]; yet, following him to the place of execution, she gave him comfort, exhorting him to perseverance and patience for Christ's sake, and, parting from him with a kiss, said, "Husband, rejoice, for we have lived together many joyful days; but this day, in which we must die, ought to be most joyful unto us both, because we must have joy forever; therefore I will not bid you good night, for we shall suddenly meet with joy in the Kingdom of Heaven." The woman, after that, was taken to a place to be drowned, and [though] she had a [nursing infant], yet this moved nothing in the unmerciful hearts of the enemies. So, after she had [given] her children to the neighbors of the town for God's sake, and [her nursing infant] to [another to] nurse, she sealed up the truth by her death. (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)

The cruelties used by the imperial troops, under Count Tilly in Saxony [Germany], are thus enumerated.

Half strangling, and recovering the persons again repeatedly. Rolling sharp wheels over the fingers and toes. Pinching the thumbs in a vice. Forcing the most filthy things down the throat, by which many were choked. Tying cords round the head so tightly that the blood gushed out of the eyes, nose, ears, and mouth. Fastening burning matches to the fingers, toes, ears, arms, legs, and even the tongue. Putting powder in the mouth and setting fire to it, by which the head was shattered to pieces. Tying bags of powder to all parts of the body, by which the person was blown up. Drawing cords backwards and forwards through the fleshy parts. Making incisions with bodkins and knives in the skin. Running wires through the nose, ears, lips, etc. Hanging Protestants up by the legs, with their heads over a fire, by which they were smoke dried. Hanging up by one arm until it



was dislocated. Hanging upon hooks by the ribs. Forcing people to drink until they burst. Baking many in hot ovens. Fixing weights to the feet, and drawing up several with pulleys. Hanging, stifling, roasting, stabbing, frying, racking, ravishing, ripping open, breaking the bones, rasping off the flesh, tearing with wild horses, drowning, strangling, burning, broiling, crucifying, immuring, poisoning, cutting off tongues, noses, ears, etc., sawing off the limbs, hacking to pieces, and drawing by the heels through the streets.

... An aged and pious divine they stripped naked, tied him on his back upon a table, and fastened a large, fierce cat upon his belly. They then pricked and tormented the cat in such a manner that the creature with rage tore his belly open, and gnawed his bowels.

Another minister and his family were seized by these inhuman monsters; they ravished his wife and daughter before his face; stuck his infant son upon the point of a lance, and then surrounding him with his whole library of books, they set fire to them, and he was consumed in the midst of the flames. (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)

[Just prior to the reign of Queen Mary I] Robert Silks, who had been condemned in the bishop's court as a heretic [for opposing Roman Catholic doctrine], made his escape out of prison, but was taken two years afterward, and brought back to Coventry, where he was burnt alive. The sheriffs always seized the goods of the martyrs for their own use, so that their wives and children were left to starve.

In 1532, Thomas Harding, who with his wife, had been accused of heresy, was brought before the bishop of Lincoln, and condemned for denying the real presence in the Sacrament. He was then chained to a stake, erected for the purpose, at Chesham in the Pell, near Botely; and when they had set fire to the fagots, one of the spectators dashed out his brains with a billet. The priests told the people that whoever brought fagots to burn heretics would have an indulgence to commit sins for forty days.

... Thomas Bilney, professor of civil law at Cambridge, was brought before the bishop of London, and several other bishops, in the Chapter house, Westminster, and being several times threatened with the stake and flames, he was weak enough to recant; but he repented severely afterward.

For this he was brought before the bishop a second time, and condemned to death. Before he went to the stake he confessed his adherence to those opinions which Luther held; and, when at it, he smiled, and said, "I have had many storms in this world, but now my vessel will soon be on shore in heaven." He stood unmoved in the flames,

crying out, "Jesus, I believe"; and these were the last words he was heard to utter. (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)

The pope being informed of the great increase of Protestantism, in the year 1542 sent inquisitors to Venice to make an inquiry into the matter, and apprehend such as they might deem obnoxious persons. Hence a severe persecution began, and many worthy persons were martyred for serving God with purity, and scorning the trappings of idolatry.

Various were the modes by which the Protestants were deprived of life; but one particular method, which was first invented upon this occasion, we shall describe; as soon as sentence was passed, the prisoner had an iron chain which ran through a great stone fastened to his body. He was then laid flat upon a plank, with his face upwards, and rowed between two boats to a certain distance at sea, when the two boats separated, and he was sunk to the bottom by the weight of the stone.

... A citizen of Venice, Anthony Ricetti, being apprehended as a Protestant, was sentenced to be drowned in the manner we have already described. A few days previous to the time appointed for his execution, his son went to see him, and begged him to recant, that his life might be saved, and himself not left fatherless. To which the father replied, "A good Christian is bound to relinquish not only goods and children, but life itself, for the glory of his Redeemer: therefore I am resolved to sacrifice everything in this transitory world, for the sake of salvation in a world that will last to eternity." (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)

Mrs. Prest ... When she was offered money [to recant], she rejected it, "because (said she) I am going to a city where money bears no mastery, and while I am here God has promised to feed me."

When sentence was read, condemning her to the flames, she lifted up her voice and praised God, adding, "This day have I found that which I have long sought." When they tempted her to recant, "That will I not, (said she) God forbid that I should lose the life eternal, for this carnal and short life. I will never turn from my heavenly husband to my earthly husband; from the fellowship of angels to mortal children; and if my husband and children be faithful, then am I theirs. God is my father, God is my mother, God is my sister, my brother, my kinsman; God is my friend, most faithful." (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)

Timothy, a deacon of Mauritania, and Maura his wife, had not been united together by the bands of wedlock above three weeks, when they were separated from each other by the persecution. Timothy, being apprehended, as a Christian, was carried before ...the governor..., who, knowing that he had the keeping of the Holy Scriptures, commanded him to deliver them up to be burnt; to which he answered, "Had I children, I would sooner deliver them up to be sacrificed, than part with the Word of God." The governor being much incensed at this reply, ordered his eyes to be put out, with red-hot irons, saying, "The books shall at least be useless to you, for you shall not see to read them." His patience under the operation was so great that the governor grew more exasperated; he, therefore, in order, if possible, to overcome his fortitude, ordered him to be hung up by the feet, with a weight tied about his neck, and a gag in his mouth. In this state, Maura his wife, tenderly urged him for her sake to recant; but, when the gag was taken out of his mouth, instead of consenting to his wife's entreaties, he greatly blamed her mistaken love, and declared his resolution of dying for the faith. The consequence was, that Maura resolved to imitate his courage and fidelity and either to accompany or follow him to glory. The governor, after trying in vain to alter her resolution, ordered her to be tortured, which was executed with great severity. After this, Timothy and Maura were crucified near each other, A.D. 304. [During the reign of Diocletian] (Foxe's Book of Martyrs)

Leaving this later history of the church we have inherited, we must consider the continuing words of Jesus to His church undergoing persecution...

Revelation 2:14-15 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.

These days if we saw a church with people standing up for Christ, even to the point of death, we would herald them as being a great church. Quick focus on external actions is a poor standard of evaluation. Proper assessment must hold look at these externals and their doctrine. Jesus shows this by noting that even this visibly good church had some compromisers, accepting (or at least tolerating) those holding to false doctrine.

Earlier God praised the church at Ephesus for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans. Here at Pergamum circumstances were different. The Pergamum church may have expressed hatred for the actions and teachings of these errant groups. Regardless, they didn't hate them enough

to act. It's easy to say that you hate what God hates, but proof of it will always be in your willingness to act on it.

Romans 12:9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. (NIV)

Sincere love is like sincere faith, it produces action.

James 2:17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (NIV)

It's not necessary to revisit the Nicolaitans in detail, previously considered in part in the Ephesian letter. Here Jesus ties their practices and doctrine 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."

Balaam is infamously the only historical person to have a donkey speak to him. More incredibly he spoke back to it (Numbers 22:28-29)! The focus of this reference to Balaam in Revelation is not his person sin. (That sin included being a prophet for hire. See 2 Peter 2:15). Balaam taught others to sin. God prevented this Old Testament false prophet (Numbers 22-24) from cursing the nation of Israel, so he tried plan b. In this alternative plan he sought to water down Israel and their fervor for God. His method? Balaam wanted them to compromise through sexual sin (Numbers 31:15-16) and mingling the worship of God with pagan practices (including idolatry). He wanted them to overlook false doctrine among them. This account provides warning to the church: compromise kills over time as surely as if a prophet cursed them.

Zeal to die for Christ falls short when the same people are unwilling to live for Him too. Not only must we keep our own life free from sin but we are also to keep God's local church pure as well. If we do not, we hear Christ's words "Nevertheless, I have a few things against you." In our love for Him those words should pierce us to the heart and spur us to action (Matthew 22:37-39). As Jesus said...

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

John's letter doesn't stop at revealing that something is wrong. Jesus tells the church at Pergamum what they must do:

Revelation 2:16 Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

One command of God applies to all believers made aware they are in sin: repent! Turn around, do what is right. Strength to do right will come from God. A Divine call to repent is frequent in the letters to the churches of Revelation (4 of the 7 churches: Ephesus, Pergamum, Sardis and Laodicea). Taken together they are a reminder the church constantly needs to be on guard against sin and follow Christ in truth and purity – without compromise!

Quickly following the call for believers in this church to repent, the second half of verse 16 warns of what will happen otherwise. The unpurified church will soon become an object of battle. Jesus, himself, will fight against them. Simply put, a church infected by the world, marked by compromise and false teaching, then becomes something God opposes. God does not say when this switchover will occur. At some point He will switch from a call to repent, His full effort then fighting against the infection within this church. This warns us against tolerating sin even for a time, for we do not know when God himself will find it necessary to act.

Why would Jesus fight them? Though visibly a part of the church; those embracing false doctrine are enemies of the truth (and Jesus. See John 14:6). These individuals set on destroying the true church. Like Satan the subtlety of their appearance masquerades evil intent (consider Satan himself, 2 Corinthians 11:14). They carry on the works of Satan whose throne is present in this city. Their loyalty is not to Christ rather they serve the Father of Lies (John 8:44). Even as the devil fell from heaven, God will destroy all enemies of Christ (Revelation 20:10).

Revelation 12:7-9 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. (NIV)

God is silent over what form His fight against compromisers and false teacher will take. Regardless, it's a serious matter landing on the losing side of any battle with God. The Old Testament provides an example here. God, himself, dealt with the false prophet Balaam, seemingly spared from his earlier offenses. He ends up dead at the Lord's command: see Numbers 31:1-8 and Joshua 13:22.

Isaiah 1:27-28 Zion will be redeemed with justice, her penitent ones with righteousness. 28 But rebels and sinners will both be broken, and those who forsake the Lord will perish. (NIV)

In contrast to continued rebellion, take note that repentance is a mark of true believers. Yet, in the world, unheeded calls to repent abound. Following these letters to the seven churches, in Revelation there are four further references to the word “repent.” Each passage references those refusing to repent – all shown or stated to be unbelievers.

2 Corinthians 7:10-11 Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. 11 See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. (NIV)

For the church at Pergamum, to repent meant more than merely recognizing they had a problem. The easy way out is to say, “yes, we have a problem; but doesn’t everyone.” Such dismissive attitudes allow the problem to continue. Sincere repentance doesn’t allow for this; it was necessary to expel the compromisers and false teachers. God did not make church discipline optional. Nicolaitans and Baalamites, by whatever name, cannot remain in the local gathering of God’s church.

Repentance also calls for watchfulness. The problem must have present resolution and preparations made to prevent it from happening again later. It’s a call to be vigilant and stay on guard.

Revelation 2:17 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 text again stresses the specific intended recipients of this message. God commands those who have ears to hear – all believers. To these believers, even if outnumbered by compromisers in their church gathering, He gives two related promises:

#1. Jesus will give them hidden manna.

#2. Jesus will give them a white stone with a new name written on it.

What is “hidden manna?” Manna references a supernatural Old Testament event from the time of the Exodus:

Exodus 16:13b-34 in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14 When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. 15

When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread the Lord has given you to eat. 16 This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.'" 17 The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. 18 And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed. 19 Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning." 20 However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them. 21 Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. 22 On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much — two omers for each person — and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. 23 He said to them, "This is what the Lord commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.'" 24 So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. 25 "Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the Lord. You will not find any of it on the ground today. 26 Six days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any." 27 Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. 28 Then the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? 29 Bear in mind that the Lord has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." 30 So the people rested on the seventh day. 31 The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. 32 Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.'" 33 So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the Lord to be kept for the generations to come." 34 As the Lord commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony, that it might be kept. (NIV)

David later describes manna in this fashion:

Psalms 78:23-25 Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; 24 he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. 25 Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat. (NIV)

This heavenly bread, provided to the people of Israel, finds a contrasting and expanded meaning in the New Covenant. Manna is a New Testament symbol, or type. All believers share in this bread.

John 6:30-58 So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? 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. 36 But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. 38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. 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." 41 At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." 42 They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven?'" 43 "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. 44 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. 46 No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. 47 I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. 48 I am the bread of life. 49 Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. 50 But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. 51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." 52 Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" 53 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.



58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." (NIV)

The gift of "hidden manna" is Christ himself! Every believer will have Christ, the true heavenly bread of life, for eternity (e.g. Revelation 21:3, 22-23; 22:1-4). Those who do not know Him will never find Him, He remains hidden from them. No unbeliever will ever see (i.e. understand) and feed on the bread that enables us to live forever.

This brings us to the second promise "a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."

Much speculation surrounds this statement, most not standing up to scriptural scrutiny. Hymns of the past century influenced this. Hymnology trumps Scriptures in some popular theology. Consider the first verse and chorus of one such hymn:

A New Name in Glory  
Music & Lyrics by C. Austin Miles

I was once a sinner, but I came  
Pardon to receive from my Lord:  
This was freely given, and I found  
That He always kept His word.

Chorus

There's a new name written down in glory,  
And it's mine, O yes, it's mine!  
And the white robed angels sing the story,  
"A sinner has come home."  
For there's a new name written down in glory,  
And it's mine, O yes, it's mine!  
With my sins forgiven I am bound for Heaven,  
Never more to roam.

I received another more modern song reflecting the same idea. The last stanza...

One Day by Aaron Shust  
One Day, death will be abolished  
And sin will have its mastery no more  
And I know that we will be astonished

At all that our Creator has in store  
One day we will meet our Savior  
And He will give each one of us a stone  
Engraved with our names upon it:  
known by God alone

A new name! We will all receive a new name in heaven. Beyond this Revelation passage, no other part of Scriptures confirms or alludes to such a happening. Assurance of this belief comes only from this Revelation passage. Before accepting this as a reasonable interpretation of the passage, further examination is necessary. Considering another illustration of Scriptures, an idea appearing earlier in Revelation, provides some affirmation. Believers are called slaves (doulos) of Christ. In Roman culture, it was common for a newly gotten slave to receive a new name from their master. The act symbolized authority over the individual. The slave now had no identity except for that given them by their master.

Slavish symbolism may be in view here, but I don't believe the text provides enough grounds to say this with certainty. Reread that portion of the verse...

Revelation 2:17b I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

This verse nowhere states the new name belongs to the recipient only that it appears on a stone given to each individual. Using the principle of Scriptures interpreting Scriptures, other references to a "new name" in the Book of Revelation would reasonably aid interpretation here. In the letter to the church of Philadelphia this easily related statement appears. This later statement provides clarity to the former:

Revelation 3:12 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. (NIV)

This new name belongs to Jesus Christ, the one who is speaking in His Revelation. This theme continues later in Revelation where His name appears on the foreheads of the saints of the New Heavens and Earth:

Revelation 22:3-4 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. (NIV)

Understanding the name given to each believer is the new name of Christ, our “new name” passage shows itself interrelated with prior statements. God gives the hidden manna, Christ himself, to believers. So too He gives the hidden name (known only to him who receives it), shown to be the new name of Christ. In fact, in Greek, the hidden manna sentence and the sentence about the hidden name are one sentence (connected by the Greek word “kai”, meaning “and”). It’s all one topic.

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This new name is a family name!

Isaiah 65:13-15 Therefore this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty; my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame. 14 My servants will sing out of the joy of their hearts, but you will cry out from anguish of heart and wail in brokenness of spirit. 15 You will leave your name to my chosen ones as a curse; the Sovereign Lord will put you to death, but to his servants he will give another name. (NIV)

The name we naturally bear – our own and that of our father Adam – is sin tainted and filled with shame, objects of the curse. This why Isaiah says the name of the lost belongs to God’s chosen ones as a curse (Isaiah 65:15; see also Proverbs 10:7). And yet, all of these chosen ones, God’s servants, by His grace receive a new name. This new name is a new family name, the name of our God and Father! (See Romans 9:26)

Revelation 2:17 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. (NIV)

Revelation 3:12 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. (NIV)

Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. (NIV)

Revelation 22:3-4 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. (NIV)

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**Definition**

Psephos – A Greek word meaning a small pebble or stone.

Why is the object bearing the name a white stone? Why write a name on this white stone? Speculation revolves around many known and diverse uses of white stones in Roman culture, only one of which appears indirectly in Scriptures. One possible cultural use is worth considering. Casting votes commonly employed white and black stones including for life and death decisions with a potential of capital punishment. History records this practice before the time of Jesus, continuing through the apostolic period, as referenced by non-scriptural sources. The white stone (pro) was a positive vote and the black stone (contra) was a negative. The apostle Paul, before his conversion, voted for the death of believers using this method, as recorded in Acts 26:10.

Acts 26:10-11 And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote [psephos] against them. (NASU)

Some have speculated the white stone in Revelation is an affirmative vote with the individual's new name on the positive voting stone. Yet, the normal means of using these voting stones never included engraving a name on it.

A named stone runs counter to the idea of John alluding to a positive vote. Even if John did so, I still believe it isn't the individual's name. Christ's name on the stone could perhaps suggest He determined and guaranteed a positive result (e.g. John 6:37). The symbolism here would be His casting a predetermined vote in favor of each believer (i.e. Ephesians 1:11).

This Revelation use of a small stone may only coincidentally resemble voting stones. Nothing definite is provable, especially since engraving a name on the stone was not part of the latter. Further study in search of more possibilities is necessary, setting aside this possible illustration rooted in Roman culture. Using only imagery found elsewhere in Scriptures a far simpler possibility exists. A small stone represents something intended to last (even as God has the

Law written on stone tablets). Engraved items, especially stones, show permanency (see Exodus 32:16; Job 19:24; Isaiah 49:16).

The named object is small making it easy for each individual to carry it. The Greek word is for a small stone, even a pebble or mosaic tile. This contrasts the large tablets of law given the people as a whole. Christ's relationship with each believer is individual and personal. And last, white is a symbol of purity (as Jesus' new name will be). In summary; the pure, perfect, eternal, new name of Christ is a gift to each individual believer.

Zechariah 14:9 [Speaking of the end times] The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. (NIV)

Unlike modern "new name" views focusing on individual people, there is only one name that matters and it's not mine. The focus of this Revelation message and specific letter is Jesus!

John now records Jesus' letter to the fourth of the seven churches:

Revelation 2:18-29 "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. (NIV)

In verse 18, Jesus makes a direct statement, referring to himself as "the Son of God." This is the only time this title appears in the Book of Revelation (versus twice for "the son of man" – see

Revelation 1:13; 14:14). Verse 18 continues with Jesus repeating a portion of the description John used earlier in Revelation 1:14b-15a.

Consider John's earlier gospel. Twelve times he records Jesus as calling himself the "son of man." John, himself, clearly states in his gospel that Jesus is the Son of God (John 1:34). Yet only once in that gospel does he record Jesus directly calling himself "the son of God." (There are five more times featuring others calling Jesus the son of God. For example: John 11:27). Significantly, Jesus binds both titles together in that one instance where he self-identified as the "son of God" ...

John 5:25-27 I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. 26 For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. 27 And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man. (NIV)

Jesus is both the son of man and the son of God!

In this letter God addresses the church at Thyatira, a city located on an ancient trade route with Pergamum and Sardis. Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities, yet its letter is the longest.

Thyatira's trade route positioning made it a well-off city, a place for merchants, artisans, bakers, cloth makers, metalworkers (copper), potters, and slave traders. Trade unions, or guilds, were a driving force in the city. Members of these guilds paid regular honor to the pagan gods. Deities included Artemis (also called Diana; goddess of the moon) and Apollo (sun god; twin to Artemis; locally called Tyrinnos). Others worshiped at the shrine of goddess Sambethe (sibyl Sambatha, a non-Roman deity). To hold any formal position in the trades it was mandatory to join one of these guilds. Once part of a guild festival attendance in honor of the gods was compulsory. Common practice included eating meals in their temples, and participation in their rituals (which included sexual promiscuity). Refuse to do so and expulsion from the guild would follow – meaning lack of employment and almost certain poverty.

A Jewish presence in Thyatira is uncertain. Any devout adherent to Judaism would have similar problems living in this city. We are aware of one biblical native of Thyatira, a seller of purple. Lydia is a God-fearer (a Gentile adherent to Judaism, see Acts 16:11-14). She was a resident of Philippi (Macedonia) when Paul met her (and when she afterwards became a Christian). She may have become a God-fearer after moving to Philippi, which probably already solidified her decision to not return to Thyatira.

Imagine coming to faith in Jesus Christ in a city like Thyatira. Your choices would be:

- 1) Be faithful to Christ, lose your job and almost any hope of another job, meaning:
  - a. Flee Thyatira for another city, if you could afford to do so
  - b. Stay and live as a witness to your friends and family, knowing you would remain in severe poverty.
- 2) Compromise and try to blend in with the pagan world and hope that you could keep your income.

From Revelation 2:19, we can be certain the church there had people who had chosen to not flee (or had circumstances that left them no choice of fleeing). They were living their lives as a witness for Christ, amid poverty and ridicule – as outcasts – but seeing God add to their numbers.

Revelation 2:19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

This wording implies that as many of them came to faith in Jesus Christ, perhaps still compromising in some areas, they had afterwards grown in their faith. This meant they started living it out. They were doing more of the good works that God planned for them than when they first started. Keep in mind that doing good works has two parts. Beyond what you do, it's as much about what you avoid doing.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)

Some stress contrast between the churches of Thyatira and Ephesus. In Ephesus they had fallen from their first love, at Thyatira they were now doing more than when they began. I think the comparison unfair. This latter doesn't have to be a "love problem." Imagine new believers who fall in love with Christ, they are passionate, on fire, and yet immature. They unquestionably have that "first love" but they don't necessarily know how to live it out yet.

There is a big difference between immature believers and willful compromisers. Externally the difference may be hard to recognize. Immature believers are in need of good teaching, spending time in God's word, and the Holy Spirit showing them what is good and right. In time, they will grow. Willful compromisers are in need of rebuke and correction and perhaps expulsion. They already know what God's word says; they need to learn to submit to it. They need to listen to the already present prodding and conviction of the Holy Spirit.

I believe Jesus' message here, in verse 19, was approving formerly immature believers who were now growing in their faith – learning what pleases the Lord and then doing it. They were learning what Paul had taught the church at Ephesus:

Ephesians 5:8-11 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. 11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. (NIV)

Verse 20 then speaks to these growing believers and points out that they still have room for further growth, to improve. For good measure, He gives them something specific to deal with:

Revelation 2:20 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.

A study of the complete book of Revelation reveals there are only two women in view overall. Awareness of the extent of this symbolism comes later in Revelation. While undeveloped in these starting letters to the churches, this imagery is still present. John preserves continuity throughout the book, often developing or defining symbolism after its first appearance. This opening reference calls one of these two women Jezebel. But Jezebel isn't the only name or title given her. All later names or titles refer to one spiritual entity appearing throughout history. She further appears as:

The great prostitute (Revelation 17:1)

The Mother of Prostitutes (Revelation 17:5)

Babylon the Great (Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2)

The great city (Revelation 11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21)

Though not directly introduced here, the second woman of Revelation is, in complete contrast, the Bride (Revelation 19:7; 21:2, 9; 22:17), also referred to as the "woman clothed with the sun (Revelation 12:1, 17)." In these early chapters, the Bride is still in view. Here she appears in all her frailty, a shadow of her fullness seen by the end of the book. In like manner, this reference to Jezebel is a shadow of the fullness of the Great Prostitute revealed later in the book.

It's possible there was a literal woman with the name Jezebel troubling this church (even as God used seven literal churches to picture the church throughout history). If so, like the single martyr's name in the Pergamum letter, it provides as a specific example. I find it more probable



it's a representative name, regardless of her true identity. Her claim to be a prophetess gave her prominence in the church. The New Testament reveals that women can and did prophesy (Luke 2:36; Acts 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:5), so in and of itself this was possible. The issue was not that she prophesied; she was not a true prophetess, she was a false prophet. The church should have judged her deceitful message and doctrine (c.f. 1 Peter 4:16) and dismissed her claim to be speaking on God's behalf (c.f. Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:19-22). Paul made this clear...

1 Corinthians 5:9-13 I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— 10 not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. 11 But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. 12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked man from among you." (NIV)

The church at Thyatira didn't need a specific name to recognize their Jezebel. The label was descriptive. The name Jezebel, of course, belonged to an infamous Old Testament figure, the wife of Ahaz.

1 Kings 16:29-31 In the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah, Ahab son of Omri became king of Israel, and he reigned in Samaria over Israel twenty-two years. 30 Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. 31 He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. (NIV)

Jezebel, at Thyatira, was misleading the people into compromise including sexual immorality and participation in feasts to idols. This mirrored practices of Jezebel in the days of Elijah. That earlier Jezebel persuaded Israel to worship Baal, the god of fertility, and Asherah, the goddess of fertility. She wasn't merely someone who promoted false practices; she rabidly opposed any who would stand in her way.

1 Kings 19:1-2 Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. 2 So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them." (NIV)

If the Jezebel at Thyatira was anything like her namesake, she would have openly and perhaps violently opposed any who would disagree with her. Physical violence is possible, threats and intimidation probable. False teachers and leaders commonly embrace worldly methods in their efforts to silence the truth. The original Jezebel's life provides another illustration of deception and lies characteristic of those (in the church) who try to keep power and influence at all cost.

1 Kings 21:1-16 Some time later there was an incident involving a vineyard belonging to Naboth the Jezreelite. The vineyard was in Jezreel, close to the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. 2 Ahab said to Naboth, "Let me have your vineyard to use for a vegetable garden, since it is close to my palace. In exchange I will give you a better vineyard or, if you prefer, I will pay you whatever it is worth." 3 But Naboth replied, "The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers." 4 So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said, "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat. 5 His wife Jezebel came in and asked him, "Why are you so sullen? Why won't you eat?" 6 He answered her, "Because I said to Naboth the Jezreelite, 'Sell me your vineyard; or if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard in its place.' But he said, 'I will not give you my vineyard.'" 7 Jezebel his wife said, "Is this how you act as king over Israel? Get up and eat! Cheer up. I'll get you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite." 8 So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, placed his seal on them, and sent them to the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city with him. 9 In those letters she wrote: "Proclaim a day of fasting and seat Naboth in a prominent place among the people. 10 But seat two scoundrels opposite him and have them testify that he has cursed both God and the king. Then take him out and stone him to death." 11 So the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city did as Jezebel directed in the letters she had written to them. 12 They proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth in a prominent place among the people. 13 Then two scoundrels came and sat opposite him and brought charges against Naboth before the people, saying, "Naboth has cursed both God and the king." So they took him outside the city and stoned him to death. 14 Then they sent word to Jezebel: "Naboth has been stoned and is dead." 15 As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned to death, she said to Ahab, "Get up and take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite that he refused to sell you. He is no longer alive, but dead." 16 When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, he got up and went down to take possession of Naboth's vineyard. (NIV)

Jezebel treated what rightful belonged to others as her own. At all cost she was willing to take another's belongings and then use them to benefit herself and those close to her. I'm certain that Jezebel at Thyatira embraced the same role.

Revelation 2:21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

The original Jezebel had opportunity to hear the truth, what was right and good, by the mouths of God's prophets and teachers in her day (including Elijah). Both of these Jezebel's willfully choose to ignore and reject correction. As God so often does, He gave time for this second Jezebel to listen to the truth and repent. The time extension didn't matter, she remained unwilling to repent.

All of us should be grateful that God gives time. If God delivered immediate judgment and condemnation the first time we acted in rebellion against Him, our life would be short and no one would come to repentance. So, instead, God gives us time for one of two reasons:

- 1) Time to come to repentance (c.f. 2 Peter 3:9)
- 2) Time to heap judgment on ourselves for continued rebellion (c.f. 1 Thessalonians 2:16; Matthew 23:32).

No one should take for granted how much time God gives. God is under no duty to delay His judgment and He holds the continued right to impose His justice and judgment when He sees fit.

The Jezebel of Thyatira was unwilling to repent – she showed her true nature by her rejection of God's truth and her continued embrace of wickedness. Jesus said it this way:

John 3:19-21 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God." (NIV)

One result awaits those persisting in rebellion against God: promised judgment and punishment:

Revelation 2:22 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. (NIV)

Revelation 2:22a 'Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, (NASU)

Translators supply the words “of suffering” or “of sickness.” The Greek merely says “I will throw her into a bed.” Notice the word “into.” The bed, of course, works with the following imagery of compromisers committing adultery with her, but the “into a bed” implies a finality – in other words that resting place of the grave. This result mirrors the end of the original Jezebel too. Her sentence was death at God’s command.

1 Kings 21:23-26 "And also concerning Jezebel the Lord says: 'Dogs will devour Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.' 24 "Dogs will eat those belonging to Ahab who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country." 25 (There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. 26 He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel.) (NIV)

2 Kings 9:30-37 Then Jehu went to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard about it, she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. 31 As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, "Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?" 32 He looked up at the window and called out, "Who is on my side? Who?" Two or three eunuchs looked down at him. 33 "Throw her down!" Jehu said. So they threw her down, and some of her blood splattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot. 34 Jehu went in and ate and drank. "Take care of that cursed woman," he said, "and bury her, for she was a king's daughter." 35 But when they went out to bury her, they found nothing except her skull, her feet and her hands. 36 They went back and told Jehu, who said, "This is the word of the Lord that he spoke through his servant Elijah the Tishbite: On the plot of ground at Jezreel dogs will devour Jezebel's flesh. 37 Jezebel's body will be like refuse on the ground in the plot at Jezreel, so that no one will be able to say, 'This is Jezebel.'" (NIV)

Returning to the verse we began in Revelation; take note that verse 22 and 23 are all one sentence and thought in Greek:

Revelation 2:22-23 So I will cast her into a bed and all who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her ways 23 and I will kill her children with death, and all the churches will know that I am he who searches minds and hearts; and I will give to each of you according to your deeds. (Mine)

Jesus said He would cast Jezebel into a bed of death and that He would kill her children also with death. (Compare this opening view of this woman to the later expanded picture in Revelation 17:1-19:3). Death waits all who are in unrepentant rebellion against God.

Ezekiel 18:20a The soul who sins is the one who will die. (NIV)

Why “her children?” A child symbolizes anyone embracing the doctrine of another, symbolically their parent. It’s similar to imagery Jesus used with the Pharisees (also recorded by John):

John 8:44 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. (NIV)

Sandwiched between the fate of Jezebel and her children is a glimmer of hope. Jesus said that he would cast into great tribulation all who commit adultery with her “unless they repent of her ways.” Unlike Jezebel and her children, who unquestionably die, this is a call for believers in compromise to repent and not die. What was God going to use to purify His church? “Great tribulation!” Throughout the Bible and indeed all of history, God has used tribulation to purify His church. It drives believers to embrace only Him and unbelievers to show their true colors.

Jezebel’s false doctrine was one of compromise. Yet, no one can serve two masters (see Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13). Through this letter God calls those identified with the church of Thyatira to reveal their true master. The same goes for us today. As the apostle James said it:

James 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (NIV)

Being identified as an enemy of God is a terrible thing. As seen in Pergamum’s letter (Revelation 2:16), this guarantees you will be on the losing end of a battle with Jesus.

The Greek of verse 23 has, “he searches kidneys and hearts.” This ancient wording echoes the Hebrew of the Old Testament (e.g. Psalms 7:9; Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10). The kidney and heart used together referred to a person's innermost being, in other words their morals, feelings, and thoughts. In modern English the phrase “minds and hearts” better expresses the original meaning. This provides great example of how all Scripture translators must use some thought-for-thought renderings.

In an ending clause, Jesus reminds this church that He is just judge. “And all the churches will know that I am he who searches minds and hearts; and I will give to each of you according to

your deeds.” He knows far more than mere actions, he knows what’s in a person’s mind and heart which includes motives. Here He also stresses that His exercising judgment on Jezebel and her children displays that He is the Lord. This emphasis comes through His use of Old Testament wording. The language Jesus used, in Revelation 2:23, closely parallels words recorded hundreds of years earlier by the prophet Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 17:10 "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (NIV)

By claiming this wording, Jesus is showing that He is the God. Many other Old Testament passages also stress the Lord searches our hearts. For example:

1 Samuel 16:7 But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (NIV)

1 Chronicles 28:9 "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. (NIV)

Our God is a transcendent God who judges in righteousness. How can we stand before Him if He gives what our deeds deserve? Only by His grace! Through faith in Jesus Christ we have complete forgiveness of all our sins (Hebrews 7:25). The blood of Christ covers all our failings, leaving only deeds performed through the power of Christ living in us. This alone allows us to hear “well done good and faithful slave (Matthew 25:21, 23)” from our Master.

Romans 4:7-8 [Quoting David in Psalms 32:1-2] "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." (NIV)

This message provides great comfort for all believers. It’s far different for unbelieving compromisers, including those in Thyatira. Their wicked deeds remain to condemn them on the Day of Judgment, when God opens the books.

Revelation 20:12 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. (NIV)

Jesus ends this specific letter with a message of encouragement for faithful believers.

Revelation 2:24-25 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. (NIV)

Simply put, faithful believer, stay faithful. Do so despite compromiser needing to repent. Do so despite deceiving unbelievers in your church, even if they are teachers and leaders. To His people, Jesus gently says “hold on to what you have until I come.” Live for Jesus all your days, till Jesus takes you in death or comes in the clouds! Jezebel didn’t deceive these dear saints; they hadn’t embraced her teaching and false doctrines and practices. They paid for their faithfulness by rejection. Those claiming secret knowledge in the church would shun them. Genuine believers were likely a minority, perhaps none or few of them being elders. Their inability to expel Jezebel from the church is proof of this. Jesus says, despite this, remain true to me. You are personally accountable to God to stay faithful to Christ. Majority support in the church, or practice of the leadership, will never be an acceptable excuse before God.

Revelation 2:26a To him who overcomes and does my will to the end

This Thyatira letter continues with a promise to all believers. We know “To him who overcomes” means “all” believers because John uses wording he defined in an earlier letter.

1 John 5:4-5 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. 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. (NIV)

Who overcomes the world? Every believer! Without exception believers surrender their will to God. We strive to do His will, following the example our Savior and Lord.

John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (NIV)

God’s promise to all overcomers (believers) is this:

Revelation 2:26b-27 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.

Jesus has the right to give authority because the Father gave all authority to Him:

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (NIV) [Spoken after His resurrection and before His ascension]

The quotation incorporated in Revelation 2:27 comes from an Old Testament messianic passage:

Psalms 2:7-9 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." (NIV)

Taken together this clearly teaches that we will all rule with Christ. He shares with us the authority He received from His Father. As co-heirs with Christ (e.g. Romans 8:17) we share in His inheritance. During a coming glimpse into heaven, the words of a new song confirm that saints will reign with Christ:

Revelation 5:9-10 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." (NIV)

All believers reign and rule with Christ!

A final promise comes with the assurance that we will rule with Christ. Once again it's all part of the same thought as the Greek text joins them using the word "kai" (meaning "and").

Revelation 2:28 I will also give him the morning star.

John makes clear who this morning star is in the last chapter of this book...

Revelation 22:16 "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." (NIV)



In other words, believers reign with Christ and we have Christ. The most precious promise given saints is that we have Christ for eternity.

Revelation 2:29 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.  
(NIV)

The message ends with familiar wording already seen in previous letters. Again God stresses that only those given ears to hear will understand. He commands believers to hear, and what we hear from God we must believe, and what we believe we must live. These are God's words of life.

Revelation 3:1-6 "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. (NIV)

Sardis was a small but prosperous city, well positioned on an active trade route. Local geography provided a highly defensible raised position for a fortress. Unfortunately these same geographic features also limited expansion of the city around it. Historical documents and excavations provide evidence the city included a sizable Jewish population, some of whom held leading positions in the city government.

Revelation 3:1b "These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars."

Once again, Jesus starts off using a portion of the description found earlier in Revelation (Revelation 1:4-20). He does so to remind this church specifically that He is speaking. The same Jesus, the one John saw earlier, is now speaking directly to them.

Revelation 3:1c "I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead."

“I know your deeds” echoes the words which opened the letter to the church at Ephesus (Revelation 2:2). In them Jesus reminds us that He sees everything.

Hebrews 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (NIV)

Proverbs 15:3 The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good. (NIV)

“You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” Many churches need to hear those same words today. Worry about their reputation and preserving it consumes them.

Reputation is important. The Old Testament warns about issues that could damage our personal reputation:

Proverbs 25:9-10 If you argue your case with a neighbor, do not betray another man's confidence, 10 or he who hears it may shame you and you will never lose your bad reputation. (NIV)

New Testament elders of God's church are only to be those of good reputation.

1 Timothy 3:7 He [the overseer] must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. (NIV)

Reputation is important within limits. Nowhere does the Bible let concern over reputation allow for compromise of God's word or commands. God rebukes the Sardis church for caring more about their reputation than something important. Their primary concern should be recognizing their spiritual condition: are they alive or not?

Modern emphasis makes it easy for a church to focus on its reputation. Consider what makes for a good reputation these days. These are a few commonly heard statements...

“Look at the amazing facility”

“Don't they have more programs than everyone else?”

“They have four campuses”

“They have a million dollar budget”

“I've never heard a better speaker”

“They’re children’s programs are the best”  
“They support the local food bank and homeless shelter”  
“Their musical productions are professional”  
“They have groups going all over the world in missions”  
“They have the best location”  
“Their missions budget is the highest in the denomination”  
“It’s the largest church in town”

The list could easily be longer. Regardless, not one of these external praises assures a church is alive. These are preeminent issues in dead churches too. Many are consumed with trying to maintain these at all cost. Remember, Sardis was a prosperous city and it’s likely that prosperity carried into the church. Prosperity has a way of changing people and churches. Consider Jesus’ parable of the sower...

Luke 8:4-15 While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: 5 "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds of the air ate it up. 6 Some fell on rock, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. 8 Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown." When he said this, he called out, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." [Which sounds very familiar as we read the letters to the churches in Revelation 2 & 3] 9 His disciples asked him what this parable meant. 10 He said, "The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of God has been given to you, but to others I speak in parables, so that, "though seeing, they may not see; though hearing, they may not understand.' 11 "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. 12 Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. 13 Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. 14 The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. 15 But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop. (NIV)

Simply put, riches and prosperity often choke out the message. Churches may experience this in degrees. Mildest, prosperity becomes a distraction. With all the “stuff” of the world comes great temptation. The apostle John warned...

1 John 2:15-16 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. (NIV)

When Jesus tells the church at Sardis “but you are dead,” He is looking past the externals of prosperity and examining the heart. He is questioning the driving motives of this church. By His recorded words we know that it isn’t His Spirit, because the Spirit gives life (i.e. John 6:63) – and they are dead. At their core is wrong motives; love of the world.

The apostle Paul gave a specific warning to Timothy about the last days.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them. (NIV)

Did you note that immediately following a list of unchristian actions and attitudes, Paul says they have “a form of godliness?” Churches can appear godly on the outside, yet be full of people and leadership characterized by Paul’s list. Leadership motivation and practice easily can become:

- The love of money.
- Bragging rights (boastful) – “we’re better than everyone else.”
- Love of self – “We’re the only church that matters.”
- Ungrateful (for the people that give and serve, always think they should do more. Ungrateful for God’s blessing, always thinking they deserve more.)
- Willing to slander anyone opposing their plans and goals.
- Willing to embrace ungodly people and means “because it will bring people in.” This could include unholy entertainment on the big screen or godless guest-speakers sounding their cause (or politics) from the pulpit.

This list could feature many more examples; instead I’ll focus on one small but significant word from Paul’s list:

- Proud.

The church at Sardis was likely proud of their reputation, as are many similarly dead churches today. They want all churches to follow their lead and example. Their corrupted minds imagine other churches hard-pressed to be better than them. Yet, Jesus words remain, “but you are dead.” Churches like this are an illusion, a deception. They are similar to the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. Good-looking outside, their externals cover a mess on the inside:

Matthew 23:27-28 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. 28 In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (NIV)

Any believer enticed to join such a church should carefully reread Paul’s closing words to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:5 “having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.”

Jesus words in Mark’s gospel have application for every church consumed with its reputation, and yet dead...

Mark 8:36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? (KJV)

Faithful to the intent of these Scriptures; it’s worth rephrasing the question for churches:

What shall it profit a church, if it gains the whole world and yet loses its own soul?

Before leaving Jesus’ words in Mark 8:36, consider a verse that follows shortly after.

Mark 8:38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels. (NIV)

Jesus’ warning also applies to dead churches with a reputation of being alive. Their embarrassment over Jesus and His words shows in many ways. Scriptures appear more in name

than in substance. The brief passages read or referenced are often without context. Gatherings feature minimal preaching or teaching of God's word (storytelling or entertainments fills the time). Unwelcomed passages receive contrived explanations or no explanation. Ignoring some scriptures is a way of life. Leadership is willing to hide discovered gross sin in their ranks. Cover-ups or vilification of the victim or exposor abound. The Son of Man "will be ashamed" of these churches when He comes in His Father's glory.

Revelation 3:2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

Revelation's wakeup call is an admonition for believers to be watchful. Useless watchmen running dead churches help no one and hurt many. Isaiah spoke of this exact problem in his day...

Isaiah 56:10-11 Israel's watchmen are blind, they all lack knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they cannot bark; they lie around and dream, they love to sleep. 11 They are dogs with mighty appetites; they never have enough. They are shepherds who lack understanding; they all turn to their own way, each seeks his own gain. (NIV)

Ezekiel spoke of the same problem in his time...

Ezekiel 34:8-10 As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock, 9 therefore, O shepherds, hear the word of the Lord: 10 This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. (NIV)

The leadership of the church at Sardis, as with any dead church, allowed wolves in sheep's clothing to control and teach the flock. Jesus' words to "wake up" remind all churches they must rid themselves of wolves. Presuming there are true sheep remaining to make such a change. The apostle Paul, trying to prevent churches from falling under control of wolves, gave this warning:

Acts 20:28-31 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! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. (NIV)

Following Jesus' "Wake Up" call, His following words imply there are still a few in the Sardis church who can wake up.

Revelation 3:2b Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

These remaining believers know what God wants done; they know what they must do. They must follow God's command to purify His church, to take a stand for what is right and good. They can't pick and choose what good deeds they are comfortable with doing – God's message is that their actions were not complete. Incomplete works arise from believers failing to do all that God has commanded us to do (not just that which is easy for us to do)!

God is not about quantity (from man's perspective); He demands quality. All we do for God requires a goal of perfection, the standard He set.

Matthew 5:48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (NIV)

Choosing to follow some of God's commands and to ignore others is willfully choosing to reject perfection. This is different from falling short, as we often do. This becomes a willful choice to fall short of God's standard from the beginning. For all who take this easy route, the word of Jesus to this church at Sardis applies, "I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God."

Before moving to the next verse in Revelation, consider that Jesus refers to God as "my God." Through these words, Jesus shows He is subordinate to the Father and fully submitted to His will. His submission does not diminish that He is one with the Father (e.g. John 10:30). This is not wording unique to Revelation, Jesus used similar wording as recorded in John's gospel:

John 20:17 (Speaking to Mary Magdalene following His resurrection) Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'" (NIV)

Our Heavenly Father is Jesus' Father and Jesus' God is our God.

Now that Sardis is aware of their serious problem, the solution begins with verse three.

Revelation 3:3a Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. (NIV)

God provides believers in Sardis a brief and pointed cure. They had received and heard God's word, now they must act on it. The word "remember" implies that they had known the truth for a long time. God's word isn't meant to be heard and filed away, it must be acted on. Hosts of people and churches have Bibles, believers and unbelievers often have multiple copies. The quantity of Scriptures owned is not evidence of faith. Living out the contents of God's word is a mark of believers, those alive in Christ. The apostle James says clearly:

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (NIV)

So what did this church at Sardis need to do? The command was repent; turnaround from their past doings (or not doings) and start doing all they should. Their hearts' desire, and ours, should reflect David's words:

Psalms 119:57-60 You are my portion, O Lord; I have promised to obey your words. 58 I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise. 59 I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. 60 I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands. (NIV)

The warning which follows, in verse 3, is similar to the warnings given to previous churches.

Revelation 3:3b 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. (NIV)

If this church doesn't repent and obey, Jesus will come in judgment at a time least expected. The church declared dead deserves judgment and, indeed, ceases to be a church. The idea of the Master returning without notice, like a thief, echoes Jesus' words to His disciples.

Luke 12:42-48 The Lord answered, "Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? 43 It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. 44 I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. 45 But



suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. 46 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers. 47 "That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. 48 But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked. (NIV, see also Matthew 24:42-44)

God had blessed the Sardis church with material possessions and opportunity. The church wasted all God gave them by not being watchful. Unless they repent and obey, their deserved punishment is waiting. The Master is returning. His return is a day of fear, in contrast to a day of rejoicing for God's righteous servants. And it's to the righteous that Jesus directs his next words.

Revelation 3:4 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. (NIV)

Jesus knew there were a few left in this dead church that belonged to Him. The imagery of unsoiled pure white clothes is that of God-given righteousness.

Isaiah 61:10 I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (NIV)

All this talk of clothing of righteousness comes with one emphasis; God clothed us. Apart from salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, the gift of God, we would have no clothing but filthy rags (e.g. Isaiah 64:6). Yet, God declares us worthy. Solely by the grace of God, we will walk with Jesus dressed in righteousness (e.g. Ephesians 2:8-9, cf. Revelation 7:9-14).

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (NIV)

Jesus stresses His promise to clothe in righteousness is not merely for the church at Sardis:

Revelation 3:5a He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. (NIV)

All overcomers will be like them, dressed in white (and all believers are overcomers, see 1 John 5:5).

Revelation 3:5b I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. (NIV)

The two English sentences of Revelation 3:5 are one in the Greek (joined with “kai,” meaning “and”). Since every believer is an overcomer, clothed in God’s righteousness, the attached promise assures our name forever remains in the book of life. The Greek text stresses this assurance, using two words for “never.” The English translation could be “absolutely never!” The apostle Paul rests in this same assurance as he wrote:

Romans 8:33-39 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. 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." 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. (NIV)

The Lamb’s Book of Life is the only book with everlasting significance. God wrote the names in it before He created the world (Revelation 17:8). Apart from having your name on one of those pages, you are destined for the second death of the Day of Judgment. By God’s grace, He spares all written within from such a fate.

Revelation 20:12-15 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. (NIV)

Your entry in the Book of Life provides more than escape from the second death. It's admission to life eternal as Christ's Bride, part of the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 21:22-27 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. (NIV)

All God's saved, each an entry in the Lamb's Book of Life, spends eternity in the presence of our Lord and Savior. Here we enjoy the fullness of God's glory forever. We have Jesus without end. On that day, when Jesus acknowledges each faithful servant's name before His Father and the angels (Revelation 3:5b), it will fulfill Jesus' words and promise to His saints:

Matthew 10:32 "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. (NIV)

Luke 12:8 "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. (NIV)

The Bible provides the specific content of that acknowledgment in advance...

"Well done, good and faithful servant [slave, 'doulos' in Greek]" (Matthew 25:21, 23; c.f. Luke 19:17)

We gladly hear and accept this title, yet another label follows "good and faithful slave." We are brothers.

Hebrews 2:11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. (NIV)

Jesus' final words to the Sardis church remind us who will respond to this message; only those given ears to hear.

Revelation 3:6 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.  
(NIV)

Before leaving the message to Sardis (Revelation 3:4-6), one phrase bears extra consideration: "Never blot out!"

Revelation 3:5 He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out ["exaleipho," pronounced: ex al eye foe] his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

Those living in the ancient Roman world were well aware of the privileges and duties attending the status of a Roman citizen, a wanted and valued class. Citizenship was not a permanent and irrevocable right. Any citizen could lose their status through well-known circumstances. First and foremost, any criminal conviction against the state (or Caesar) resulting in a sentence of death carried with it a loss of citizenship before execution.

"... Whenever any citizen has to suffer death at the hands of the state for a crime, his name is erased first. Why is this done? One reason is that he may no longer be considered a citizen when he undergoes such a punishment but, so far as that is possible, as having become an alien. Then too I presume that it is looked upon as not the least part of the punishment itself, that even the appellation should no longer be seen of the man who had gone so far in wickedness, but should be utterly blotted out ["exaleipho"], just as, I believe, traitors are denied burial, so that in the future there may be no trace whatever of a wicked man." – Dio Chrysostum (Orations 31.84)

God's message to Sardis and, indeed, today's church is this: No believer in Jesus Christ, once part of God's eternal kingdom (and family), is ever going lose that citizenship. He blots out ["exaleipho"] unbelievers resting in their own "righteousness." They are not citizens regardless of external appearances including membership in physical Israel or a local church. Guilty of crimes against God, they are objects of wrath awaiting their just condemnation, destined to be forgotten and never to come to mind again (Isaiah 65:17).

Every believer refusing to show their loyalty to the Roman State and worship Caesar as Lord (proclaiming "Kaisar Kurios") was in danger of removal from Rome's earthly civic register (blotted out). Declared no longer citizens of Rome, they became aliens and convicts destined for death. In contrast, in this message to Sardis, God proclaims a higher unchanging truth: The book of life, God's final register of heavenly citizenship, has every name permanently recorded

with no fear of Him ever removing a name! (For more on this book of life, see Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23).

The sixth specific letter now begins:

Revelation 3:7-13 "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. (NIV)

The letters to the seven individual churches typically start with Jesus invoking a portion of the imagery John expressed in the first chapter when first seeing Jesus in His glory. This letter is slightly different. Instead of using exact wording from the earlier, it draws on the meaning of the previous. For example, consider the statement...

“These are the words of him who is holy and true”

This refers to Revelation 1:4-5 in Revelation’s introduction:

Revelation 1:4-5 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. (NIV)

Consider the parallels. He who is “holy and true” is the “faithful witness.” He is the faithful witness because He is “holy and true.” In the Old Testament, Isaiah tells us why we must listen to the words of our Redeemer. He also stresses that our Redeemer is Holy, underscoring the benefit that comes from listening to the truth He speaks:

Isaiah 48:17 This is what the Lord says — your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. (NIV)

Knowing that our Lord, our God, is holy and true gives us reason to rejoice through all eternity. In a glimpse into heaven, later in Revelation, John gives an awe-inspiring description. Don't miss the specifics of the song; we praise God for being holy, just, and true!

Revelation 15:2-4 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. They held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "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." (NIV)

Returning to our text in Revelation chapter 3, consider the words which follow.

"These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David."

Again, these words are a partial allusion to the earlier description given by John. There he speaks of keys that Jesus holds:

Revelation 1:18 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. (NIV)

Notice that "keys (plural)" are not in view during this later reference of chapter 3; it specifically now refers to a single key, "the key of David." The focus is on Jesus' right to rule in David's line. At His birth God made clear that Jesus came to assume this prophesied right:

Luke 1:31-33 You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end." (NIV)

Jesus is the rightful ruler, the one the prophets looked forward to, that would rule God's people forever. The New Testament stresses His right to rule:

Hebrews 1:8 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. (NIV)

A little later in the book of Hebrews, it describes Jesus as a "faithful son over God's house" (Hebrews 3:6). He is the ruler in the line of David who is also God's faithful son whom He placed over His entire house.

This wording in Revelation 3:7 purposely highlight Jesus' standing as a faithful servant. The wording comes from the Old Testament. Its first use applied to a faithful servant in ancient Judah, Eliakim son of Hilkiyah, appointed and given authority by God. Now God applies these words to the perfect faithful servant, Jesus.

Isaiah 22:22 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. (NIV)

The last words of Revelation 3:7 come directly from this passage in Isaiah 22.

"What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."

While this originally described an earthly ruler in the Old Testament, his authority and right to rule are only because God granted it for a time. Jesus, though, received absolute authority for all eternity.

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (NIV)

Don't miss the implication of this authority granted to Jesus. His ability to rule absolutely is a characteristic only credited to God alone. Even in ancient times, Job recognized this fact:

Job 12:13-14 "To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his.  
14 What he tears down cannot be rebuilt; the man he imprisons cannot be released.  
(NIV)

This letter to the church at Philadelphia warrants further context. In 140 B.C., Attalus the Second founded Philadelphia. Out of love for his brother Eumenes he called the city

Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love. It was a well-placed city located along a major trade route linking Asia with Europe. Beyond buying and selling, Greek culture and language were direct imports providing many opportunities to the inhabitants of the city. For the Christian church it would have provided an ideal opportunity for missionary efforts.

The area around Philadelphia was fertile because of volcanic soil, gaining fame for its wines. Unfortunately volcanic activity and earthquakes plagued the area and often struck the city. One such severe earthquake devastated the city in 17 A.D. It was serious enough the Emperor Tiberius not only gave directly to help rebuild the city, he further exempted Philadelphia from paying taxes. Still, people feared living in the city and many preferred living outside the city walls. The letter addresses the city by its original name rather than the later names given the city in honor of Roman emperors. The first renaming followed the earthquake of 17 A.D., the second exalted Vespasian (69-79 A.D.).

Of the seven cities Jesus addresses in Revelation, Philadelphia has the distinction of being the one that kept a Christian presence and functioning churches the longest. The city fell to the Muslims in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, as usual bringing serious oppression to the remaining churches. Every other city had its lampstand removed earlier (i.e. Revelation 2:5).

I have seen articles and messages claiming that a Christian church continued in this city until the modern era. In fact, this past century has shown the church in Philadelphia to be long since dead. As is common with most areas taken by the Muslims in Asia Minor, there are no churches remaining today (in a country that is 99.8% Muslim).

Dispensationalists have a reason for wanting the church in Philadelphia's continuity to the present. Their focus on the historical churches, instead of seeing an extra continuing message for all churches, drives their thinking. They see only a strictly literal fulfillment for that geographic church in the words "I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. (Revelation 3:8b). If this is a door that no one can shut, the church in Philadelphia must survive indefinitely. Some use the words of a still published Bible commentary to assert the church's continued presence as fulfillment of these words:

Gibbon ('Decline and Fall,' ch. lxiv.) gives an unwilling testimony to the fulfillment of prophecy as to Philadelphia temporally: 'Among the Greek churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect-a column in a scene of ruins; a pleasing example that the paths of honour and safety may sometimes be the same.' (From selection on Revelation 3:13, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc.)



I have personally spent time in Turkey examining the ruins of these cities and their churches. I can assure you that they are all long gone, including Philadelphia. Following the 14<sup>th</sup> century Muslim conquests, if any church survived in Philadelphia it must have been small and left no trace. All ruins date earlier. The previously mentioned commentary, supporting a continued Philadelphia church, cites Rev. A. R. Fausset (1821-1910). This excerpt also appears in his "Fausset's Bible Dictionary." Because he cited "Gibbon" without any qualifications, people reading his work think a church still existed in his day. Compounding the problem, current preachers quote Fausset as though he was present-day. The original source, Gibbon's work, is far from current, published in 1776. I could find no other work contemporary to Gibbon that corroborated a still functioning church in Philadelphia. It's possible that he was referencing (without attribution) an even earlier work in his material.

The literal church in Philadelphia unquestionably had its door closed. This presents no problem when understanding these Revelation churches are literal and representative. Jesus used then existing churches to show the church throughout history. There was no guarantee in that passage that God would keep the doors open in Philadelphia until Jesus' return. Yet, without question, God does place open doors before His church throughout history and keeps them open for as long as He wishes.



A mosque (center) built next to the ruins of the ancient church basilica at Philadelphia

Muslims like to cite their supremacy over the church by claiming the status of victor or conqueror. This is why mosques often take over former churches, replace former churches, or stand next to the ruins of former churches. They cite passages such as this in Revelation and claim Islam superior because it closed a door "that no one can shut." Again, properly understood, this passage provides no such proof. God opens and closes as He wills and in the manner that He wants.

Later in Revelation, a time comes when God allows the world to overpower the church (see Revelation 11:3-10), this too is for God's purpose and for His glory. The result is no less an open door for Christianity. Many see only open doors in appearances of a thriving church (e.g. wealth and numbers). Muslims do not understand how God works in weakness and even through removing a church in judgment. Theirs is religion commonly steeped in forcible and violent means of conquest. They hold themselves victorious by numerical superiority and multiplication of physical buildings (i.e. mosques). In true Christianity, God could care less how many steeples dot the countryside; believers living and even dying for Him is a testimony to success. God's church is more than conquerors!

Romans 8:35-37 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." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. (NIV)

Returning to Jesus' words in Revelation 3:8...

Revelation 3:8 "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."

Jesus confirms that He knows and sees what the church is doing. Then He immediately reminds them that He has provided them an open door. And when Jesus opens a door, the door is open. The apostle Paul understood this clearly...

1 Corinthians 16:8-9 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, 9 because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me. (NIV)

Take note that open doors don't mean there will be no opposition! I would say the wider the door, the more opposition. Yet, that didn't stop Paul – he understood that open doors meant that God had work for him to do regardless of any opposition.

2 Corinthians 2:12 Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me (NIV)

Colossians 4:3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. (NIV)

Paul was a slave going where his Master wanted – knowing that his Master had opened doors for him that no one could close (even if it took him into suffering, hardship, or death).

Revelation 3:8b I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

The strength of the church wasn't an issue. What mattered was this church's faithfulness and obedience regardless of their strength. A great problem for churches and individual believers is relying on their own strength. Most people read "I know that you have little strength" as a negative; it is not. When Jesus says this it's a positive. He knows we don't have much strength, we are His creation. He wants us to recognize our weakness. In fact, God will use us most in our weaknesses because it brings glory to Him alone! The Apostle Paul understood this. Open doors accessed under his own strength would give glory to him, but open doors accessed solely in the power of Jesus Christ can only bring glory to His Lord and Savior.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (NIV)

Philippians 4:12-13 I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. 13 I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (NIV)

My lack of strength shouldn't worry me or cause concern. It must drive me to seek God, the giver of true strength. Then I too will say "I can do everything through [Christ] who gives me strength."

Revelation 3:8b I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

Because of Christ's strength we keep His word and don't deny His name. Obedience is a mark of Christians, evidence of love for their Lord:

John 14:21-24 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." 22 Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" 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. 24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. (NIV)

John 17:6 "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. (NIV)

Consider an ancient prayer in the Book of Proverbs, where a man named Agur feared that he would somehow deny the name of His Lord. Are we concerned enough about this that we would pray similar words?

Proverbs 30:1, 7-9 The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh — an oracle: 7 "Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: 8 Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. 9 Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God. (NIV)

Paul, in the New Testament, reminds us there are many ways we can deny the name of our Lord.

1 Timothy 5:8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (NIV)

Believers, in God's strength, will keep His word and not deny His name, including at this Philadelphia church.

Luke 12:8-9 "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. 9 But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. (NIV)

Jesus never disowns a single believer in Him. Rather Jesus "acknowledges" us, but how? Return to the words which follow in Revelation:

Revelation 3:9 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.

Jesus recognizes us with words that should amaze us: "I have loved you." Not only does He say this to us directly, He here says that He will make unbelievers and religious persecutors recant their lies and recognize the same. All the hollow words of false teachers, cults, and non-Christian religions are merely lies when they falsely claim to be recipients of God's love and favor. These same individuals often go further claiming that God could never love the poor and weak that composes much of His true church. Yet all they have are lies and Jesus promises that one day they will admit the truth — "I have loved you." When will this admission take place? I believe Scriptures point to it happening on the Day of Judgment, the day when every knee will bow before Jesus.

Romans 14:11 It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.'" (NIV) [Quoting Isaiah 45:23]

Philippians 2:5-11 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 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! 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. (NIV)

The focus of these passages is everyone bowing before Jesus and confessing Him as Lord, but part of that confession includes His saints. It appears that at that same time, Jesus

acknowledges us before the Father and His angels (Matthew 10:32 and Luke 12:8). He makes those compelled to bow (all unbelievers) recognize believers are different. We stand with Christ through nothing of our own, only His merit. But we stand with Him, loved of God and co-heirs with Christ.

That God loves His people shouldn't surprise us. He has repeated this statement throughout His word. He has always loved His people. Yet I think we need to hear and take to heart that it's God's love for His people that has been on display throughout history. In the Old Testament:

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (NIV)

Jeremiah 31:3 The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. (NIV)

Hosea 2:23 I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" (NIV)

The New Testament says the same to all believers, including the Gentiles grafted as part of spiritual Israel (Romans 11:17-26).

John 15:9a "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. (NIV)

John 17:20-23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5a For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. (NIV)

2 Thessalonians 2:13 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. (NIV)

Loved by the Lord! What have we ever done that deserves His love? His grace here should overwhelm us. I can understand how David wrote Psalms of praise on this subject...

Psalms 86:5 You are forgiving and good, O Lord, abounding in love to all who call to you. (NIV)

Psalms 89:1-2 I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. 2 I will declare that your love stands firm forever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself. (NIV)

And in case you need proof, believer, of God's love for you, Paul made it clear:

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (NIV)

God gives these Philadelphian believers, who He loves, a combined promise and reward.

Revelation 3:10 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.

They, as do all believers, have kept the Lord's command to persevere (James 1:4; 2 Thessalonians 3:5), to overcome (1 John 5:5), or as He now says "to endure patiently." They have done so by the Lord's strength, so it is a personally unmerited reward, given graciously by the Lord. Specifically, the reward: "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."

The word appearing as "trial" also translates as "temptation" or "testing." Great difference exists between trials and temptations for a believer versus a nonbeliever. Context helps prove which is in view. For example, for believers, when God brings it about, its purpose is to prove someone, not to cause them to fail. When it's the devil tempting he does so with a goal of causing his target to fall. Context demand we first settle what people are in view in this Revelation passage. Who receives this coming trial or temptation? It isn't the church, God spares them from it. This major event is coming on "the whole world," the world God called His

church out of! (Same idea of the use of the word “world” in James 4:4). This trial’s purpose is to show the world that they do not belong to God, for He will spare those He loves. Why is God sparing His people? God knows the trial, testing, or temptation is too great for the church...

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation [same word as “trial” in Revelation 3:10] 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. (NIV)

Jesus is personally aware of trials and temptations; the Bible clearly says that because He suffered in these He can help us through all of ours.

Hebrews 2:18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted. (NIV)

A common temptation or trial isn’t the topic of our Revelation passage. God provides believers strength to get through the ordinary variety or a way out of them. But here, God spares the church outright an event of worldwide scale. How does He spare them? One word provides a clue...

“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.”

We need to examine the word “from.” Does this word mean evacuation or perhaps preservation? In other words, to keep a person from “the hour of trial,” does it mean that God has to remove His church? Those holding to the church’s rapture before a seven-year great tribulation affirm such a claim. They often use verses such as this to say God must remove His church before that horrible time. The Greek wording of the text provides less than compelling support for their assertions.

The Greek preposition, translated “from,” also means “through.” With this alternate understanding the passage means that God will keep believers safe during worldwide hardship. Removal or preservation is equally possible meanings of this text. Yet I believe there are key Scriptures (using Scriptures to interpret Scriptures) that teach God’s plan for the church solidly to be one over the other. In Jesus’ prayer for all believers, He says this:



John 17:14-15 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. (NIV )

God clearly promises to preserve His people in the face of trials and temptations and it's just as reasonable to believe that He can and will do so in the face of the worst. Beyond continuing preservation, if God graciously chooses to remove His church to do this, He has the right and ability to do so. Either possibility fits within a Scriptural understanding of this text. God does remove His church before the outpouring of His wrath towards the end of everything (Revelation 15:7 onward). God planned that final trial only for the lost.

Why does John call it an "hour" of trial or temptation? The context shows this is figurative language merely to picture a relatively short time of limited duration – not a literal 60 minutes of it.

Some believe this passage speaks of a future time, perhaps in the period they call the Great Tribulation. We must examine if this is a valid understanding of this passage. So does this passage speak of some future time, perhaps in what is referred to as the Great Tribulation?

"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." (ESV)

The NIV wording "going to come" allows for a far-off event, but the ESV better translates the Greek text (see above). There is no real sense of far-off in the Greek, rather imminent. The church imminently faces trials, which come and go, throughout history. This is still true today.

The original addressee of this message, the Philadelphia church, seemingly had nothing to do with a future Great Tribulation (especially as Dispensationalists view that church). How would ancient Philadelphia understand the message sent to them? There is no question; the church at Philadelphia understood that trials, testing, and temptations would come to them. Every Revelation church would agree. These are not unique to ancient churches having continued through the ages. This universality of time and geography accounts for "that is coming on the whole earth." Jesus' warning wasn't of a onetime future event; rather that trials and temptations will come on the whole world. It's a continuing warning, spanning ages, in keeping with what we found in the introduction. This message's application is equally for your local gathering or that of ancient Philadelphia.

Historically, God kept His people at the Philadelphia church from the hour of trial in myriad ways. Keeping His church from an hour of trial didn't mean that no believer suffered physical death during these times. This passage speaks of spiritual deliverance, not personal comfort or freedom from pain (a focus of many western churches). It certainly didn't promise unending physical life. Again, God delivered his people from the hour of trial by multiple means. He granted some physical death by divine appointment. Others He providentially spared from any physical harm. God's spiritual preservation of martyred believers is still divine deliverance. No spiritual death or further harm is possible. Believers in every age and location can rest assured that God will spare them from the hour of trial awaiting the world. For unbelievers of the past, present, and future, that trial or testing will come. It comes on the whole earth. Except for God's "called out ones," the world will fail the test and succumb to the trial. God spares His saints, even if it kills us! With the Lord's help and by His power we will overcome.

The passage, itself, highlights the goal of this "whole earth" trial...

"to try those who dwell on the earth (ESV)"

"to test those who live on the earth (NIV)"

This phrasing purposely appears later in the Book of Revelation (see Revelation 11:10). There it labels rebellious sinners and persecutors of God's people. Bringing judgment on the lost is the focus of this trial coming on the whole earth. Unbelievers have no hope of God sparing them. Their trial is terrible, ending with physical and spiritual destruction, without exception.

Preterists argue "the whole world" and "dwell of the earth" don't have to mean the entire planet. They want this distinction because they limit Revelation's scope mostly to the land of Israel. They are correct the Greek word for earth "ge" can also mean land and world ("oikoumene") can mean "the occupied world." These words in English automatically speak to us of the entire globe. As with all ambiguous words in Greek, context must settle understanding. While Preterist want to limit most Revelation uses to only Israel, here they allow an empire-wide crisis (with similar use to Luke 2:1). Yet, the events in Israel surrounding the temple's destruction didn't come anywhere close to being an empire-wide crisis. Most outside Israel felt little or no impact at all, including these churches in Asia Minor. These Revelation texts look towards something more widespread having a worldwide scope.

Revelation 3:11a I am coming soon. (NIV)

Jesus gives four words of great hope and comfort. As He promised, He is coming back. Yet, His return is different from the first. The first included suffering and death; the return is in victory, as judge, and to reign forevermore.

Acts 1:6-11 [Following Jesus' resurrection and post-resurrection appearances] So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" 7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (NIV)

The imminent, soon coming, return of Jesus has been the church's hope from the beginning.

Matthew 24:36-47 "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. 45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. 47 I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. (NIV)

From these passages, we know Jesus has promised:

- How He will return: in the clouds
- When He will return: soon (by God's standard and at the time He alone has set)

- The time of His return: at the time we least expect.

With the possibility of their Master returning at any time, all Christians should live daily in expectation. And should He return today, we will rejoice at His coming, for by His grace we have nothing to fear and nothing to cause us shame (see Revelation 16:15).

Revelation 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. (NIV)

Jesus reminds us to be watchful, to persevere, to endure, and to overcome. This external call commands us to do so; the overall message of Scriptures assures it is God doing it in us.

Philippians 2:12-13 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (NIV)

What crown is Jesus talking about? The crown of life given to all believer in Christ Jesus (the same mentioned in Revelation 2:10 in the letter to the Smyrna church)!

Revelation 3:12 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.

“He who overcomes,” meaning all believers (1 John 5:5), Jesus says will become “a pillar in the temple of my God.” This does not mean we literally become some stone pillars. John is using figuratively descriptive language, a recurring practice throughout the book of Revelation. Scriptures repeatedly speaks of the church using terms associated with a living building.

1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. (NIV)

Ephesians 2:19-22 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.

22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit. (NIV)

“Never again will he leave it” were significant words to the people of Philadelphia. These citizens feared to live inside their own city because of earthquakes. Those living inside, or entering temporarily, had to be constantly ready to flee. But for believers, citizens of the Holy City, there is no more fleeing, no fear to be inside. We are citizens of the Holy City for eternity.

Revelation 22:14-15 "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. (NIV)

Extra detail appears a few verses before Revelation 22:

Revelation 21:22-27 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. (NIV)

Believers are not merely associated with the city and the temple of God. The completed church is this city and God's temple. We currently are in Christ (Romans 8:1) and He in us (John 14:23), yet on that day we will be fully and forever in God's presence. Of all that Scriptures says regarding our everlasting home, this is the primary detail. The prophet Ezekiel, speaking of the Eternal City, says it best:

Ezekiel 48:35 "And the name of the city from that time on will be: THE LORD IS THERE." (NIV)

The lost will never understand this message or its importance. Jesus reminds the Philadelphia church of this with His closing words...

Revelation 3:13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. (NIV)

The seventh, and final, specifically addressed letter now begins.

Revelation 3:14-22 "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." (NIV)

When Rome took over the area encompassing Laodicea in 133 B.C., they afterwards built east-west and north-south roads through this city. Laodicea was literally at a major crossroad. As with some of the cities previously considered, it used its key position on trade routes to gain influence and wealth. Major industries, worth considering, included production of black wool and a manufacturing of costly garments, as well as a prominent medical school that specialized in ear and eye care. This latter industry thrived mostly because of their development of an effective ointment for treating inflamed eyes.

The same earthquake that impacted Philadelphia in 17 A.D. also struck Laodicea. Similarly, they received financial aid from the Roman government to help rebuild. A later event shows how wealthy the city became in the years that followed. In 60 another major earthquake struck. The Roman government again offered financial aid, but the city government responded that it did not need help, stressing that they had all the resources they needed for reconstruction. Not only were they self-sufficient, but they also contributed to neighboring cities that needed help.

While historical records imply a large Jewish presence in the city, no direct opposition appears in the biblical text. This suggests how watered down the church's Christian message was, leaving an inoffensive message that Jews could tolerate.

The nearby Lycus River was a primary source of water for the city. Large Roman cities, such as this, commonly needed high volumes of water. Some assume essential water quantities would need more than this (present-day) small river. If they needed an extra source, choices are a great distance from the city. Various scholars believe that at least a portion of Laodicea's water supply came from Hierapolis, roughly six miles away, the source of which was hot water springs. (From personal investigation, I believe the archaeological evidence for such an aqueduct is lacking). Romans valued hot water springs, such as those at Hierapolis, filled with minerals including calcium carbonate, and promoted its medical properties. If this water reached Laodicea, on arriving at the city it would no longer be hot but rather lukewarm at best.

Revelation 3:14b These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation.

These words almost directly parallel the beginning of the previous letter. Consider again the words beginning the letter to the church at Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:7 These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. (NIV)

This letter uses "Faithful and true" to parallel "holy and true" and "the ruler of God's creation" to also parallel the One "who holds the key of David."

#### **Definition**

Arche (pronounced "ar-kay") – This Greek word means primacy, such as "beginning" or "chief in rank." The latter employed to represent a "ruler" or "authority" or "power." Its usage in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (e.g. Genesis 40:13, 21; 41:13), plus in inter-testament documents (2 Maccabees 4:10, 50), provide great proof the word commonly meant "ruler" or "authority."

Some translations differ from the NIV's "ruler of God's creation." Alternates include "the beginning of God's creation" and "the originator of God's creation." Primacy is the focus in Greek; the text portrays Jesus as both ruler and originator of God's creation (see Colossians 1:15-16 further below).

Jesus fulfilled prophecy given long-ago to David. In advance, God proclaimed One would come to rule in David's line. He would be different from any other ruler in that He would rule forever (compare Luke 1:33).

1 Chronicles 17:10-14 "I declare to you that the Lord will build a house for you: 11 When your days are over and you go to be with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. 12 He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. 13 I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. 14 I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever." (NIV)

The message to this last Revelation church clearly reveals the scope of this eternal ruler's kingdom. He is the ruler over all God's creation. Some believe the Bible's portrayal of Satan rule's rule on the earth as a contradiction here. They stress the Devil (or Satan) is ruler over this world. There is no Biblical inconsistency here; Satan is a ruler, but in a far limited sense. In John's gospel, three times the apostle recorded Jesus calling Satan "the prince of this world" (John 12:31; John 14:30; John 16:11). This imagery shows the devil is merely a prince, one who rules under a King. God is that King. Jesus' pronouncements on this prince also bear examination:

John 12:31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. (NIV)

John 14:30 I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, (NIV)

John 16:11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. (NIV)

In these three statements, Jesus made it clear the devil is inferior. He has no hold on Jesus (meaning Jesus is stronger and greater). God's condemnation and expulsion of the devil is permanent and absolute. This brings us to wording used by the apostle Paul:

2 Corinthians 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (NIV)

That Paul, who repeatedly affirmed there is only one true God, called the devil a "god" has caused much discussion throughout history. Yet, Paul's overall message made something clear. Satan's powers may allow him to appear as a god, but he is a limited inferior being. He is



merely the finite “god of this age.” The one true infinite God, from everlasting to everlasting (Psalms 90:2), is not merely a god of this age, He is God of every age.

1 Timothy 6:15b-16 God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (NIV)

When the prince of this world, or god of this age, is long gone (cast into the lake of fire), the rightful ruler and originator of God’s creation will remain.

Colossians 1:15-16 He (Jesus) 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. (NIV)

Returning to the letter to Laodicea, Jesus again affirms that He is all-knowing.

Revelation 3:15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

This church wasn’t on fire, full of life, nor was it stone-cold dead. Jesus clearly says this middle-of-the-road placement is worst: “I wish you were either one or the other!”

Of course it makes sense that God would want us to be on fire for Him – hot versus lukewarm. Questions surround the extreme opposite position, cold – cold as death. God’s preference of cold over lukewarm ties to the only two weapons the devil uses:

- #1. Lies
- #2. Deception

The best lies and deception work because they contain some truth. A 100% lie, fully in direct opposition to a clear truth, is often readily recognizable. But merge or intertwine truthful characteristics into the lie and far more accept the deception, readily mistaking the blended lie for truth.

A lukewarm believer or church produces more damage to the cause of Christ than any nonbeliever. Outsiders regularly credit their ungodly beliefs and actions to God. In contrast, those cold, not claiming to be Christian, have just reason for their ungodly actions. Of course,

far better, that they be hot, zealous for God, living a life that supports the name they claim to bear.

Jesus made it clear, being hot means loving Him above everything. No parent, wife, child, or friend, can be more important than following Christ. No place, no goods, no comfort, can be more important than serving Christ.

Matthew 6:24 "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. (NIV, the following verses emphasizing than cloth, food and lodging are no different than money)

Matthew 10:37-39 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (NIV)

What does being "hot" look like? Paul gives a brief description in his letter to the Roman church...

Romans 12:9-21 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NIV)

Peter wrote of false teachers in the church, all individuals easily characterized as neither hot nor cold. They have an external appearance of being hot, yet they are cold (dead) internally. Take note of what he says about their ending:

2 Peter 2:19-22 They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity — for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. 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." (NIV)

Did you catch the part of verse 20, in 2 Peter, where it's made clear that it's better to have always been cold than to be lukewarm? John restates the same in Revelation...

Revelation 3:16 So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. (NIV)

The lukewarm are merely a bad taste in the mouth of God. Put another way, they taste so bad He could spit. This imagery was easily recognizable to the Laodiceans. If some of their water came from Hieropolis, that hot mineral water traveling miles through an aqueduct would be a lukewarm mouthwash. In the least, even cold water from the Lycus River would be lukewarm flowing into the city through aboveground aqueducts. To become refreshing or pleasant required further effort. Storage in an underground cistern would refreshingly cool it or, of course, heating it in a kettle made good tea.

It's far better being "scum of the earth" than spit from God's mouth. Paul used this first wording to describe himself and his companions – all people that were "hot" for God.

1 Corinthians 4:13 Up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world. (NIV)

Lukewarm people in the church often try to restrain on-fire believers. Their catchphrases tout moderation "in all things." Philippians provides their proof-text, typically the King James of this verse:

Philippians 4:5 Let your moderation be known unto all men. (KJV)

## Definition

Epieikes – Greek word meaning “gentleness” or “reasonableness” or “graciousness” or “fairness” or “as is fitting or right.”

The Greek word translated “moderation,” back in 1611, is “Epieikes.” Most translations now use terms better representing the meaning in modern language, including “gentleness”, “reasonableness”, or “graciousness.” Paul never called anyone to be “moderate,” on-the-fence, or mediocre, about the Christian life. Remember, this was Paul whose own life displayed hot. His uncompromising actions and message were cause for riots, stoning, floggings, imprisonment, and more. Jesus makes it clear... better to be hot or cold than lukewarm.

Jesus telling this church He was about to spit them out of His mouth was a reminder that He would remove their lampstand (Revelation 2:5), that they would stop being a church. Already they had fallen so far that their lukewarm example and message wasn't even an offense to the Jews of the city or the pagan Romans. Being “hot” means we smell...

2 Corinthians 2:15-17 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? (NIV)

Those who are “hot” smell wonderful to the saved but to a lost world they stink. “Hot” churches draw opposition because of this. Everyone wants to be rid of something stinking.

Revelation 3:17-18 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.

I can see it now; leaders or powerful influencers in this church working to keep the message “moderate.” Their greatest fear was the message harming their local commerce, their ability to trade or, worst of all, negatively impacting their personal finances. Preserving their style of living was a priority. These issues still drive what happens in hosts of churches today.

Jesus points out that they were resting in their own wealth, saying “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” Remember, this city turned away a government handout. This

would be like sending back that unsolicited stimulus check to the federal government with a note saying "I don't need it." The truth for those resting in temporal wealth appears in the following words. Spiritually speaking they are "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." All the costly garments made in their city and filling their closets won't make any difference on the Day of Judgment. Their blindness calls to mind an earlier meeting some Pharisees had with Jesus.

John 9:39-41 Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." 40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, "What? Are we blind too?" 41 Jesus said, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains. (NIV)

This church pretended to see what was important but they were blind to God's truth. Another warning over the Pharisees, recorded in Matthew's gospel, applies:

Matthew 15:12-14 Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?" He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. 14 Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." (NIV)

God's people in the lukewarm church of Laodicea had a choice. Those in any similar church today have the same choice. Follow only the example of Christ and His word or follow blind guides trying to keep the church lukewarm. On paper the decision seems easy but following Christ comes with a cost.

The church at Laodicea needed riches that would last. Instead they focused on earthly gold (a better title might be "fool's gold"). James wrote to similar people:

James 5:1-5 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. (NIV)

Jesus words in the gospel of Mark put worldly riches in proper perspective to eternity...

Mark 8:36-37 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (NIV)

The church at Laodicea needed true riches and spiritual robes of white that come from Christ. Their eyes needed healing. Local salve healed only the physical, God's supernatural salve opens eyes to see His truth. This intertwined imagery revealed what they had failed to see in their lukewarm state; their focus was the physical rather than eternal matters.

John's later glimpse into heaven shows that all those wearing robes of righteousness know clearly to Whom they owe everything.

Revelation 7:9-10 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." (NIV)

Do you want evidence that God has saved you, that you are part of His church and loved by Him? The next verse, in this Laodicean letter, is an important reminder.

Revelation 3:19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. (NIV)

Those who belong to God – all His slaves – He rebukes and disciplines with purpose: to see us repent from doing wrong and to become zealous for Him. In fact, the NASU and ESV better translate "earnest" as...

Revelation 3:19b therefore be zealous and repent. (NASU/ESV)

From this brief command we can highlight two points:

#1. God wants His people to be able to recognize and turn from sin (repent). Doing so is evidence that He is at work in your life.

2 Corinthians 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you — unless, of course, you fail the test? (NIV)

How does God get you to the point of repentance? Through the rebuke of His word and His accompanying discipline!

Proverbs 3:11-12 My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, 12 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. (NIV)

Hebrews 12:5-11 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (NIV)

God's purpose in disciplining us is to keep us safe in Him...

1 Corinthians 11:32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (NIV)

#2. God wants His people zealous for Him!

God's never wanted His church filled with a bunch of lukewarm pew warmers; He intended it to be a too-hot-to-handle living-it-out group of witnesses. The early church became widely known because it appeared this way – including many that died for their faith. Unfortunately, today, with far too many lukewarm churches, the church is almost unknown. Lukewarm has a way of just blending in.

Revelation 3:20 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. (NIV)

In caricature, this verse often portrays a powerless and pathetic looking Jesus knocking on the door of a person's heart hoping and pleading that someone might let Him in to save them. In truth, the picture is far different. This passage has earlier words of Jesus, to His disciples, in view.

Luke 12:35-40 "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. 39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (NIV)

In Revelation 3:20, Jesus portrayed himself as standing at the door of this church. If any faithful servants are preset, they will quickly and gladly open the door for their master. As it says in Luke 12, they will "immediately open the door for him." Many churches today would struggle to find anyone to open the door for Jesus. They believe they would, or claim they would, but they are looking for a Jesus that they have created in their own minds rather than the revealed Jesus of Scriptures. They wouldn't begin to recognize this scriptural Jesus, let alone accept Him in their gathering.

Jesus knocking doesn't mean that He is dependent on those inside to have it opened. He is Lord and Master, everything belongs to Him. The door will open willingly or it will open at His command. For churches that don't recognize Him and don't open the door, the result will be shame and judgment. Another of Jesus' parables specifically shows what happens to unworthy servants who believe they can keep the Master out.

Matthew 21:33-41 "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. 34 When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. 35 "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. 37 Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. 38 "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's



kill him and take his inheritance.' 39 So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. 40 "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?" 41 "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time." (NIV)

Returning to Revelation 3:20, Jesus describes what awaits those who do recognize His voice and were waiting for Him... "I will come in and eat with him, and he with me." As it says in Luke 12:38: "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready." Good and wonderful are weak terms to describe that day and meal. All welcoming Jesus will eat with Him and remain in our Master's presence for eternity. In sharp contrast, God expels forever everyone not opening their door. God will purify His church.

Revelation 19:9 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." (NIV)

Many self-deceived individuals and churches believe they are part of God's church. By Jesus' own words, a rude surprise awaits them when that day comes:

Matthew 8:11-12 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." (NIV)

Everyone resting in their own goodness, personal standing, riches, or lineage, will find them useless. Only those wearing God's righteousness (through faith in Jesus Christ) will attend. God opened their eyes to His truth to respond and see Him for whom He is. Their hope alone rests in Him. This describes everyone chosen by God. Those at Laodicea thought they had the best clothes, now they find out they had no clothes at all...

Matthew 22:11-14 "But when the king came in to see the [wedding] guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. 13 "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are invited, but few are chosen." (NIV)

Never adopt that mistaken view of a powerless Jesus who stands at the door and knocks. The Jesus Scriptures, revealed in Revelation, comes in power as ruler and owner of everything! His knock is to see who is ready and waiting when He comes. Not ready when that knock comes? It's too late. This is Jesus' warning to the church at Laodicea and every lukewarm church unwisely following her example.

Jesus ends this specific letter with another promise to all believers:

Revelation 3:21 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. (NIV)

Every overcomer (1 John 5:5) will sit on God's throne. Our seat is with Jesus, already seated with His Father. As the Father gave Jesus authority to rule, we receive authority to rule with Him. We will rule and reign with Christ. Yes we, that rebellious creation deserving everlasting punishment, chosen by God and saved by His grace, receive reward beyond imagination. We will reign with Him! [See the Appendix for "What does it mean to reign?"] Paul summed this up in reciting the first part of an ancient creed of the church...

2 Timothy 2:11-12 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. (NIV)

And how long will we reign? Verses considered before, about the New Jerusalem, merit repeating:

Revelation 22:4-5 They [all inhabitants] will see his [God's] 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. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Forever and ever in His presence! Are you watching and waiting for the Master to return? Are you looking forward to that knock? Are you doing what He has commanded us to be doing until He returns? Watchfulness and obedience means hot, on fire for God. Pray that far more churches today would come to a boil – for we don't know how soon God will choose to spit.

Revelation 3:22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." (NIV)

One final time, as we finish this seventh and final letter, God reminds us that this is a message for His church. Believers alone receive ears to hear what God is teaching by His Spirit.

Revelation 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."

Using the phrase, "After this I looked," John states that His vision continued. This wording leaves it uncertain if his vision was continuous and uninterrupted, perhaps with a brief break before continuing. Six times, in the book of Revelation, John uses this phrase to start another portion of the Book of Revelation (Revelation 4:1; 7:1; 7:9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1). In the least, they signal John's awareness of the passage of time while receiving these visions.

The door standing open in heaven immediately brings to mind the door John previously wrote about in the letter to Philadelphia.

Revelation 3:8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. (NIV)

God placing an open door before John revealed that He was showing John where He would have him go and that nothing could prevent it. No one could close this door until God's revelation was complete. God didn't open all of heaven. A door opened into heaven, showing not everything in heaven was accessible to John. God was specifically showing John only what he needed to see and where he needed to go. Consider the same for open doors that God grants each of us. While we are seemingly free to go anywhere, the only place where we see and experience what God specifically planned for us is to go through the door He has opened for us.

The Bible records a few others who had the rare opportunity to glimpse heaven. Each was a unique experience, only John saw an open door. The first heavenly vision appears in the opening book of the Bible...

Genesis 28:10-15 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. 11 When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will

give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (NIV)

Jacob saw little of heaven, but three prophets, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah, saw God's throne.

Ezekiel 1:26-28 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 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. (NIV)

Daniel 7:9-10 "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. (NIV)

Isaiah 6:1-8 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." 6 Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (NIV)

John's door, as we will see, enabled him to see far more than the others. As with Jacob, he would see angels coming and going (serving their Lord). As with Ezekiel he would see the splendor of God on His throne. As with Daniel he would see the future and as with Isaiah, God would question him and give specific tasks. But John's door into heaven went further. It granted him the ability to see everything necessary to do what Jesus commanded...

Revelation 1:19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. (NIV)

Only John's door enabled him to see and write of the past, present, and future. John's expansive view of heaven is unique to all of Scriptures. It is a picture spanning vast tracks of history and God's plan for the ages.

Revelation 4:1b 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."

The voice John had first heard speaking to him, "like a trumpet," was the voice of Jesus. At the beginning of this Revelation, even before John had turned to see that it was Jesus speaking, he described the opening command given him in this way:

Revelation 1:10-11 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." (NIV)

By using the same wording, John stresses this continued Revelation is still coming from Jesus. Again, the entire book is The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

Jesus' words to John are immediate:

Revelation 4:1c "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this."

Some Bible teachers place heavy emphasis on the words "what must take place after this." Four differing opinions include:

- The letters to the seven churches mainly represent eras of history. Historicists claim this phrase means sometime close to the end time, a far future fulfillment following the final period of the Church of Laodicea.

- The strict Preterist places all soon-mentioned events in first century, dismissing these words as a literary device. They insistently assert known referenced events all took place shortly after John's writing.

- Futurists see the previous letters as chiefly to seven historical churches. They claim this wording merely means John is hearing of events that will come after his time, yet Futurists place that time only in the far distant future.

- Idealists are similar to futurists, yet they see this "after his time" can include almost two thousand years of what we now call history plus times present and still future.

Since God already told John he would write of people and events past, present, and future (Revelation 1:19); the meaning of these words is straightforward. Nowhere did Jesus say that He was going to give everything in this Revelation in a linear past-to-present-to-future format. Rather, here, He's merely telling John the first events he will see are from a future time. Further on, it changes as God shows John events unquestionably from earlier times. This clarifying phrase applies to the immediately following scene and not the entirety of the book.

Some commentators see a picture of the rapture in Revelation 4:1; first there is a trumpet sound and then God takes John up. Consider related passages, about Jesus' second coming, speaking of something similar...

Matthew 24:30-31 "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. (NIV)

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 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. (NIV)

1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 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. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words. (NIV)

Implied likeness or not, I hold that such a comparison lacks proof of being representative of the rapture. My three primary reasons follow, the first of which provides enough contrary evidence by itself:

#1. At Jesus' return there is a bodily resurrection, physical beings raised to be with Him. God raises even those long dead physically to life, transforming them. In Revelation, John's visit to heaven is only in spirit, not bodily.

#2. The event included only John. John alone could hear the trumpet or see Jesus as part of this vision. Jesus' return, what many call "the rapture," is the day when everyone will see Jesus (consider Matthew 24:30-31 again). His return is a public, not private event. Scriptures nowhere includes the idea of a secret rapture. (An idea fueling story lines such as Left Behind with everyone wondering what happened to Christians that are mysteriously missing). Also note the text say it was a voice "like a trumpet," not a trumpet sounding.

#3. In the final event, we go to be "with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:17). John's brief visit saw him leave that wonderful place and the immediate presence of God.

If John intended an allusion to the rapture, the dissimilarities far outweigh any made out parallels.

Returning to John's specific experience, the voice like a trumpet merely signaled that God was about to reveal something important, or something major was about to happen. This was part of Israel's experience many times in the Old Testament:

- At Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16, 19; 20:18)
- At important festivals (Leviticus 23:24; 25:9)
- Telling the people to assemble or move out (Number 10:5; 1 Samuel 13:3; Joel 2:15)
- Before battles (Joshua 6:16, 20; Judges 3:27)
- At the king's coronation (1 Kings 1:34; 2 Kings 9:13).

Without question, God let John know he was about to witness something incredibly important. Here the announcement appears as a voice like a trumpet. Later, John hears further trumpet sounds. From Revelation chapters 8 to 11, seven trumpets sound.

God takes John into the present heaven in spirit, to show him a panorama of history, not its entirety, only the portions God considered relevant. When a believer dies they normally go to

the present heaven in spirit. John's experience followed this pattern (the fact he got to return was the abnormal). There are only three recorded exceptions in all of history where individuals went bodily into the present heaven.

Enoch –

Genesis 5:21-24 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. 22 And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. (NIV)

Elijah –

2 Kings 2:11-12 As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. 12 Elisha saw this and cried out, "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his own clothes and tore them apart. (NIV)

Jesus –

Acts 1:1-3, 9-11 In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach 2 until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. 3 After his suffering, he showed himself to these men and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ... 9 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (NIV)

Continuing with John's open door...

Revelation 4:2 At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. (NIV)



The words “I was in the Spirit” also validly translate as “I was in spirit.” Translators have usually preferred the first, but have noted the second as a possibility. It is the same wording as Revelation 1:10, as John begins his first vision. I believe this ambiguous wording is intentional. John’s human spirit is incapable of seeing into heaven, or visiting heaven, apart from God enabling this by His Holy Spirit.

John’s first stop in heaven is the most important place: God’s throne room. In fact, reference to God’s throne occurs eleven times in this brief eleven verse chapter. (Note: English translators do not always supply an English equivalent each time it appears in Greek). Other heavenly sights within John’s immediate view are irrelevant; that throne holds the most important entity in the universe. I believe that every person arriving in heaven follows this same order of sight. On arrival, nothing matters but God. (The few unperfected humans given an early look at God do so by His grace. He limits, shields, or restrains His glory so these not-yet-glorified individuals may do so and live).

Psalms 103:19 The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. (NIV)

John then tries to describe some of what he sees. God does not give him a specific description to write, rather God allows John to describe this using comparative (or looks-like) terms. It enables this apostle to craft a description describing the majesty of God without specific detail. Providing too much detail would enable people to try to make a painting or image (something every Jew was acutely aware of the Law’s warnings against. See Exodus 20:4).

Revelation 4:3 And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. (NIV)

The two stones in John’s description evoke two primary thoughts. The first, jasper, sparkles in brilliance, and the second have a reddish color, perhaps fiery. This comparative description may be another way of saying what Paul did...

1 Timothy 6:15b-16 God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (NIV)

## Definition

Iris – A Greek word commonly translated “rainbow” but can also refer to a “halo.” It is a curve or ribbon or band of light, creating a semi-circle or full circle of light. This Greek word often referred to a rainbow (including in classical Greek works), including rainbows in the Old Testament, as used in the Greek Septuagint translation. On this basis, Bible translators almost uniformly use “rainbow” instead of “halo.”

A bow of light encircled the throne. John uses a Greek word here not found elsewhere in the New Testament, only used by him in the book of Revelation: “Iris (Revelation 4:3; 10:1).”

The rainbow, of course, was the sign God gave in Noah’s day showing that He would never again destroy the earth by flood.

Genesis 9:14-16 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth." (NIV)

Our earthly rainbow consists of shades ranging from red, orange, yellow, and green, to blue, indigo, and violet. This heavenly rainbow seen by John only has shades of Green (or emerald). A rainbow surrounds the throne of God as a reminder that God keeps His covenants with humankind! His faithfulness displayed in His grace and mercy is unquestionably in view. Judgment is not the sole focus of God’s throne; the rainbow reminds us there is more. It’s a place where God rules, directs, and saves, keeping His people from destruction.

Revelation 4:4 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. (NIV)

The twenty-four elders represent the unified church of the Old and New Covenants, twelve for each (and they represent the full church of God, whether on earth or in heaven). Symbolism of 24 also includes further Old Testament imagery. In David’s time he divided the priesthood into 24 courses (1 Chronicles 24:1-19). Since these heavenly elders do priestly work, such as offering incense (Revelation 5:8), under their High Priest, the twenty-four show a church that’s a “royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9). This twenty-four with their High Priest, the Lamb, make twenty-five – a fitting replacement to the wicked leadership seen by Ezekiel in the old temple (Ezekiel 8:16).

The image is of these saved elders of God sitting on thrones surrounding God's throne, a room with God's throne in the middle, and six thrones each to the front, back, left and right. This surrounding pattern invokes imagery of God's church coming from the four corners of the earth, meaning the entire earth. It reminds us of the promises God gives that all saints will reign with Jesus (Revelation 20:4) and that each sits with Him on His throne (see Revelation 3:21, in the letter to Laodicea).

The elders robed in white, symbolize Christ's righteousness clothing His people. All have full cleansing of their sin (also referenced in Revelation 3:4; 7:9). Further, these elders have crowns of gold. As regal or military symbols, a crown is fitting either way. A regal symbol shows that we rule with Christ (Revelation 3:21; 5:10; 20:4, 6; 22:5; 2 Timothy 2:12), something promised only to the saints and never to the angels. A military symbol shows we are faithful and prized soldiers under one Commander (Revelation 17:14; 19:11, 19; Ephesians 6:10-18a). See the appendix "Understanding Crowns in Roman Culture" for more on crowns.

Revelation 4:5a From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings [Greek: "phone"] and peals of thunder. (NIV)

The image of the rainbow first reminds of God's faithfulness and preservation of His people. Next is a sign of judgment and justice, also dispensed from God's throne. This imagery is similar to an Old Testament time of God's judgment, also a time when God displayed His holiness by decreeing what was sin.

Exodus 9:23-28 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. 27 Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. "This time I have sinned," he said to them. "The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. 28 Pray to the Lord, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go; you don't have to stay any longer." (NIV)

Exodus 19:16-19 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. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. (NIV)

### **Definition**

Phone – Pronounced “fo-nay.” Used of any sound or tone heard by another person. It applies whether the sound issues from God, angels, man or comes from inanimate objects (such as a trumpet) or other natural actions (such as wind or thunder). Some English translators use “voice” by default. Context decisively reveals if the sound is a voice originating from a person or supernatural being.

The Greek word (“phone”), translated “rumblings” in the NIV of Revelation 4:5a, appears as “sounds” in the NASU. The King James uses “voices” (and the ESV footnotes both variations). “Voices” is one literal meaning of the Greek word. Why stay with “voices,” something we normally associate with spoken words versus noises? The Septuagint translators rendered the Hebrew expression “voice of God” using “phone” in Exodus 19:19. Further association of the voice of God and “thunder” occurred in places such as Psalms 29:3-4. While John different words in Revelation 4:5 to reference the sounds of thunder, his particular use of this word “phone” unquestionably reminded his readers of Old Testament passages tying thunder to the voice of God.

Revelation 4:5b Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. (NIV)

Seven is a number symbolizing completion or perfection. Before God’s throne we have seven bright lamps, representing complete and perfect light at God’s throne. For believers, God has made His perfect light shine on us.

Psalms 118:27 The Lord is God, and he has made his light shine upon us. (NIV)

2 Corinthians 4:6 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. (NIV)

As God sits in judgment, His perfect light shines on every wicked deed exposing every sin of the wicked.

Ephesians 5:11-14 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 13 But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." (NIV)

John provides the interpretation; these lights are "the seven spirits of God," or better put "the sevenfold spirit of God." In other words, God's perfect Spirit brings His light to all. The Spirit reveals knowledge of the Lord and His glory to believers, while exposing and judging sin in unbelievers. Jesus' words in the gospel of John, about the Holy Spirit, also show this contrast.

John 16:7-15 But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. 8 When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: 9 in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; 10 in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; 11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

12 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (NIV)

Nothing can obscure or even partial veil this perfect light before God's throne. The next "looks like" statement John shows this clearly.

Revelation 4:6a Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. (NIV)

A throne with blazing lights nearby is visible, readily observable from all horizontal directions or from above. Typically, the throne room floor restricts those below from seeing. Here we have a floor of glass "like a sea." John makes clear that nothing stands in the way of all to see this Divine light, including those below.

In John's day, during Roman times, glass was opaque (or cloudy). Only crystal was clear. This explains John's describing the floor as a sea of glass, but not normal Roman glass, rather glass as clear as crystal. Visible to everyone in heaven above and in realms below, nothing restrains or restricts God's light of salvation and justice.

John now mentions something secondary to the presence of the elders (representing the church around God's throne); there are also angelic beings surrounding God. Isaiah, in the Old Testament refers to these heavenly angelic beings by two names. He calls them Seraphs (the Hebrew means "fiery") in Isaiah 6:2, and then uses Cherubim later in his book...

Isaiah 37:16 "O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. (NIV)

Ezekiel also describes these angelic creatures surrounding God's throne, with his wording perhaps being closest to that which John now uses (compare Ezekiel 1:10-14; Ezekiel 10:14, 21).

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." (NIV)

They exist for one purpose, continuously ascribing to God the glory He is due. God is thrice holy, as He is Trinity, but also intensely holy as the expression can also mean: holy, holier, holiest! God is eternally holy; it's a permanent quality existing before time and unchangingly the same forever.

What is the church's response to hearing this heavenly proclamation of God's glory? We lay our crowns at His feet. Through this action, all believers show they recognize the overcomer's crown (Revelation 3:11) or crown of life (Revelation 2:8) given us is solely because of Him, undeserved by us. We then join in worship...

Revelation 4:9-11 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." (NIV)

The text describes three actions of these angelic beings, the living creatures...

- #1. Giving Glory to God
- #2. Giving Honor to God
- #3. Giving Thanks to God

In one of his psalms, David directed that God's people should be doing all this already. This theme is not isolated; it appears all throughout the book of Psalms.

1 Chronicles 16:7-11 That day David first committed to Asaph and his associates this psalm of thanks to the Lord: 8 Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. 9 Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. 10 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice. 11 Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. (NIV)

Glory, honor and thanks should fill our prayers to God, a continual part of our daily life. This attitude filling our hearts will affect what we do and how we do it.

Notice the small change in wording when all believers around the throne join in:

Revelation 4:11 "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."

When angels proclaim glory and honor and thanks to God they do so using impersonal terms – it sounds like a proclamation for all to hear. (Consider "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty" as in Revelation and Isaiah). Perhaps this is part of their role, even as they are also "ministering spirits sent by God to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews 1:14). Though their words ascribe these qualities to God, still giving glory and honor and thanks to Him, their proclamation is perhaps as much a message for those who will hear (saints and holy angels alike).

In contrast, consider how God's saints give glory and honor and praise to Him. Our words are personal: "You are worthy, our Lord... for you created." We speak directly to our God. Believers have something that no angel has; we have a personal relationship with God. God is

our Father and brother! We intend our vocal praise for an audience of one, regardless of listens. (For another example; contrast the angel in Revelation 11:15 to saints in Revelation 11:15-18. While not true in every instance, it's the vast majority). This follows the example of Jesus who taught us to pray to the Father using direct and personal terms...

Matthew 6:9-10 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, 10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. ... (NIV)

Twice Paul reminded us that we personally cry out to God, saying "Abba," distinctly using the everyday word someone would use to address their own father in Jesus' day (Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6-7).

Revelation 4:11, this joint proclamation of believers, is more than an impersonal recitation. It reveals our heartfelt cry to our Father, our Lord and God.

Revelation 4:11 "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 angels, as spiritual beings, contrast God's eternalness. Though existing in the spiritual realm outside this world, they are acutely aware they are finite. They understand God created them and that God alone was, is, and is to come. As for saints, our exaltation emphasizes creation and gives God praise for this physical world we occupied. And yes, we praise God for everything He created and included in this now fallen and sin-tainted world, for we understand that He created everything by His will with purpose. He alone is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power as the rightful ruler of all creation.

As we read these words, or recite similar ones from the apostle Paul, or sing the same, are they your own words directed to an audience of One? They should be! They encompass what our personal relationship with Jesus Christ is all about.

1 Timothy 1:17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (NIV)

Continuing in Revelation, we start a new chapter in our modern Bibles, while continuing John's unbroken telling...



Revelation 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.

The one seated on the throne, God, has a scroll in His right hand, created by God himself. The right hand represents power and favor. Writers commonly preserved written works on scrolls in the time of Jesus and the apostles. The Codex, or book, didn't come into widespread use until a century or so later. Animal skins were the norm outside Egypt where papyrus was widespread. We do not know the material of this heavenly scroll; it's an irrelevant detail for John. The major detail is writing on both sides. While rare, it's occasionally found in antiquity. Preparing both sides of the leather for writing was difficult. Typically they only prepared one side. Having the heavenly scroll written on both its sides shows it's fully complete. No addition is possible; everything written is final and all God intended.

It was common to seal important documents, especially legal records. The seal made it obvious should any unauthorized person open it to read or perhaps to alter. Further, in Roman times, they often simultaneously crafted an unsealed copy of the same document. The unsealed edition enabled awareness of the contents, only needing appeal to the unopened sealed original for legal reasons. Scriptures show similar practice in Israel hundreds of years earlier, in the time of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 32:13-14 "In their presence I gave Baruch these instructions: 14 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Take these documents [deeds to land], both the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed of purchase, and put them in a clay jar so they will last a long time. (NIV)

Even though this heavenly scroll is a legal document, no unsealed copy of it exists. The open call for some to read it implies no available readable copy. Lack of someone to open it would be of little concern if a public copy was available. No copy is necessary because God, who crafted it, is alone knowledgeable of its contents. And He doesn't need to refer to some copy to have perfect recollection of what He wrote.

Most documents would have a single seal or perhaps a double seal belonging to two parties. God sealed this scroll with seven seals, representing perfection and completion and the need of someone worthy to open it. This sevenfold seal is not a regular seal.

Revelation 5:2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"

From our earthly perspective, all angels are mighty. Every angel can do far more than us, unconstrained by our typical physical limits. John calls the speaker “a mighty angel” leaving its appearance to the reader’s imagination, also silent over any of its extraordinary abilities. Nowhere else in Scriptures are the mighty Cherubim or Seraphim directly called so. The text settles little here. The description may be trying to show diversity in the ranks of these already known angel classes rather than introducing a different class. Perhaps angels are as diverse as humans, some stronger and more powerful.

This mighty angel proclaims his message “in a loud voice.” The scope of those hearing this announcement (which we will consider in the next verse) shows that John’s expression “a loud voice” is an understatement. This angel’s message consists of one question; “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” God intended only one person to be worthy of opening this scroll, but the universal call or query goes out with a purpose.

Revelation 5:3 But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.

The call, asking went out to the entirety of creation. But no one came forward, in heaven, on earth, and under the earth (meaning those dead, specifically lost humans and fallen confined angels). The unanswered call showed that no one else was worthy to open the scroll in all of creation. God prepared this scroll for only one person.

In the delay, as all heaven waited to see who would step forward; the absence of any response caused the Apostle John great concern.

Revelation 5:4 I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.

Four primary views exist over the purpose of God’s seven-sealed scroll:

Preterists – The scroll’s unsealing represents God’s first-century judgment on Israel, or specifically Jerusalem (about 66-70 AD). 144,000 Christian believers escape Jerusalem (or Judea) to Pella. Revelation’s four horsemen represent Rome’s invasion of Israel to stop this Jewish rebellion that led to Jerusalem’s destruction – events that brought civil war, bloodshed, famine, and death.

Historicists – The scroll’s unsealing represents the start of the Roman Empire’s fall, ranging from Domitian’s reign (died 96 AD) through the Goth and Vandal invasions (4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries). Not all historicists agree on the specific events represented.

Futurists – The scroll’s unsealing represents the church’s rapture through the start of the Great Tribulation. God seals (or saves) 144,000 specially qualified Jews during the Tribulation. Revelation’s four horsemen tie to the Antichrist, who rides out conquering.

Idealists – The scroll’s unsealing represent God’s dealings with humankind, showing cycles of judgment, including wars and believer’s deaths, throughout history. The seals highlight God’s sovereignty over earthly kingdoms and His protection of His saints (some idealists believing these don’t connect to specific events).

God must have started by giving John a general understanding of this scroll’s purpose. Otherwise, why would John weep profusely over an unopened and unknown scroll? We soon discover in the book of Revelation the scroll contains the eternal plan of God (similar, yet expanded, to the idealist’s understanding). It holds the secret will of God, all He planned and purposed. Without someone opening the scroll, we (indeed all of creation) would never get to hear or understand the fullness of what God is doing, let alone knowing how it ends.

Do we so want to understand what God is doing to the point of tears? Historically, the heart’s desire of God’s people has been to search out all God says about our salvation. Even angels long to look into these things...

1 Peter 1:10-12 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. (NIV)

Are we passionate for God’s word? Consider what people have experienced, throughout history, to look into the things of God – merely to have and read a portion of Scriptures, let alone the entirety of the Bible. The same drive and motivation to hear God’s Word should compel all believers. This book, the Bible, is God’s word, filled with wisdom from the mind of God. What the church has today is complete, everything God wanted to reveal to us, all 66 books.

Imagine when we can hear the words of that final and yet unrevealed book – the seven sealed scroll. It will provide clarifying details we have been longing to hear. Our want to hear this work should be great, for it encompasses the beginning, purpose, and goal of God's Word. God allows John to record a small portion of the contents of this book, in Revelation, but nowhere close to all. Perhaps God is using the Book of Revelation as a partial, unsealed, copy for the benefit of humanity or, specifically, His people. Only at the bar of God's final judgment will the Lamb unseal and read the details of the original legal document.

John should have known the pause, the delay, was merely for effect. If he had stopped to consider this further, he had been present after Jesus' resurrection and had heard Jesus say:

Matthew 28:18b "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (NIV)

The elders around the throne, representing the church, show the believers in heaven know who has the authority to break the seals and open the scroll...

Revelation 5:5 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." (NIV)

There was no need to weep. What follows the dramatic pause, the futile wait for an answer to this universal call, proves this. God prepared this scroll for one individual. He is the prophesied ruler coming from the line of Judah, a descendant of David, now revealed.

Revelation 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. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

The Lamb of God! John, himself, recorded the words of John the Baptist who clearly pointed to Jesus as being the prophesied Messiah:

John 1:29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! (NIV)

The apostle Paul would later say:

1 Corinthians 5:7b For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (NIV)

John is again using “looks like” statements to describe what he is seeing. Why would Jesus appear as a slain Lamb? To remind us that Jesus, now ascended and glorified, still bears the marks which testify to what He did. Consider that Jesus chose to keep these scars, though risen from the grave and healed of His floggings and death itself. He was obviously willingly to keep these, as He could fully heal if He wished to do so.

John 20:26-28 A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" (NIV)

As Jesus ascended and took on His fully glorified appearance (even as John described at the beginning of the Revelation), He still retains those earthly scars. Jesus, God in the flesh, is still fully God and man in heaven (see 1 Timothy 2:5). And that man still wears evidence of what His creation did to Him – and what He willingly suffered to redeem His creation.

Twenty-nine times in the book of Revelation John refers to Jesus as the Lamb, each time reminding us that He is the Lamb slain for us. His appearance will remind us of this for eternity. This was God’s plan before time began. The apostle Peter said it this way:

1 Peter 1:18-20 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. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (NIV)

See the Lamb with seven eyes and seven horns uses the symbolism of seven to show two major qualities of God. The Lamb is perfectly omniscient (eyes), all-knowing, and omnipotent (horns), all-powerful.

The continuing Revelation of Jesus Christ focuses on the actions of the Lamb...

Revelation 5:7 He [Jesus] came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

Jesus, before the crowds of heaven, claims what is rightfully His. The Father's giving it to Him shows everyone that Jesus was the rightful claimant. Next we have the response of those witnessing this event...

Revelation 5:8 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.

The angels and church surrounding the throne have no other response but to fall prostrate, to bow before and recognize the Lamb in all His greatness.

Remember, this is a descriptive looks-like scene for John. Chosen wording of some translators imply both the angels and elders have a harp and bowl. While possible, the Greek leans towards the latter, namely only the saints having them. John's further clarification, with the bowls full of incense representing the prayers of the saints, makes the items apply to the saints alone.

Three alternatives exist for the harps...

#1. They are literal harps. Since harps appear in the Old Testament and in the Roman period of his day, John would recognize one. It would be different from those we use today (closer to a squared-off guitar, having 8 or 9 strings). For example, Israelites used harps in Old Testament worship (1 Chronicles 25:1; Nehemiah 12:27) and especially in singing the Psalms (such as Psalms 33:2; 71:22; 147:7).

#2. A harp was the best description John could think of to represent another perhaps heavenly instrument that also uses strings.

Both of these first possibilities, if true, would imply the heavenly ability of all believers to play a musical instrument.

#3. The harps are figurative. Figurative language makes sense in a sentence featuring bowls of incense to represent prayers. The harp would represent a musical instrument in a general sense, namely every believer now equipped with the ability to make music. Every saint, no matter how tone-deaf and tongue-tied here on earth becomes vocally able to make beautiful music for God. This also makes sense since the next verse speaks of singing. These verses are one Greek sentence, joined by the word "and (kai)." The rest of the Book of Revelation shows believers often singing, but remains silent about playing any instrumental music.

Regardless of how, this scene clearly shows that music will be an important part of worship in heaven. In fact, both the Old and New Testaments show music to already be an integral part of our worship.

Ephesians 5:19-20 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. (NIV)

Old Testament temple worship included both voice and instruments. New Testament passages on music focus on content more than details such as accompaniment. And yet, God command believers to sing psalms. Use of psalms assumes instruments, many psalms include references to instruments or instruction to use them in accompanying that psalm (for example Psalms 4:1; 5:1; 6:1; 33:2; 54:1; 55:1; 67:1; 76:1; 81:2; 92:1-3). Non-instrumental Churches of Christ (or Christian Churches) and other like-minded churches should reconsider their stand on this.

The beauty of much earthly music is indisputable. Much of it powerfully invokes emotional response in listeners. Try to imagine what the perfect music of heaven will be like!

Returning to verse 8; the bowls of incense, representing the prayers of the saints, draws on imagery from the Old Testament and practice from the New Testament period.

Psalms 141:1-2 O Lord, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you. 2 May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. (NIV)

The Mosaic Law mandated the regular burning of incense, morning and night (Exodus 30:7-8), a shadow and imitation of that which exists in heaven. By Jesus' day, the time for burning incense was also prayer time at the temple.

Luke 1:10 And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. (NIV)

This intertwining of incense and prayers is in view in a later Revelation passage:

Revelation 8:3-4 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. (NIV)

This later passage is slightly different. John describes prayers going up with smoke from the incense. The earlier and clearly figurative description of Revelation 5 describes prayer as incense. In describing prayers as bowls of incense, John provides visual imagery of how prayers can rise to God (with incense from His altar before the throne). Olfactory imagery reminds that our prayers are pleasing to God as is any beautiful fragrance.

All saints in God's church may not be yet present around the throne. The twenty-four elders represent the entire church (but this can mean the church in heaven and still on earth). Those focusing on literal elders, ignoring their symbolism, sometimes generalize the bowls of prayers. If saints remain on earth they claim the bowls must not only contain the personal prayers of the elders but also prayers made by earthly saints. It mistakenly makes these heavenly elders (saints who have gone on before) an intermediary in prayer. Prayer is personal. Other saints don't offer up prayers for living saints. This is dangerously close to an unbiblical Roman Catholic belief. Their tradition has believers praying to saints in heaven who add their further petitions before taking them to God (or Mary, who then takes them to God).

Scriptures show only two individuals involved with our prayers, aiding believers in bringing our praises and petitions to the Father. When we offer up our personal prayers, the Holy Spirit fixes up their content and Jesus intercedes on our behalf.

Romans 8:26 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. (NIV)

Hebrews 7:24-25 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (NIV)

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, (NIV)

The next verse in Revelation, a continuation of the last, directly shows that heavenly music is vocal. This does not preclude instrumental accompaniment, but it strongly suggests an emphasis on oral music.



Revelation 5:9 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.

The elder's "new song" contains so much content for something so short. Notice its label, a "new song." Every old song was once a new song. While not wrong to sing old songs, sung many times before (for this even occurs in heaven, see Revelation 15:3), there is an emphasis throughout Scriptures on new songs.

Psalms 33:1-3 Sing joyfully to the Lord, you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. 2 Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. 3 Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. (NIV)

Psalms 96:1-3 Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. 2 Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. 3 Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. (NIV)

Psalms 98:1 Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things (NIV)

Isaiah 42:9-10a See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." 10 Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise from the ends of the earth (NIV)

These cited examples include clues over why a new song. As we see God doing more, we have continual reason to craft songs in praise of what He is doing. With God it's never the same-old-same-old, He's always at work and doing something new and different (from our perspective). Therefore, the saints in heaven crafted a new song in praise of a unique happening – the Lamb's opening of the scroll! I believe eternity will continue to see saints crafting new songs. His new creation will provide us more and continuing amazement over our God. Anyone thinking we will suddenly know everything about God underestimates how big and great our God is.

This new song in Revelation 5:9 begins by stressing that Jesus is worthy. Don't confuse worthy with ability. Revelation 5:5 (NIV) has an elder saying that Jesus "is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." The ESV better translates that passage, removing any emphasis on ability...

Revelation 5:5 And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." (ESV)

Jesus is not merely able to take the scroll and open its seals – many could likely perform that physical act. Rather, Revelation 5:9 speaks to His qualifications. He alone deserves to open it, for He is worthy. The text immediately provides reasons for His worthiness. Jesus is worthy because of His death as a perfect and sinless substitutionary sacrifice. He alone died to pay for sins, to satisfy the justice and wrath of God. Jesus' shed blood was the only satisfactory payment to redeem us, to purchase us for God.

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (NASU)

People became slaves in Roman times by three means; by birth (to another slave), conquered into slavery, or sold into slavery because of debt. Every person born into Adam's race becomes thrice a slave (a threefold slave), spiritually speaking, because all three apply to us.

#1. All people are slaves from birth, born into sin. (Galatians 4:1-9; Romans 5:12-17)

#2. All humanity is overcome and conquered by evil. (2 Peter 2:19-20; Romans 6:16-17; Titus 3:3; 1 John 3:8)

John 8:34 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (NIV)

#3. The whole human race is slaves, sold into it, because of debt we cannot repay. Personal repayment of what we owe is impossible. We own nothing of value, nor can we earn anything for ourselves. All we struggle to earn, the best of our efforts, belong to our slave-master. (Matthew 18:22-35; Luke 12:58-59)

God's salvation, our redemption, sets us free from our enslavement to sin and the devil. We become slaves to God! A new Master owns us and we belong solely to Him. We become thrice slaves to God.

#1. We are born again, born into God's kingdom – Born as slaves to God from the moment of our new birth! (John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:3-7)

#2. Jesus triumphed over sin, death, and the devil (Revelation 5:5). As supreme conqueror, He claims us.

Colossian 2:13-15 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (NIV)

#3. We are purchase of God; Jesus bought us with His shed blood (The focus of Revelation 5:9; see also Colossians 1:19-20; Mark 14:24; Romans 5:9).

Romans 3:25-26 God presented him [Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— 26 he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Ephesians 1:7 In him [Jesus Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Hebrews 9:11-12 When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. 12 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (NIV)

1 Peter 1:18-21 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. 20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. (NIV)

What did Jesus buy with His blood? He “purchased men for God from [or “out of”] every tribe and language and people and nation (Revelation 5:9b).” The text stresses “out of” those worldwide people groups. Jesus did not buy every person; His blood specifically purchased some. This explains and confirms Jesus’ words in the gospels...

John 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (NIV)

Matthew 20:28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many [versus ‘all’].” (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (NIV)

God chose himself a people out of every tribe, people and nation. More than Jews, more than Romans, His intent is worldwide. This was the heart of Jesus’ command to his followers shortly after His resurrection:

Matthew 28:19-20a 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. (NIV)

The people God chose were not merely from every tribe, people and nation, the heavenly song clearly adds another category – “language.” Don’t miss the importance of this grouping. It shows that God does not demand that those becoming part of his church must all adopt a common language. We do not have to learn Hebrew or Greek or Aramaic, rather God’s word transcends language and is potentially available in every language on earth. God encourages translation into every language. It’s still His word whether in it is in English, Chinese, Spanish, or Greek. [Take note that, in complete contrast, Islam says that you must read the Koran (alt. Qur’an) in Arabic to be reading the word of God. Arabic becomes the only acceptable language in their religion.]

The elder’s song continues...

Revelation 5:10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (NIV)

“God made them!” The elders recognize God as the sole source of this resulting people. We are not a self-made people; we are a work of God. Consider the emphasis Paul placed on God’s actions in making His people (seven of them noted by exclamation marks in the following passage):

Ephesians 2:1-10 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. 6 And God raised us up [!] with Christ and seated us with him [!] in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God [!]  
— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship [!], created in Christ Jesus [!] to do good works, which God prepared in advance [!] for us to do. (NIV)

According Revelation 5:10’s heavenly song, God made us three things. All are promises first given to Israel (excluding unbelieving Jews). God later grafts believing Gentiles into Israel enabling the same promises to apply to them as well (i.e. Romans 9:6-8; 11:1-26).

### #1. A kingdom

We are a holy nation. The original promise: Exodus 19:6.

### #2. Priests (to serve our God)

We are a nation of priests. The original promise: Exodus 19:6. In the Levitical priesthood only priests could perform direct service for God, under a temporary high priest (who died). We have all become priests in the order of Melchizedek under our High Priest, Jesus, who serves forever (i.e. Hebrews 5:9-10; 6:20; 7:23-24). We serve God directly for eternity (because our High Priest is God!).

### #3. Rulers (and they will reign on the earth)

We are rulers over all other nations (unbelievers). The original promise: Deuteronomy 15:6.

The elder's song praises God for fulfilling His promises in the fullness of His church – this complete church is the entirety of spiritual Israel. God has one people, all one holy nation, everyone priests and rulers.

Revelation 5:11 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. (NIV)

John now sees it is far more than few exotic or specific angels close to the throne witnessing this event with the elders. His widened view sees attendance of innumerable angels, watching, listening, and taking part. The 10,000 times 10,000 would literally make 100 million but the Greek phrasing expresses a huge number beyond counting (with better English wording perhaps being “myriads and myriads”). The gathered multitudes in the throne room of heaven extended as far as the eye could see around God's throne. Every holy angel was present for this important day. If that many are present, image how many angels followed Satan to become demons, since Scriptures tell us that he took one-third with him in his rebellion (i.e. Revelation 12:4).

The book of Hebrews uses wording similar to John's to describe the quantity of angels in heaven...

Hebrews 12:22-23 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. (NIV)

Both the Hebrews and Revelation passages invoke terminology that Daniel used hundreds of year earlier (which we have now referred to many times before):

Daniel 7:9-10 "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. (NIV)

Now that we know the number of angels present is beyond counting, imagine the following scene...

Revelation 5:12 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!" (NIV)

The greater assembly of angels immediately add another verse to the song begun by the living creatures (Revelation 4:8) and continued by the elders (Revelation 4:11; 5:9-10). Their focus is specifically the Lamb. They ascribe seven qualities to the Lamb, with praise of each (the number itself showing perfection and fullness)...

- #1. Power
- #2. Wealth
- #3. Wisdom
- #4. Strength
- #5. Honor
- #6. Glory
- #7. Praise (or Thanksgiving)

Note that other scriptures ascribe every one of these qualities to God (especially in David's Psalm of 1 Chronicles 29:10-13). Now are all recognized in Jesus, clearly affirming His deity.

Jesus is worthy to receive continual offerings of praise for all these qualities. When we credit these to the Lamb, our Lord and Savior, we offer a sacrifice to God. This sacrifice of praise is the church's only offering; Jesus' life and death fulfilled the need of all other sacrifices.

Hebrews 13:15 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name. (NIV)

Living creatures, elders, and uncountable angels are not enough. The Lamb deserves praise from all creation.

Revelation 5:13-14 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. (NIV)

Some believe this is poetic language merely saying “all other believers.” They cannot see how Satan or unbelievers would sing out praise to God. I disagree. If God demands and commands it will happen, refusing God is not a choice. And Scriptures are clear that every knee will bow and every tongue will proclaim God’s glory. In the Old Testament, Isaiah recorded this:

Isaiah 45:23-24 By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. 24 They will say of me, 'In the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.'" (NIV)

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul phrases it this way:

Philippians 2:9-11 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (NASU, all caps for emphasis)

Isaiah and Paul prophesy two happenings. First, every knee will bow. The text shows no limit to the term “every” in scope. It includes the lost, Satan, and demons. Second, everyone will confess that Jesus is Lord. This thought is part of Isaiah’s wording “in the Lord alone are righteousness and strength.” The words of this Revelation song, that all creation sings, encompass all parts of the prophecy in Isaiah and Philippians. Such reluctant praise would unquestionably be torment for the lost. God’s redeemed and holy angels need no compulsion, for their praise flows from a heart of gratitude and awe.

The elders fall down and worship as this song finishes, again showing the church doesn’t merely recite or sing these words; we are in wonder of the One we direct them to. This gathering is awe-inspiring. Consider the impact of the crowd’s size and the song’s theme. It is greater than any song sung before, leaving the living creatures (that normally call out around God’s throne) almost speechless. They are only able to utter a single word in response – “Amen!” This single word encompasses the idea “So be it!” and “Your (God’s) will be done.” Our continuing response to God’s revelation and plan must be amen. This is a fitting response to God opening His eternal scroll and revealing His plan for the ages.

Revelation 22:20b Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (NIV)



The time has come for God to reveal, in part, some contents of this scroll. John continues to use “looks like” imagery – images that will span a vast time frame.

Revelation 6:1-8 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.

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.

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!"

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. (NIV)

As John’s heavenly visit continues, Jesus now begins to open the sealed scroll. The scroll contains writing on the back and front, sealed with seven seals (Revelation 5:1). Yet, the scene playing out for John does not have Jesus opening all seven seals at once, nor does it have Jesus reading the specific words and full details of the scroll. Obviously, its exact details belong to the time of the end. What Jesus does, in this preview, is provide John with visions, images, and sounds that display summaries of what each section of the scroll includes. The Bible text provides a clue showing the full text of the scroll remains unseen. A scroll with seven seals would need all seven seals removed at once to unroll it. Instead, as the Lamb opens each numbered seal, God reveals the preview vision, or summary of its content. The images comprising each section come from God, the author of the scroll. He doesn’t need the detail of the scroll to display a summary.

Many views exist over possible meanings of the seals. As mentioned in chapter five, I believe Scriptures suggest the scroll (of which the seals are a part) is the sealed secret-will of God for history. It is God revealing, at the end, what He planned and fulfilled from before time began. This revelation of His plan shows He carried out all He planned and intended, so He alone receives all glory. In John's preview of the scroll, the seals each have themes, sometimes spanning large tracts of history (past and present). Multiple scroll sections, or seals, involve the same time frames and events, in whole or in part. The repeat enables each section to view events using that section's theme.

Many try to relegate all seven seals (the entire scroll), or most of it, to still future end times. Dispensationalists fit into this category using various inconsistent methods. One primary tactic tries to make all sections chronological, with each consecutive seal following the earlier. Other theological schools look at the scrolls in a host of various ways. During this study we will sometimes look into these diverse views highlighting merit, or showing how they fall short. Know this; many good believers, teachers, and scholars hold to differing views on these subjects. Eschatology (the study of end time's events) should not be a reason to divide the church. Equally, our struggle to understand God's revelation is not a valid reason to stop studying it. Thankfully most of Scriptures are straightforward and clear. God's inclusion of ideas stretching our understanding, or beyond our understanding, reveals our incredibly wise God as author.

It is certain that we will one day have full understanding of this Revelation. As with many Old Testament prophecies, believers understood them at or near the time of their final fulfillment. Full understanding of prophecies having near and far fulfillment often came following the final fulfillment. Clear understanding awaits much of Revelation, especially these seals and scroll. Some many come during the later events, or it may lie in the final gathering around the throne. Prophecies spanning vast amounts of time, including periods the reader is a part of, are more difficult to identify. An observer too close to one portion of it lacks perspective of the whole (especially events coming later).

### **The Four Horses of the Apocalypse**

The first four seals reveal "the four horses of the apocalypse." This title comes from common use and not from Scriptures. Commentators commonly agree on the general meaning of the second through fourth, not the first. Because of this disparity, and to show context, we will first consider numbers 2 to 4, and then return to the start.

Revelation 6:3 When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!"

Each seal opened comes with a proclamation by one of the four living creatures surrounding the throne of God (Revelation 4:6b-8a). The word is "Come!" While a sole and unaccompanied word, it carries a two-part implication. Directed to John, it expresses "come and see." Directed to the horse riders it is "come and go forth."

John sees the four horses with illustrative colors; in order they are:

- 1) White
- 2) Red
- 3) Black
- 4) Ashen or Pale (Green)

John is not the first to see a vision featuring these horses, God enabled the prophet Zechariah to do so 600 hundred years earlier. In Zechariah's vision they are pulling chariots, also sent by God into the whole world.

Zechariah 6:1-7 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. (NIV)

The implication in Revelation matches Zechariah; these horses and riders are going throughout the earth. They are not literal horses and, as you will see, there are not literal people or beings riding them (or transported by them. A chariot's presence also implies a passenger in Zechariah). Both are an imagery (or personification) visually expressing a theme and message.

### **The Red Horse**

Revelation 6:4 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.

This red horse and rider represent war. While many like to portray God as perhaps passively allowing war, a Scriptural examination shows far different. War exists only because of opposition. It wouldn't exist in creation except for sin coming into the world. As part of God's plan He actively uses war, throughout history, to carry out His purposes. A small sampling of relevant passages...

Deuteronomy 4:34 Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes? (NIV)

Joshua 11:16-20 So Joshua took this entire land: the hill country, all the Negev, the whole region of Goshen, the western foothills, the Arabah and the mountains of Israel with their foothills, 17 from Mount Halak, which rises toward Seir, to Baal Gad in the Valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon. He captured all their kings and struck them down, putting them to death. 18 Joshua waged war against all these kings for a long time. 19 Except for the Hivites living in Gibeon, not one city made a treaty of peace with the Israelites, who took them all in battle. 20 For it was the Lord himself who hardened their hearts to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses. (NIV)

Psalms 144:1-2 [King David...] Praise be to the Lord my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle. 2 He is my loving God and my fortress, my stronghold and my deliverer, my shield, in whom I take refuge, who subdues peoples under me. (NIV)

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: ... 8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace. (NIV)

Isaiah 13:4-9 Listen, a noise on the mountains, like that of a great multitude! Listen, an uproar among the kingdoms, like nations massing together! The Lord Almighty is mustering an army for war. 5 They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens — the Lord and the weapons of his wrath — to destroy the whole country. 6 Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. 7

Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. 8 Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. 9 See, the day of the Lord is coming — a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger — to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. (NIV)

In summary, God says that wars will be part of the human condition until this world ends.

Mark 13:7-8 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. 8 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. (NIV)

For the record, God's holy angels fought a defensive war in heaven.

Revelation 12:7-9 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. (NIV)

Scriptures show Jesus, himself, waging just war...

Revelation 19:11 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. (NIV)

### **The Black Horse**

Revelation 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!"

This black horse and rider represent famine and pestilence. Historically, famine appears in most nations. Consider key famines mentioned in the Bible (beginning with the first book, Genesis)...

Promised Land (Abram goes to Egypt) – Genesis 12:10

Promised Land (Isaac lives with Philistines) – Genesis 26:1  
Egypt and whole region (Joseph predicts) – Genesis 41:55-57  
Israel (Ruth – Moab) – Ruth 1:1  
Israel (David) – 2 Samuel 21:1  
Samaria (Elijah) – 1 Kings 18:2  
Israel (Elisha) – 2 Kings 4:38  
Israel (Nehemiah) – Nehemiah 5:3  
Roman World (Paul) – Acts 11:27-30

God used each of these famines either in judgment or to provide circumstances whereby He would be glorified through the resulting actions of His people.

The NIV's "a day's wages" is a "denarius (ESV/NASU)," a common Roman coin. Normally a denarius would buy ten to twelve quarts (Greek "choenix") of wheat (see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Against Verres* Book 3.81; First century BC). This would normally feed an entire family. Here a day's wage only buys a small fraction, enough for one person, or they would have to choose to buy three quarts of less nutritious barley. The black horse's famines are of limited duration and intensity shown by its harming of grains rather than plants with deeper roots including olives and grapes (wine).

Famine is a temporary withholding, or lack, of a basic need. As people crave that which they once took for granted it reminds them to seek the One who normally provides it (see Matthew 5:45; James 1:17; Acts 14:17). Food and water are basic needs, with any lack of these staples framing a serious famine. Yet, biblically, worse famine exists. When God withholds this other essential it results in even greater devastation. And, yet, He's sometimes limited this essential, His word, to reveal our need.

Amos 8:11-12 "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I will send a famine through the land — not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. 12 Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. (NIV)

### **The Pale Horse**

Revelation 6:7-8a 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 [chloros] horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

**Definition**

Chloros – A Greek word from which we get words such as chlorophyll (which makes plants green). It is the color of grass, which in ancient times meant that it could encompass true green and even the colors of dried or parched grass, namely a yellowish or pale green color. This pale color came to also represent the color of death and disease and early Greek literature uses it in this manner.

This Pale Horse represents death. Zechariah calls this a dappled (or mottled) horse. The NET and Holman bibles translate Chloros as pale green and the New American Standard as “ashen.” What are these color choices saying? Consider what flesh looks like on a dead body – a mottled pale greenish yellow. This sickly color belongs to the fourth horse.

John calls the rider of this final horse Death, clearly using personification. The apostle describes death in terms of a living being. Portraying this concept in a figurative manner is in harmony with his presentation of the previous riders.

Death went forth and has been riding from the time of Adam and Eve’s sin. There are almost 700 verses in the Bible using the word death or dead.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (NIV)

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (NIV)

Death is an enemy (1 Corinthians 15:26) and, yet, death is also part of God’s grace to humankind. Imagine if we, as fallen and corrupt creatures, could live forever. The sin tainted results of being in such a condition would compound forever: sickness, wounds, thousands of years of memories and regrets, or perhaps worse still thousands of years of lost memory, dementia, or worse. In withholding the tree of life from Adam & Eve and their descendants (Genesis 3:22-23), God was sending forth the pale horse who would enforce the ultimate statistic – ten out of ten people die. David said it well...

Psalms 89:48 What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave? (NIV)

God orders death. He alone fixes the time of death for everyone who lives. God can legitimately order a life's end whenever He chooses. Besides so-called "natural" means (including old age and sickness), consider...

God can do it directly Himself –

Genesis 38:7 But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the Lord's sight; so the Lord put him to death. (NIV)

Deuteronomy 32:39 "See now that I myself am He! There is no god besides me. I put to death and I bring to life, I have wounded and I will heal, and no one can deliver out of my hand. (NIV, also 1 Samuel 2:6)

God can order His people to do it (during the theocracy of Israel) –

Exodus 31:14-15 "'Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. 15 For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. (NIV)

God can demand death as a normal punishment among all people –

Genesis 9:6 "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man. (NIV)

God can have one of His angels do it (yet He is still the primary cause) –

Isaiah 37:36 Then the angel of the Lord went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When the people got up the next morning — there were all the dead bodies! (NIV)

Exodus 12:23, 29 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. ... 29 At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. (NIV)



Death continues to ride until the end but always under control of the One who said “I hold the keys of death and Hades (Revelation 1:18).” God has already decreed the end of death (or the death of death):

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

### **The three horses together**

While some argued that these three horses are only future, sent forth on a special mission, nothing in the immediate passage or context says this or so limits them. Their use and scope fits our previous understanding of the scroll (to which this vision belongs). God is unveiling His plan throughout history. From Adam and Eve’s day to the present, the human condition has included everything represented by this trio of horses. I believe the impact of their actions has increased from Noah’s day onward. The Bible shows this increase of famines, war, and death, and post biblical history is full of it. Again, God sent them out from the beginning, following the fall of humanity into sin. The Bible shows them to be a part of His plan and purpose throughout history.

What do the three horses do? They are a twin means of God’s judgment and God’s correction. Famine, war, pestilence, and death are all used to remind creation that they are not in control and that they need to look to Him alone. And yes, God actively uses these three. Many take a passive view, something like: God makes the best out of it when these horrible events happen. This mistaken view opposes the way Scriptures portray His involvement. They are God’s “dreadful judgments” and serve His overall purpose.

Ezekiel 5:14-17 "I will make you a ruin and a reproach among the nations around you, in the sight of all who pass by. 15 You will be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and an object of horror to the nations around you when I inflict punishment on you in anger and in wrath and with stinging rebuke. I the Lord have spoken. 16 When I [!] shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine, I will shoot to destroy you. I [!] will bring more and more famine upon you and cut off your supply of food. 17 I [!] will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will leave you childless. Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you, and I [!] will bring the sword against you. I the Lord have spoken." (NIV, my square parenthesis for emphasis)

Ezekiel 14:12-22a The word of the Lord came to me: 13 "Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I [!] stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, 14 even if these three men — Noah, Daniel and Job — were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign Lord. 15 "Or if I [!] send wild beasts through that country and they leave it childless and it becomes desolate so that no one can pass through it because of the beasts, 16 as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved, but the land would be desolate. 17 "Or if I [!] bring a sword against that country and say, 'Let the sword pass throughout the land,' and I [!] kill its men and their animals, 18 as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, even if these three men were in it, they could not save their own sons or daughters. They alone would be saved. 19 "Or if I [!] send a plague into that land and pour out my wrath upon it through bloodshed, killing its men and their animals, 20 as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they could save neither son nor daughter. They would save only themselves by their righteousness. 21 "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: How much worse will it be when I [!] send against Jerusalem **my four dreadful judgments — sword and famine and wild beasts and plague — to kill its men and their animals!** 22 Yet there will be some survivors — sons and daughters who will be brought out of it. (NIV, my square parenthesis and bold for emphasis)

Deuteronomy 32:23-25 "I [!] will heap calamities upon them and spend my arrows against them. 24 I [!] will send wasting famine against them, consuming pestilence and deadly plague; I [!] will send against them the fangs of wild beasts, the venom of vipers that glide in the dust. 25 In the street the sword will make them childless; in their homes terror will reign. Young men and young women will perish, infants and gray-haired men. (NIV, my square parenthesis for emphasis)

Jeremiah 24:8-10 "'But like the poor figs, which are so bad they cannot be eaten,' says the Lord, 'so will I [!] deal with Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the survivors from Jerusalem, whether they remain in this land or live in Egypt. 9 I [!] will make them abhorrent and an offense to all the kingdoms of the earth, a reproach and a byword, an object of ridicule and cursing, wherever I [!] banish them. 10 I [!] will send the sword, famine and plague against them until they are destroyed from the land I gave to them and their fathers.'" (NIV, my square parenthesis for emphasis)

Jeremiah 29:15-19 You may say, "The Lord has raised up prophets for us in Babylon," 16 but this is what the Lord says about the king who sits on David's throne and all the

people who remain in this city, your countrymen who did not go with you into exile — 17 yes, this is what the Lord Almighty says: "I [!] will send the sword, famine and plague against them and I [!] will make them like poor figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten. 18 I [!] will pursue them with the sword, famine and plague and will make them abhorrent to all the kingdoms of the earth and an object of cursing and horror, of scorn and reproach, among all the nations where I [!] drive them. 19 For they have not listened to my words," declares the Lord, "words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets. And you exiles have not listened either," declares the Lord. (NIV, my square parenthesis for emphasis)

Jeremiah 42:13-18 "However, if you say, 'We will not stay in this land,' and so disobey the Lord your God, 14 and if you say, 'No, we will go and live in Egypt, where we will not see war or hear the trumpet or be hungry for bread,' 15 then hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'If you are determined to go to Egypt and you do go to settle there, 16 then the sword you fear will overtake you there, and the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt, and there you will die. 17 Indeed, all who are determined to go to Egypt to settle there will die by the sword, famine and plague; not one of them will survive or escape the disaster I [!] will bring on them.' (NIV, my square parenthesis for emphasis)

David summarized all of this in Psalms 7...

Psalms 7:10-13 My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart. 11 God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses his wrath every day. 12 If he does not relent, he will sharpen his sword; he will bend and string his bow. 13 He has prepared his deadly weapons; he makes ready his flaming arrows. (NIV, consider also Zephaniah 3:5)

Did you note that David says that God expresses His wrath every day? And how does God do this? He uses His four dreadful judgments. If we deny that God actively uses these we reject or ignore God's regular exercise of one of His righteous attributes. If you ask most believers what qualities God exercises every day, they would be quick to say His mercy, love and grace, and stop with those. We must not forget that our loving God is also Holy and His Holiness demands justice and includes His wrath. He will have mercy on whoever He wishes (i.e. Exodus 33:19; Romans 9:15). We, the objects of His mercy, continue to cry out to God as David did...

Psalms 57:1 Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. (NIV)

Believer, aren't you glad that you are in the hands our Father, our Master, who loves you with an everlasting love (c.f. Psalms 103:17)? Otherwise only wrath remains.

Revelation 6:8b 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.

The "they," of verse 8, is specifically about the 4<sup>th</sup> horse, its rider (death) and his companion (hades). This rest of verse 8 shows that God has limited the number that will die by His dreadful judgments. All who suffers war or famine don't die. While God has every right to destroy all of humanity in this fashion, His restraint here shows His mercy on this fallen world.

A quarter of the world dies simultaneously in some apocalyptic disaster, war, or disease, in the futurist view of these seals. Understanding the scroll to encompass God's plan throughout history spreads this 1 out of 4 judgment throughout history, long or short. Judgment on one quarter doesn't mean God spiritually saves the three-quarters, it merely means He leaves them to the normal sequence of events in this fallen world. This returns us to the original statistic: ten out of ten die, but not all in specific acts of God's judgment. Reflecting on a thorough history of these judgments, consider the incredible proportion of people who have died in famine, pestilence, disease, and wars. God's will carry out His justice. Those accusing God of unfairness or wrong in so doing need to listen to His words to Job...

Job 40:6-14 Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm: 7 "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. 8 "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? 9 Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? 10 Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. 11 Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, 12 look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. 13 Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. 14 Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you. (NIV)

The last word on God's justice goes to David...

Psalms 9:7-8 The Lord reigns forever; he has established his throne for judgment. 8 He will judge the world in righteousness; he will govern the peoples with justice. (NIV)

Reread Revelation 6:1-8 to set the context of the horse we earlier skipped over. For the record, the second, third, and fourth horses are:

Red – War

Black – Famine

Pale – Death and Hades

Each horse is a personification, representing events or a location. God clearly showed this with especially the last horse. This brings us back to the first white horse and its rider.

Many commentators, perhaps a majority, claim the first rider to be a literal physical being. Doing so, they rip this first horse from the context of the remaining three. By context, I have no choice but to understand the first rider in a similar way. All four horses are personifications. What great force has God used from the beginning, here personified? That it appears first among the four surely speaks to its preeminence. The imagery itself incorporates clues to its identity.

The text describes the horse as “white.” All 16 further references to “white,” in the Book of Revelation, represent something pure, righteous and heavenly. In fact, 6 out of 7 cases in the rest of the New Testament, including John’s earlier gospel, do the same. (The only exception uses white as a literal hair color in contrast to black. See Matthew 5:36). This broad context and proven usage allows easy dismissal of some common ideas. Those claiming this horse and rider represent something wicked, such as the Antichrist or anti-Christ, have failed to use Scriptures to interpret Scriptures.

Those believing this horse must represent someone, or something, evil often cite this verse:

2 Corinthians 11:14 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.  
(NIV)

They claim that Satan or the Antichrist can appear in white, masquerading as Christ (an over-the-top version of a wolf in sheep’s clothing. i.e. Matthew 7:15). Yet, if Scriptures include ambiguous portrayals of evil, how can we be certain? Unlike our daily circumstances we often struggle to recognize, Scriptures clearly identifies evil as evil. Revelation’s specific context always portrays evil and wickedness as being clearly such. This book isn’t about disguising, it’s about revealing. In Revelation, there’s no portrayal of the devil as beautiful, rather he appears as a fearsome dragon (Revelation 12:7, 13:1) and a serpent (Revelation 12:9). In fact, there is no direct reference to the Antichrist in Revelation, rather many assume reference to him in passages about “the beast” (Revelation 13:11, 18). Biblical evaluation of their understanding waits. Regardless, the beast clearly appears as evil. This white horse and rider is not some hard

to understand portrayal of beautiful-looking evil. White consistently references good throughout this Revelation.

John's unflinching use of white to describe that which is good, righteous, and heavenly, does not always refer to Jesus. If the white horse's rider is Jesus, the text would have Jesus simultaneously opening the scroll and going out. This illogical sequence is abnormal to, and out of character with, the account as Jesus continues to open seals (see Revelation 6:1-3). Those who don't recognize the consistent personification of all four horses, feel that a literal individual must be riding only this first horse. They take a cursory look through the Book of Revelation and focus on this passage:

Revelation 19:11-16 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. (NIV)

Yes, Revelation 19 shows Jesus riding on a white horse but that doesn't necessarily mean the instance in Revelation 6 is Him. This later passage states that God's servants are also riding on white horses. In fact, Scriptures show Jesus with a crown (Revelation 14:14, 19:12) but so too all his people (Revelation 2:10, 3:11, 4:4). If casual association is all that is necessary, it would be equally valid making the earlier white horse represent all of God's servants. The church would then be the conquering force (which fits nicely with historical Roman Catholic theology and practice, plus views of some Protestants holding to forms of Dominion Theology). At least this latter view comes closer to being a personification in keeping with the context of the four horses. Whether Jesus or the church, their limited and inconsistent interpretation fails to examine the entirety of the book.

To settle who, or what, this white horse of chapter 6 represents, the answer must connect this list of qualities:

- 1) It's a personification. This is the context of the four horses.
- 2) It is something good and holy. This is what white symbolizes.

- 3) It is something that has been riding from the beginning, indeed before the other three begin their rides.
- 4) It rules (as shown by the crown given; Revelation 6:2), and indeed surpasses in power the three which follow and takes preeminence over them.
- 5) Its weapon is a bow, a specific weapon able to target an individual even in a crowd and from a distance.
- 6) It is a conqueror with a historic conquest that will be completed.

Only one answer meets all six of these measures, the Gospel of Jesus Christ! Before famine, disease, war and death claimed anyone, the gospel of Jesus Christ went forward selectively to conquer for God. He proclaimed this gospel immediately following Adam & Eve's fall in the garden (see Genesis 3:14-15) and it has continued to be victorious over all He sends it to conquer. The white rider rules the others. Whether famine, war, or death come, those pierced by arrows of the first rider have nothing to fear from those who follow. In this confidence, Paul asserts:

Romans 8:37-39 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. (NIV)

Many so-called conquerors have come and gone throughout history. This will continue but they will be unlike God's perfect conqueror. As first (or preeminent) of God's plan for human history, this rider carries out everything ordered of him. He is victorious over everyone on God's list to conquer. Every believer should praise God that this rider rides first and that God destined one of His arrows for them.

1 Peter 2:9-10 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. (NIV)

One overall message comes from these horses; the Lamb (who opened the scroll) has triumphed. The gospel, God's righteous judgments, and death itself serve Him. All realized small or limited victories by the forces of evil (Revelation 13:7) are part of the plan. God's plan is eternal and successful – He is in charge!

From the portrayal of Jesus in the last chapter, as one worthy to open the scroll (Revelation 5:5) to conquering King (Revelation 17:14), He has triumphed! Revelation's message shows the Lamb overcomes and is victorious. He will save all He chooses, everyone meant to suffer famine and war will do so, and death will run its course. God will finish His plan.

This brings us to the fifth seal, the first seal after these four horse riders.

Revelation 6:9-11 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. (NIV)

The fifth seal includes an event belonging to a vast time frame. Saints past and present have the same question. The scene takes place in the heavenly temple, of which the former earthly one was a mere copy (Hebrews 8:5; 9:24).

Some hold the heavenly altar in this passage equals temple's altar of burnt offerings, but it cannot be for two reasons:

- 1) The only acceptable blood offering on the heavenly altar of burnt offerings, payment for mankind's sins, is that of the perfect Lamb of God.

Hebrews 9:12-14 He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. 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! (NIV)

- 2) There is no need of a new sacrifice. No one needs to ever pour anything on the altar of burnt offerings again. That one time sacrifice is past and complete.



Hebrews 9:24-28a For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. 27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, 28 so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; (NIV)

Hebrews 10:12-14 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. 13 Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, 14 because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (NIV)

Some believe this describes martyrs' lives poured out as an offering on this altar. Offerings come from owned items – our lives already belong to God, so how can this be an offering? Read the passage again, taking note of where it shows the saints. Priests place sacrifices on altars not *under* them. God nowhere calls for pouring the blood of any sinful human (even redeemed) on an altar of sacrifice.

Ruling out the altar of sacrifice, this brings us to the altar of incense. This altar fits with both the specific imagery of this passage as well as with related imagery found elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, Paul claims he is an offering...

Philippians 2:17-18 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18 So you too should be glad and rejoice with me. (NIV)

2 Timothy 4:6-8 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 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. (NIV)

Why does Paul use the imagery of a drink offering? Though part of temple worship, the drink offering was in use before God gave the Law. Its primary symbolism remained the same. Consider a prelaw instance with the patriarch Jacob...

Genesis 35:11-15 And God said to him, "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. 12 The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." 13 Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him. 14 Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. 15 Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel. (NIV)

Pouring out this drink was an act of praise and acknowledgment of God' blessing (consider also Joel 2:13-14). This drink offering used wine as a symbol of gladness...

Psalms 104:15 Wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his heart. (NIV)

Pouring out the wine is a visual act showing everything David's wrote in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles...

1 Chronicles 29:10-14 David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. 11 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. 12 Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. 13 Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. 14 "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. (NIV)

Paul's imagery of a poured-out drink offering was his way of saying that he had given back to God what God had given to him. His life had been an offering of praise.

Hebrews 13:15-16 Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16 And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (NIV)

This brings us back to the fifth seal in heaven featuring souls of saints under God's altar, each a poured-out offering of thanks and praise to the Lord.

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. (NIV)

### **Definition**

Martus – This Greek word, from which we get “martyr” in English, merely means a witness.” It’s used thirty-four times by New Testament writers, yet only three times does the KJV or NIV translate it into English as “martyr.” See Acts 22:20; Revelation 2:13; Revelation 17:6. NASU and HCSB translators don’t use “Martyr.” ESV translators use it once. In each instances commonly using “martyr,” the passage focuses on their witness for Jesus. This witness is cause for death rather than death being the witness.

“Those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.” Most immediately read this phrase as “martyrs.” The Greek “martus” simply means a witness. Consider witnesses in a court of law, they reveal their firsthand knowledge of people and circumstances as part of their testimony. They confirm (or affirm) what they declare to be true. Biblically speaking, every believer is a “martus!”

Should we apply the English word martyr to every believer? No, our English word is more specific. Casual and generic use cheapens its meaning. In English, martyr applies to someone put to death for what they believe. This word has application in translating the Greek “martus” only when specifically describing someone whose witness includes their resulting death. This is why the KJV and NIV can legitimately use the word “martyr” to refer to Stephen, whose witness brought him a stoning death for being a believer in Jesus Christ (Acts 22:20).

Here in Revelation 6:9, either “witness” or “martyr” is valid. In a thought for thought translation, I prefer witness as the primary meaning. Every martyr is a witness because their death is a testimony to what they believe.

Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses [martus], let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (NIV)

If John used the Greek word “martus” in Revelation 6:9 because of the broader meaning of the word, it could have meant all believers. Some Revelation commenters understand the passage

in this manner. But, based on John's further specific wording, I believe his focus is a subset of the believers in heaven.

### **Definition**

Sphazo – (Pronounced "sfad-zo"). Meaning "slain" or "to slay." It appears 10 times in the New Testament, 8 in Revelation and twice in 1 John 3:12. John's earlier usage in 1 John gives primary meaning to the word. He uses it to describe Cain's brutal killing of his brother. Every New Testament instance implies the violent killing of a human being by another.

"... souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained." The text clearly speaks of those killed because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Again, the English word "martyr" here is applicable.

Nowhere do scriptures hint that souls of Christian martyrs receive different treatments than other believers. Many passages show uniform destination and reward. Though John focuses on a subset, I believe all saints' souls are equally under the altar in the throne room of heaven (the present heaven).

With all believers figuratively under the altar, why does John focus on martyrs, those killed for their witness? A clue comes from Paul's words to a church familiar with persecution and death.

Romans 12:17-19 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (NIV, see also Deuteronomy 32:35; Hebrews 10:30)

This seal represents the same message. It's not for God's people, His church to avenge themselves; they are to wait patiently for God to act. Everyone killed for their testimony has the greatest reason for revenge, yet they recognize that God must avenge them.

Deuteronomy 32:43 Rejoice, O nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people. (NIV)

Indeed it is good that we wait on God instead of immediately caring out retribution. Even as He is patient, often long delaying judgment, to provide time for someone to come to faith in Him (2 Peter 3:9), we too should want to give them time. Perhaps they will come to salvation, and no longer be objects of wrath, but brothers and sisters and joint-heirs with Christ.

This seal, too, can represent a vast time frame. The quantity of believing souls under the altar has increased throughout history. Murdered Old Testament prophets are there, plus those slaughtered during first century persecutions, the Roman Catholic Inquisitions, and those dying today in Muslim countries – all for their faithfulness to the message of Jesus Christ. Nothing in the text says this is a onetime event, as some futurists claim. Read the text again...

Revelation 6:9-11 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. (NIV)

"They called out (v10)," in this passage, equally allows for individuals to do so as they arrive in heaven versus waiting for one common time. The continuing passage implies there will be extra people coming all asking the same. Dying for Jesus continues to be God's plan for more of His children. Believing this is only some future event affects understanding of an extra event in the passage. It forces the text to imply the saint's white robes are withheld until that future time, rather than receipt on arrival (i.e. Revelation 3:5).

It's easy to imagine all martyred believers asking this same question on their arrival in heaven – if for no other reason than the hope that perhaps they are the last. Maybe no further believer will have to suffer the same. On earth, the blood of God's saints cries out for His wrath and has done so since the first religious murder (Genesis 4:10).

Returning to verse 11, God makes it clear to each arriving martyr that they must wait. This implies knowledge of the passage of earthly time in heaven. The instruction to wait "a little longer" still applies though many years pass on earth. From a heavenly perspective, it's a short wait compared with eternity to come. (A similar spiritual perspective appears in Revelation 12:12, where the devil knows his time is short).

This command to “wait... until” also makes clear that God knows exactly how many will die for him. Like the first four, this seal will be complete when God’s plan has played out in its fullness. Until then, His prescription for the saints is patiently to “wait.” Praise God, one martyr will finally hear “you are the last” when they cry out “how long Sovereign Lord?” Then woe to the remaining inhabitants on the earth as God turns His focus to judge them and avenge the blood of His saints. Details of this judgment await a later seal.

Revelation 6:12-17 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?" (NIV)

Verses 12 to 17 are not all of seal six – they provide an introduction showing its focus. These five verses are so different from those following that many commentators view Chapter 7 as a parenthesis. Ignoring the continuation, in chapter 7, allows them to claim a common theme for seals six and seven. If these first five verses were the entirety of the sixth seal it would be fair to claim close association of the sixth and seven seals by subject. And yet, there is no warrant for removing the following seventeen verses (in chapter 7), from seal six, by context. Remember, these are artificial chapter divisions. The text from chapter 6 verse 12 until chapter 7 verse 17 are all given as being the sixth seal. And when the greater portion of a passage appears rather different from its start, it should raise questions. Any interpreter must not sever it from the account as easy out. Many futurists, placing these events in a future Great Tribulation, want following verses in chapter 7 separated because the continued account doesn’t fit their preconceived ideas. They believe the final two seals are all about that Tribulation, focusing on judgment and wrath. To support their position, they must relegate these verses to an unrelated topic since they show something else.

The proper technique for dealing with two seemingly disparate topics in one seal is to find harmony spanning both. The goal is to find common ground, a unified theme. Verse 17 provides the answer: “For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” The sixth seal’s theme answers the question “Who can stand in the Day of God’s Judgment?” Yes, it introduces the Great Day of The Lord but that theme is primary to the next seal.

God planned the Day of Judgment equally with His finished salvation of the saints. The last seal revealed the patience of the saints (the need for all to wait until God completes His plan). This seal now shows a planned day of judgment and a sure plan for a chosen people to stand on that day.

“Who can stand?” Before getting to the textually provided answer to this question, let’s spend some time considering the introduction to this query. The opening verses all give a summary of events tied to the Day of Judgment. John sees the following as the sixth seal of the Lamb’s scroll opens:

Revelation 6:12b -14 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.

John provides a list of signs showing events in nature as the Day of the Lord begins:

- #1. A great earthquake
- #2. The sun turned black like sackcloth
- #3. The moon turned blood-red
- #4. The stars in the sky fell to earth.
- #5. The sky receded like a scroll
- #6. Every mountain and island removed from its place.

Why signs using nature? People have historically viewed natural events such as these as inescapable. If it has to do with the sky, sun, moon, stars, and mountains, there is no expected way of avoiding it – and that’s the message God wants the earth to know. Apart from Him there is no escape on the day of His wrath. Consider some details of this judgment in this brief summary:

### The Great Earthquake (#1)

Earthquakes were a firsthand experience for most of John’s first-century audience. We already noted recent earthquake devastation in Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

John stresses the earthquake of this seal, as something extraordinary, beyond the earthquakes already experienced (no matter how devastating they seemed). He called it a “great”

earthquake. He merely mentions this earthquake as part of this preview and introduction. Details await the next and final seal...

Revelation 16:18 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. (NIV)

It is perhaps better for us to describe this final event not as a “great earthquake” but rather “the great earthquake.” Old Testament prophets preceded John in calling for an end-times earthquake. Consider Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 38:19-20 In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. 20 The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. (NIV)

The sun turned black like sackcloth (#2)

Once again, John uses a “looks-like” statement. The sun does not literally have to go black; it merely has this appearance from an earthly perspective. A literal darkening of this star would have a disastrous effect on the earth, fully lethal and final. Removing the sun’s energy from earth would make any other sign irrelevant; everyone would be dead. In contrast, events causing the effect of a darkened sun from an earth perspective are not necessarily immediately lethal or irreversible. The imagery of the sun going dark comes from the Old Testament, repeatedly associated with the Lord’s wrath.

Isaiah 13:9-11 See, the day of the Lord is coming — a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger — to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. 10 The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. 11 I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. (NIV)

Isaiah’s imagery clearly refers to something causing a darkened sky; “the stars... will not show their light.” Whatever method God uses, it prevents people from seeing sunlight plus light from all the other heavenly bodies including the stars and the reflected light of the moon. Other Old Testament passages echo these words and stress the darkness that accompanies God’s judgment and wrath.



Jeremiah 13:16 Give glory to the Lord your God before he brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light, but he will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom. (NIV)

Amos 5:18-20 Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. 19 It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. 20 Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light — pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? (NIV)

Amos 8:9 "In that day," declares the Sovereign Lord, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. (NIV)

Zephaniah 1:14-16 "The great day of the Lord is near — near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. 15 That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, 16 a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. (NIV)

One final passage is worth considering, though seemingly repetitive to those already read:

Joel 2:30-31 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. (NIV)

Viewed together, these passages portray the sun's darkening accompanying or caused by fires and war. Anyone experienced in extreme fires and the smoke that clouds the air understands what this could look like. Having, personally, been close to a massive forest fire, it looked at best like twilight even in the middle of the day. In ancient times, when warring armies conquered a land, they often burned the fields and groves, and even entire cities. This all-too-common terrifying sight would have filled the minds of John's readers, a sun blackened in daylight by the fire and smoke.

Preterists, who see fulfillment of this imagery in past events such as Jerusalem's destruction and the fall of the temple, are perhaps partially correct. The Jews understood fulfillment of many of these Old Testament passages in various military defeats and exile. Overall, it is perhaps better to understand the passages as descriptive of anytime God judges and pours out

His wrath, especially using war with accompanying fires and destruction. Old Testament fulfillments and the destruction in A.D. 70 are all types and forerunners to that great final time of God's wrath. Revelation's text anticipates one last time of God's judgment, with a backdrop of the entire earth. Knowing this, we return to the associated question; "who can stand" on that day of God's final judgment?

### #3. The moon turned blood-red

John uses another "looks-like" statement. It doesn't mean the moon itself is physically going to change color. Its continuing imagery similar to the sun's darkening. The same circumstances affecting the sun – fire and smoke from destruction – also make the moon's blood-red appearance. Futurists, especially Dispensationalists, often note the moon had this appearance after detonation of nuclear weapons. Technically-advanced weapons of a nuclear variety are unnecessary for this effect, though they could be a source. Many saw blood-red moons during God's past judgments long before nuclear weapons existed. Revelation's wording continues to point to one final time.

Natural blood moons occur during eclipses. Some Dispensationalist prophecy speculators, such as Mark Blitz and John Hagee, have claimed John's description belongs to an eclipse of the sun and moon. Their widely promoted blood moon hysteria crested on September 27-28, 2015, the last of four lunar eclipses completing a tetrad. Hagee and Blitz believed these eclipses coinciding with Jewish holidays were a sign of the end times.

Could John refer to a regular natural event? For example: The sun turned to darkness resulting from the moon directly between the Earth and sun in a total solar eclipse. This would need to combine with the moon turned to blood resulting from the Earth directly between the sun and moon, earth's shadow falling on the moon in a total lunar eclipse. The answer is no. Solar and lunar eclipses are ordinary and frequent happenings throughout history, but they don't happen, and can't happen, ever, on the same day. John's description points to an extraordinary cause.

One natural source may account for these associated events. Another event beyond war puts volumes of particulates into the atmosphere. Volcanic eruptions have spewed volumes of ash, also causing the same blood moon effect. The great earthquake accompanying this sequence may suggest related volcanic eruptions. Multiple eruptions, borne by atmospheric currents, could darken the sky worldwide.

### #4. The stars in the sky fell to earth.

Stars are not literally going to fall on the earth. One star moved near the earth, without hitting it, would consume it. This is figurative wording describing what God showed John. It could describe meteors, or falling burning debris of any composition. Large debris spewed far into the atmosphere by volcanic eruption would also meet this appearance when falling. Whether from earth source or meteoric, God causes this extraordinary event directly or indirectly. Worldwide awareness is part of this event. Flaming debris, a part of many earlier times of God's judgment, is typically more localized unless happening simultaneously all over the world. This wording may show the extent of this planetary destruction. Echoing Isaiah 13:9-10, no heavenly stars appear because of the darkened sky, making the "falling star" effect even more prominent as flaming debris or meteoric impacts fall through the smoky canopy.

#5. The sky receded like a scroll.

Again, this "looks-like" statement does not claim the removal of the literal sky or atmosphere. No atmosphere would result in an immediate and abrupt end. It points to a great fire or explosions, perhaps even volcanic action (which could go with a worldwide earthquake). The best example of such an atmospheric effect, in modern times, came by using nuclear weapons. It points to the intensity of this final time; an event witnessed worldwide.

Consider Isaiah, where he speaks of God's judgment on the nations. His wording encompasses language that includes the sky receding and the previous line of our passage in Revelation of stars falling...

Isaiah 34:1-4 Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it! 2 The Lord is angry with all nations; his wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, he will give them over to slaughter. 3 Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. 4 All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. (NIV)

#6. Every mountain and island removed from its place.

The sixth statement returns us to the first – all to stress the scope of this worldwide judgment. While God can and does use armies to carry out His judgments, the events we call "natural" are those that have even greater impact. This "great earthquake" physically will shake the earth, with mountains crumbling and falling, both on dry land and under the seas. The earth will move, worse than normally witnessed on a smaller scale with localized earthquakes of our day.

Even as these small earthquakes cause great damage, consider what a worldwide earthquake would do. Unquestionably, the whole earth will (or should) ask “who can stand?”

Psalms 97:1-5 The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. 2 Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. 3 Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. 4 His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. 5 The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. (NIV)

Jesus, giving signs of Jerusalem’s destruction and His return (Matthew 24:3), uses similar language, drawing on the passages recorded in Isaiah...

Matthew 24:29-31 "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. (NIV, see also Mark 13:24-27)

Jerusalem inhabitants in A.D. 70 would have seen fulfillment of these words (as Preterists assert). Yet Revelation shows a further and final fulfillment awaiting the world’s end. The ambiguity in Jesus’ response to the disciple’s twofold question allows for this near and far fulfillment. Jesus’ answer was for both questions, first over the temple’s destruction and second about His return. His response used language applying to both.

Revelation’s description doesn’t mean God tears apart the entire universe, with stars and other heavenly bodies moving. If heavenly bodies are visible at all, earth’s shaking would create an earthly illusion of them moving. It is safe to say this portrayal shows irrevocable change and affect to the earth. No resident of earth can miss this final Day of God’s Judgment. When finished, no one will question “Is this it?” This period features unimaginable terror for the unsaved.

The dramatic changes appearing during this time remind that this present creation is temporary, belonging to a heaven and earth due for permanent replacement by its Creator.

Revelation 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. (NIV)

What follows next is the response of the unsaved world to these events belonging to God's Judgment:

Revelation 6:15-17 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?" (NIV)

It begins with the powerful and the rich, people normally believing they can do almost anything. These individuals often think they can escape events and circumstances affecting commoners. They imagine they can fight, manipulate, or buy their way out. In the face of God's wrath, all their power, influence, and riches will mean nothing to them.

Proverbs 11:4, 28a Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. ... 28a Whoever trusts in his riches will fall... (NIV)

The rich and powerful are not the only unbelievers. Far from the status of rulers and generals are further objects of the Lamb's wrath. Revelation 6:15 continues by encompassing the lowest of the low, slaves, and every average citizen between those poor and wealthy.

The uniform response of unbelievers, experiencing the wrath of the Lamb, is to hide. They show by their actions that they are natural and spiritual descendants of Adam and Eve. Remember our first parent's response to realizing that they were sinners in the presence of a Holy God...

Genesis 3:7-10 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." (NIV)

Some things never change. Sinners hope to hide from God and think they can use natural objects to do it. What they show by their actions is that they do not know God. That they believe they can hide from an all-knowing and all-seeing God, let alone use His own creation to

do it, shows how little they know of our all-powerful Creator. In fact, responding in fear is a mark of unbelievers.

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (NIV)

In judgment the lost realize they have no hope. Their finishing question shows their despair: "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" They cannot see that God has always had an answer to the question they personally ask in vain. The next chapter gives us the answer.

### **Those who will stand – Revelation 7**

Chapter seven reveals the people who will stand on the day of God's wrath. For context, at least the first seventeen verses must remain together.

Revelation 7:1-17 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. 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.

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."

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!"

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. 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. 16 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." (NIV)

This is no "parenthesis," or story gap, between seals six and seven, as some assert. This continuing passage is the heart of the theme expressed in the sixth seal. Here God assures us there are a people who will stand in God's Day of Wrath. His eternal plan includes a remnant, a people that praise His name. The sixth seal of the Lamb's scroll is not a negative, it's a positive. It's not about the recipients of God's wrath, and it's only indirectly about those God has redeemed – it's all about God and His amazing grace!

Even as chapter six showed God using nature in Judgment, here again it shows that He is fully in control of it. Even as earthquakes cause worldwide damage, winds (in tornadoes, hurricanes, typhoons, and storms) similarly cause seemingly indiscriminate worldwide damages. In keeping with the sixth seal's theme of God over all creation, God who uses nature in judgment, here we see God restraining the winds themselves until something is complete. Despite many efforts, winds remain outside the control of people. God alone is sovereign over this global feature.

Through this seal God shows the fullness of His judgement is delayed until His set time when all details of His plan are in play. Specifically, this final judgment will not take place until God has completed the salvation of His remnant.

Acts 15:15-18 (James speaking:) The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written: 16 "After this I will return and rebuild David's fallen tent. Its ruins I will rebuild, and I will restore it, 17 that the remnant of men may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who bear my name, says the Lord, who does these things! 18 that have been known for ages. (NIV)

2 Peter 3:8-9 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. (NIV)

Why four angels and four corners of the planet? This is figurative language meaning everywhere; the east, the west, the north and the south (terminology also used in Isaiah 11:12). God's instruction is to withhold judgment of the whole earth until He seals His servants (His slaves). Scriptures gives us detail on this sealing by God...

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (NIV)

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 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. (NIV, also Ephesians 1:13-14)

Who does God seal? Every believer who has received the Holy Spirit! This makes it clear that God's final judgment is withheld until after the last person He will save has come to faith in Jesus Christ. Only following the last believer's sealing does the possibility exist of God releasing His judgment on the earth. God's sealed are not merely on the earth, they include those sealed throughout history, many already in heaven. God's restraining earthly judgments of nature keeps the focus on the earth more than the scene in heaven. It is here the last person He will seal will one day come to faith in Jesus Christ. God alone knows who this person is.

Why does God seal the forehead? This is figurative language pointing to the internal nature of our sealing. For example, consider the Old Testament Law...

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (NIV)

God is not saying people need to fasten written law on their foreheads, hands and doorframes, as some Jews do with their phylacteries and mezuzahs. God was telling them to keep His law in their thoughts and in what they do and where they live.



John's description of our sealing being on our foreheads represents divine sealing of our inward being. God seals our soul and spirit, as we long for our body's final redemption (resurrection and glorification). The Greek word translated "on" also translates as "in" as did the King James... but neither word choice changes the symbolic meaning of the passage.

John's imagery, here, also echoes that of Ezekiel. In this following Old Testament passage God speaks of judging the people for turning their backs on Him. He uses similar language of setting a mark (unquestionably spiritual in nature) on the foreheads of the faithful, sparing them coming judgment.

Ezekiel 9:3-7 Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. 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. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple. (NIV)

Returning to our Revelation passage; note "a seal," itself, is something symbolic. Though a seal is normally a physical object, its true benefit rests in being a symbol. A little wax or a lump of clay (common in ancient times) has no power in itself. It stops no one from opening a document or a door. It is what this seemingly (physically) useless object represents that is its real power. The seal symbolizes something greater. Knowledge of the power and authority of the seal's owner restrains people from breaking the seal.

We should find great comfort in knowing that God himself is the power and authority behind the seal He sets on His elect. Further, since God himself (the Holy Spirit) is the seal itself, it should give us great assurance. In all creation, nothing can break this seal. In this assurance, Paul confidently says...

Romans 8:38-39 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. (NIV)

God's seal is irrevocable and unbreakable because He is unchangeable.

1 Samuel 15:29 He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind." (NIV)

Malachi 3:6a "I the Lord do not change. (NIV)

In our sealing, God reveals a threefold witness about every believer:

- #1. He owns us (and has the right to seal us).
- #2. He prevents anyone from tampering with us.
- #3. We are genuine believers. (And God unquestionably knows who are His. See 2 Timothy 2:19)

Having proved by Scriptures *who* God seals, namely all believers, we can then see that John is using a threefold example to express and stress the same. The context shows that John is repeating himself in a threefold way in these 17 verses. A threefold repetition itself shows emphasis. In three differing ways, he clarifies the entire subject:

- #1. Revelation 7:3 Sealed slaves of God  
(Slaves obey their master's command and example)
- #2. Revelation 7:4-8 Sealed citizens of Israel (the Kingdom)  
(Citizens are loyal to their King)
- #3. Revelation 7:9 Sealed remnant from all nations and peoples (the called-out ones)  
(This is a group different from all natural people groups, separated from them)

As already noted, these three examples focus on the same people. Yes, even the second about Israel. In the end it's not about two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, it is about God's one people, His holy nation. This is not "replacement theology" where the church replaces Israel. Rather it affirms the church does not exist apart from Israel. Indeed the church is part of Israel, God having grafted her in.

John 10:16 (Jesus said) I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. (NIV)

The reason Paul assures the salvation of "all Israel" is that true Israel includes only the redeemed. God grafted in believing Gentiles while weeding out some of natural Israel (specifically unbelieving Jews). This results an Israel comprised of only those God saves, an

Israel of all God saves! (See also Romans 2:28-29, 4:12-16). God allowed natural Israel to exist simultaneously with spiritual Israel in the Old Testament. There is nothing in the New Testament era preventing the natural nation of Israel from coexisting with spiritual Israel or having further purpose within God's plan. To be clear, the book of Revelation does not focus on God's plan for natural Israel, rather spiritual Israel – God's one people.

Romans 11:25-26a I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And so all Israel will be saved... (NIV)

As Paul earlier said,

Romans 9:6 It is not as though God's word had failed. For not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. (NIV)

Confident of this one people of God, Paul writes to a church including Gentiles and refers to them as "the Israel of God"...

Galatians 6:16 Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God. (NIV)

So why does John list 12 tribes with seemingly specific numbers – something that has led to much speculation especially among Dispensationalists? Read Revelation 7:4-8 again. Notice that John "heard" the number. It is a known value in heaven; God knows exactly how many are His. Specifically Jesus knows exactly how many the Father has given Him for eternity.

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (NIV)

John 10:29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. (NIV)

How large is God's spiritual Israel, this people who will stand? Until that final day when God reads the scroll in full, we are not to know specifics. Instead John gives something representing the answer, his norm in each seal of this Revelation. The numbering is figurative language to express a couple ideas. First, 12 is a number representing governmental perfection as seen especially by its use in the book of Revelation. Twelve appears in many features of the New Jerusalem including twelve tribes to describe spiritual Israel. Second, ten is a number showing

fullness (or ordinal perfection). Ten times ten times ten equals 1000, a number expressing a perfect multitude. (There are four biblical numbers that represent perfection in different ways: 3, 7, 10, and 12; see the opening section on numerical symbolism for more details).

The symbolism of the smaller numbers enables a figurative understanding of 144,000 in this way... The church includes Old Testament saints (represented by 12 tribes) and New Testament saints (represented by 12 apostles) and a perfect multitude of both (represented by 1000 [10 x 10 x 10]). Therefore 144,000 is 12 x 12 x 1000, or perfection x perfection x a perfect multitude. God's Israel is a perfect multitude of all His saints.

A slightly different understanding of Revelation's 144,000 looks to Old Testament imagery. During the Exodus, 1000 was an ancient Israeli military division:

Numbers 31:4-5 You shall send a thousand from each of the tribes of Israel to the war."  
5 So there were provided, out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war.

Parallel with normal figurative use of 1000, it's as likely that John used this military imagery to portray God's completed church. Old Israel (12) x New Israel (12) x Military Division (1000) = a Complete Battle Ready Israel (144,000). This is compatible with Revelation's later portrayal of the church as heaven's army (Revelation 19:14, 19).

God enabled others throughout history to recognize the 144,000 as representing the entire church:

"And I heard the number sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel." The 144,000 represent the fullness of the church. "After this I looked, and behold a great people which no one could number, from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues." He did not say, "After this I saw another people," but "I saw a people," that is, the selfsame people he had seen in the mystery of the 144,000, which he now sees as a people without number from every tribe and tongue and nation. For by believing, all nations have been engrafted into the root. ... "And he said, 'These are they who have come from the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes in the blood of the lamb.'" These are not, as some think, only martyrs, but rather the whole people in the church. For it does not say they washed their robes in their own blood but in the blood of the Lamb, that is, in the grace of God through Jesus Christ, our Lord." -- Caesarius of Arles (Exposition on the Apocalypse). Written and preached circa 510-537 A.D. He lived 470-

542 A.D. Arles was in Gaul (now southern France). Translated and edited by William C. Weinrich (Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation).

Preventing any separation of the Old and New Testament churches, God provides the representative 144,000 a specific set of divisions. John provides a roster dividing the entirety of the church into 12 tribes, showing both Gentiles and Jews represented by 12 everlasting tribes (again, Gentiles are here because God made us a part of Israel. See Romans 11:17). If John was trying to speak only of the literal tribes of Israel he would have used tribal lists that echoed those of the Old Testament. Instead, this tribal list is unique, even as God's one church is unique.

The twelve sons of Israel originally defined Old Testament Israel...

1 Chronicles 2:1-2 These were the sons of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, 2 Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad and Asher. (NIV)

Much speculation exists over why the final heavenly tribal division varies from the original. Perhaps it's for no other reason than to show the uniqueness of the heavenly nation and so none should presume acceptance based on their original tribe (if they were Jewish). It suggests former tribal representation has ended for Jews making them equal to Gentiles who have none. This leaves God to appoint everyone's everlasting tribal association. The saved tribal names become reminders of a few of the former. Such memories may give reason for why Dan is notably missing. The tribe of Dan never claimed the territory God had given them (see Joshua 19:47 and Judges 18:1). They later fell into adultery and worship of the golden calves of the divided northern kingdom of Israel. No one wants everlasting labeling by such a disgraced name.

Judges 18:30 There the Danites set up for themselves the idols, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land. (NIV)

That Manasseh appears in this heavenly list is testimony and reminder of God blessing the descendants of one who followed him, namely Joseph. Manasseh appears as a tribe among the lists of Israel (but the number of tribes always remained twelve. See Numbers 1:34-35).

The last of John's threefold example takes the slaves and citizens and shows us that this full and God-defined number is an incredible multitude taken out of the nations and peoples of the earth. Unlike the earlier "given" symbolic number, here John looks for himself and describes what he saw. This last example focuses on the greater part of the sealed; the multitude in

heaven versus the previous example focused on the final sealing of those on earth. Both are part of God's one church and sealed people.

Revelation 7:9a 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. (NIV)

"Few" and "great multitude" seem to have nothing in common. And yet, this "great multitude that no one could count" is still in keeping with Jesus' words in Matthew:

Matthew 7:13-14 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (NIV)

These passages together reveal the big picture. A vast amount of time is enough to gather a multitude, even when believers are regularly a small percentage of the earth's population. Consider how few believers existed at many times in history, even though multitudes were alive. In Noah's time there were eight (1 Peter 3:20); in Elijah's day only 7000 in all of Israel (1 Kings 19:18). Of the seven billion on the planet today, consider what small percentage knows the Lord versus merely claiming his name. In the west, it is fashionable to wear the label Christian while simultaneously opposing all Jesus stood for. Cults, including Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, further claim to be Christian. Regardless, through history God gathers and completes His multitude.

Revelation 7:9b "from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb."

This final and everlasting church ("called-out" ones), of Jews and Gentiles, of nations around the world, of innumerable natural tribes and people groups, now has something else in common – one language. God calls from every language, including those existing today and many long dead and forgotten. On earth, His word transcends language; all may hear and understand through translation. God does not mandate a common language for His people on earth. There is no need to know Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. People merely need to hear the message originally composed in those languages, whether written or spoken so long as it preserves the meaning and intent. God has blessed and guaranteed the efficacy of translation by prophesying this great mixed multitude. In this heavenly scene, they are one people "standing before the throne." And, as the next verse shows (v 10), they cry out in one voice to their savior and Lord. Only before humanity's stubborn rebellion, leading to the Tower of

Babel, were people able to call out in one voice, if they were willing (Genesis 11:1). Revelation shows that God's people will eternally be able to praise Him together!

"Who can stand on the Day of God's wrath?" The text clearly gives the answer to the theme of this seal. God has a people, a vast multitude that will stand by His grace. The remainder of chapter seven gives voice to this people as they honor the One who enabled them to stand.

Revelation 7:9c-10 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." (NIV)

Everyone present that day wears a robe of righteousness given by God. The palm branches they hold in their hands are in praise and honor of Jesus. John, of course, would remember an earlier scene with palm branches:

John 12:12-13 The next day the great crowd that had come for the Feast heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. 13 They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Blessed is the King of Israel!" (NIV)

Hours later another crowd followed that earlier scene, perhaps including some from the same crowd, crying "Crucify Him, Crucify Him" (see Luke 23:21, 23). In contrast, those earlier events made possible this heavenly and complete gathering. There are no turncoats, fakes, or defectors in this crowd. In one loud voice they give praise to the Savior and Lord: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Their words of praise contain the heart of the gospel. The only reason anyone stands on the day of God's wrath is God made it possible. Salvation from beginning to end belongs to our God. Everything in the Lamb's scroll, from beginning to end, is part of His plan.

Isaiah 43:11-13 I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior. 12 I have revealed and saved and proclaimed — I, and not some foreign god among you. You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "that I am God. 13 Yes, and from ancient days I am he. No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?" (NIV)

God's angelic host joins in praise. They too are in awe of God who enabled some, His people, to stand...

Revelation 7:11-12 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!" (NIV)

Take note of the word "wisdom" in that sevenfold list of specifics they are praising God for. God's wisdom orchestrated this plan for the ages. It is His plan, for His purposes, and to His praise! The Bible shows God's people have praised His wisdom throughout history.

Job 9:4-12 His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? 5 He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. 6 He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. 7 He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. 8 He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. 9 He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. 10 He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. 11 When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him. 12 If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, 'What are you doing?' (NIV)

Romans 11:33-36 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" 35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (NIV)

Isaiah 29:13-16 The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. 14 Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish." 15 Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, "Who sees us? Who will know?" 16 You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows nothing"? (NIV)

This scene in heaven reveals that by His wisdom the Potter has completed His work and turned the clay into vessels made perfect for His use (see Romans 9:19-21).



The focus of this final scene in this sixth seal again answers the question “who can stand?” As already discovered, this group features all believers, each made righteous by the blood of the lamb throughout all history. The uncountable multitude all wears robes of white.

Revelation 7:13-14 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.

Here we get meaning for the words “great tribulation” as used by John in Revelation. Believers throughout time comprise this uncountable multitude. This people, all God’s slaves and citizens of His kingdom, wear God-given white robes of righteousness. All history provides the scope of this “great tribulation.” Church history is the great tribulation. Scriptures are clear; in this world we will have tribulations...

John 16:33 "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." (NASU)

Romans 12:10-13 Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; 11 not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; 12 rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, 13 contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. (NASU)

These combined tribulations, of various sizes, scope and intensity – plus a last major one – are together the Great Tribulation of Revelation from which God calls out and preserves His church. One specific tribulation may legitimately be called “great tribulation,” as did Jesus in Matthew 24:21, 29. All tribulations together become Revelation’s “the Great Tribulation.”

Many have historically recognizing the Great Tribulation spans a vast time. Consider a comment on the scope of the Book of Revelation from a translator of ancient Latin Commentaries on Revelation:

... the more diligent commentators understood that the content of the Revelation has to do with what “had begun immediately after the passion of our Lord and Savior and therefore was to be fulfilled to the day of judgment.” In other words, the visions of the Revelation reveal the spiritual truth of the life of the church that is lived and experienced between the time of Jesus and the last day. (William C. Weinrich, From his Introduction to “Ancient Christian Texts: Latin Commentaries on Revelation”. The

quotation within his quote is from Caesarius of Arles who wrote and preached around 510-537 A.D.)

Our heavenly scene continues to focus on the multitude of believers coming out of the Great Tribulation:

Revelation 7:15-17 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. 16 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." (NIV)

These finishing verses of Revelation 7 promise comfort for all believers, everyone who has come out of the Great Tribulation of human history. What are we promised?

1. We will be before God's throne (forever in His presence and able to look on His face. God restores that which we lost in the Garden. See Revelation chapters 21 and 22).
2. We will serve Him day and night in His temple (always able to serve our Lord without wavering or stumbling.) We are his perfect slaves! This doesn't contradict Revelation 21:22 which says the New Jerusalem has no temple, because it further says that God and the Lamb are the temple. This merely means that we are in Christ for eternity (c.f. Ephesians 2:6). We are priests of God, always in His presence serving Him!
3. God will spread His tent over us. We are part of His household, under His protection for eternity. More than slaves, believers are also family – sons and daughters of God.
4. We will never hunger or thirst again. While chiefly referring to food and water, which we'll never lack again, it can equally reference hungering and thirsting for righteousness (see Matthew 5:6). With our salvation complete we no longer hunger and thirst for righteousness as something that we lack, for God will have made us fully righteous.
5. The sun will not beat on us, or scorching heat. Numbers 4 and 5 are a direct reference to this passage in Isaiah...

Isaiah 49:8-12 This is what the Lord says: "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, 9 to say to

the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. 10 They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. 11 I will turn all my mountains into roads, and my highways will be raised up. 12 See, they will come from afar — some from the north, some from the west, some from the region of Aswan." (NIV)

6. The Lamb will be our shepherd and lead us to springs of living water. Consider Psalms 23.
7. God will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Revelation 21:4). In this world's end or, better worded, the beginning of eternity, God removes everything causing sorrow. No sickness, no death, no pain, no worry, and no evil...

Isaiah 25:6-8 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine — the best of meats and the finest of wines. 7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (NIV)

Isaiah 35:8-10 And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. 9 No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, 10 and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away. (NIV)

Isaiah 60:18-21a No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. 19 The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. 20 Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. 21 Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. (NIV)

And so ends seal six, revealing God's eternal plan and the answer to the question "Who can stand in that Day of the Lamb's wrath?" The praiseworthy answer is everyone "made righteous by the blood of the Lamb!" The few provided details of what this means for eternity compel us to read on. The seventh and final seal is next.

### **The seventh seal**

Chapter 7's scene should still resound in our minds as we begin chapter 8 (and the seventh seal). John's threefold example in the sixth seal makes it clear that God has sealed every believer before the "harming of the earth (Revelation 7:3)" and the coming final judgment. This last judgment is highlighted in this seventh seal (see especially Revelation 8:7-12). Only with the last believer's sealing (and only God knows that day) is the final judgment set to begin. Today could be that fateful day when these final scenes start to unfold. (The church's response is always "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." Revelation 22:20).

Revelation 8:1 When he [Jesus] opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (NIV)

These opening words of seal seven remind us that John's vision of the one who "is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll (Revelation 5:1, 9)" continues. He continues to see sights and imagery representing words written on both sides of the Lamb's scroll (Revelation 5:1). Its contents provide final proof of these events being God's plan from the beginning. God sealed this scroll in eternity and gave John (and us through his eyes) a summary preview. One day we will finally see Jesus read every detail of the scroll and reveal His intricate plan and full sovereignty over the affairs of man and this world from beginning to end.

Isaiah 46:9-10 Remember the former things, those of long ago; 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. (NIV)

Specifically, the seventh seal takes us to the end of the world as we know it. The heart of Revelation's final seal is the words "there will be no more delay (Revelation 10:6)." This seal again takes us through events spanning history, but it has greater focus than any before on the final judgment and culmination of God's ancient plan.

This final scene does not begin with a flurry of action or overwhelming commotion, let alone a focus on earthly events. The setting is heaven, the throne room of God, which John so aptly

described earlier in the book of Revelation. John makes a personal observation depicting a sense of time, or passage of time, in heaven; “there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”

Christians often think there is no passage of time in heaven (present) and eternity. In fact, we have hymns that say so (at least for eternity):

When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more,  
And the morning breaks, eternal, bright and fair;  
When the saved of earth shall gather over on the other shore,  
And the roll is called up yonder, I'll be there.  
(When the Roll is Called up Yonder, James M. Black, 1893)

It is probable that time, as we now experience it, ceases for eternity future. The new heavens and earth are a fresh creation, different from the present. Time is part of this present creation, specifically this fallen creation (Hebrews 1:10-12), which God finally makes new (Revelation 21:5). Yet, Scriptures nowhere suggests time stops before the end of this world (also the end of the present heaven). Further, we have multiple statements in Revelation showing a sense of passage of time by spiritual beings including by deceased believers awaiting God's final judgment. Examples:

Half an Hour (Revelation 8:1, all present in heaven)  
How long Oh Lord? (Revelation 6:10, departed believers)  
No more delay (Revelation 10:6, angel)  
Time is short (Revelation 12:12, the devil)

Why silence in heaven? I've heard many answers to this question, some as the punch line of jokes. For example:

Do you want proof there will be no women in heaven? “There was silence in heaven for about half an hour.”

Another, which I like:

“The half hour of silence in heaven is because everyone just realized that their view on end times (eschatology) was wrong. They're all standing there dumbfounded thinking, so that's what those passages mean!”

The Bible gives several examples why silence is fitting in the presence of God.

**Definition**

Haras – A Hebrew word meaning “be quiet, be still, stop speaking.”

Exodus 14:13-14 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still [Hebrew “Haras”] (NIV)

- Be silent because God is working. It’s His battle (1 Samuel 17:47), His fight.

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (NIV)

Isaiah 40:28-41:1 Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. 29 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. 30 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; 31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. 41:1 "Be silent [Hebrew “Haras”] before me, you islands! Let the nations renew their strength! Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment. (NIV)

- Be silent, look to God for all your strength.

Nehemiah 8:8-11 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. 9 Then Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, "This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. 10 Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." 11 The Levites calmed all the people, saying, "Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve." (NIV)

- Be silent on this sacred day, there is no need to worry it's a day to rejoice in the Lord's strength.

Psalms 37:7-13 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret — it leads only to evil. 9 For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. 10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace. 12 The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them; 13 but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming. (NIV)

- Be silent and patient, judgment has come on the wicked and God wins.

Psalms 46:8-11 Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. 9 He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. 10 "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." 11 The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. (NIV)

- Be silent, see what God has done and continues to do and know that He is God.

Zechariah 2:10-13 "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the Lord. 11 "Many nations will be joined with the Lord in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the Lord Almighty has sent me to you. 12 The Lord will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land and will again choose Jerusalem. 13 Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling." (NIV)

- Be silent, God is working (and the time for His people to live with God is near).

Habakkuk 2:20 But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him." (NIV)

- Be silent, God is Sovereign and on His throne.

Zephaniah 1:7, 2:13 Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near.  
... 2:13 Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling." (NIV)

- Be silent, the Day of God's Judgment has come.

Some believe this noted half hour of silence is during the outpouring of God's wrath – especially those who try to link seals six and seven. Events in seals six and seven do overlap, both including God's final judgment, but this seal must speak for itself. Unquestionably, this silence doesn't follow events of the sixth seal; it's before events of the seventh seal. This silence is the prelude to an extraordinary heavenly event. It assures all that follows focuses on God alone. This isn't a time to weep or a time to rejoice – it's time to be silent.

Every other provided glimpse of heaven, from the Old Testament to the New, portrays a heavenly throne room full of action and sound. But here, in complete contrast, even the angels who forever call out Holy, Holy, Holy (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8) fall silent. All eyes and thoughts focus on the Lamb opening the scroll, who has now broken this seventh seal. There is no need here for the Father's voice to say "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him (Luke 9:35)." Everyone present knows this and waits, prepared for amazement, eager to know what this final seal reveals. They want nothing more than to listen to the Son.

Revelation 8:2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. (NIV)

Verse 2 introduces seven heavenly angels. This vision unfolds before John similar to all earlier seals. Though similar in visual style, the seventh seal is different; its contents are greater than all those earlier seals.

As John introduces these angels, he makes a more specific identification of them, noting that they are angels who "stand before God." The Bible says fallen angels come and stand before God (e.g. 1 Kings 22:19-22; 2 Chronicles 18:18-21; Job 1:6, 2:1). But, here, John's consistent use of the word angel in Revelation restricts these to being only holy angels. These seven could be any of God's holy angels who serve Him. They possibly are Seraphim. Isaiah shows this class of angels always in the presence of God immediately surrounding His throne and clearly engaged in announcements (Isaiah 6:2-3). The unusual silence in God's throne room (Revelation 8:1) may have freed these ever-present angels from their normal duties for these announcements. Their normal duty endlessly ascribes Holiness to their Maker. Here, associated with seven trumpets, they proclaim specific acts rooted in God's Holiness, fulfilling His eternal plan.



Tradition, as usual, can't leave the absence of detail in Scriptures to speak what God intended. Even in Jesus' day, a centuries-old tradition claimed there were seven archangels. For example, the inter-testament apocryphal book of Tobit:

Tobit 12:15 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. (KJV, and yes, the King James Bible had an Apocrypha section even when it was first published in 1611.)

The Old Testament identifies only one archangel, Michael (Daniel 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7), and the New Testament another, Gabriel (Luke 1:19, 26). Another New Testament passage associates the resurrection trumpet call with an archangel. Contrary to popular tradition it doesn't say which archangel, it may not be Gabriel:

1 Thessalonians 4:16 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. (NIV)

Both biblically identified archangels have names ending in "el," a common way of identifying someone with Elohim (God) in Hebrew names. Later tradition builds on the extra (third name) in Tobit and its idea of seven archangels. Consider the Ethiopic Book of Enoch (also called 1 Enoch to separate it from the Slavonic Enoch, or 2 Enoch). This Old Testament Pseudepigrapha provides all seven names (using an 'el' ending to make them believable):

Enoch 20:1-8 And these are the names of the holy angels who watch. 2 Uriel, one of the holy angels, who is over the world and over Tartarus. 3 Raphael, one of the holy angels, who is over the spirits of men. 4 Raguel, one of the holy angels who takes vengeance on the world of the luminaries. 5 Michael, one of the holy angels, to wit, he that is set over the best part of mankind and over chaos. 6 Saraqael (alt. Sariel), one of the holy angels, who is set over the spirits, who sin in the spirit. 7 Gabriel, one of the holy angels, who is over Paradise and the serpents and the Cherubim. 8 Remiel, one of the holy angels, whom God set over those who rise. [Archaeologists found fragments of this non-biblical book at Qumran. Scholars typically date its composition to around 165 to 64 B.C.]

Unbiblical naming speculation aside, the focus here in Revelation is not the angels anyway. Seven appointed angels, who normally stand before God, are about to sound trumpets. Historically they sounded this instrument to herald important events or happenings, plus to prepare for battle. The message accompanying each trumpet is of utmost importance, not

those delivering the message. I'm sure each of these appointed messengers would echo the Apostle Paul about their mission and message:

2 Corinthians 4:5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (NIV)

Apostles and teachers of Jesus Christ are servants carrying out their duty and seeking to exalt their master. Similarly, these angels are God's servants sent by Him to serve us. Even during this final judgment, the angel's words are for God's people:

Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (NIV)

Returning to the instrument that John sees these angels using in their announcements; trumpets have specific purposes throughout biblical history.

Numbers 10:1-4 The Lord said to Moses: 2 "Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out. 3 When both are sounded, the whole community is to assemble before you at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 4 If only one is sounded, the leaders — the heads of the clans of Israel — are to assemble before you. (NIV)

During the Exodus, a pair of trumpets signaled the people to assemble and listen. The seven here in Revelation makes clear that all of heaven and earth needs now to listen to this perfect, complete, and incredibly important announcement. These provide a clear trumpet sound (c.f. 1 Corinthians 14:8) with an understandable overall message. Together they ask: are you ready to meet your Maker? David's words in Psalms are fitting for this awaited proclamation:

Psalms 150:1-3 Praise the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. 2 Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. 3 Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet... (NIV)

Unquestionably, the message of these trumpets will praise God!

Revelation 8:3-5 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. (NIV)

John begins this passage by stressing there are more than seven angels standing before God and serving Him, all by using one word, “another.” Before the seven angels can complete their tasks, this other angel attends to his specific duty. The prayers of all saints mingle with incense, invoking imagery from Old Testament temple worship. All the saints share a common prayer, a unified and soon fulfilled petition. David prayed a form of it long ago:

Psalms 74:10-11 How long will the enemy mock you, O God? Will the foe revile your name forever? 11 Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them! (NIV)

Psalms 119:84 How long must your servant wait? When will you punish my persecutors? (NIV)

John heard a similar prayer earlier in Revelation, before God directs those saints to wait a while longer (Revelation 6:11):

Revelation 6:10 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?" (NIV)

This heavenly angel throwing prayers of the saints to the earth pictures a fulfillment of their prayers on the earth. The time of God’s wrath has come:

Romans 12:19 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. (NIV)

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 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. (NIV)

Keeping in mind God answering these prayers, we return to the seven angels previously given trumpets.

Revelation 8:6 Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. (NIV)

Why do the angels prepare? Preparing presumes planning. It shows that these events aren't just reactionary, perhaps a result of trying to deal with circumstances. God planned them first. There is no hint that God suddenly needs to tell the angels what they must do or say; rather the angels that God has appointed for such a task are ready. Now – at the appointed time – they act on information previously given and are now readying themselves for action (perhaps the high point and crowning reason for their existence).

Displaying great confidence in the plans of our Lord, the Bible ties the word “prepare” to statements about the eternal state of believers. Examples include:

John 14:2 (Jesus said) In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. (NIV)

Isaiah 25:1-8 O Lord, you are my God; I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things **planned** long ago. 2 You have made the city a heap of rubble, the fortified town a ruin, the foreigners' stronghold a city no more; it will never be rebuilt. 3 Therefore strong peoples will honor you; cities of ruthless nations will revere you. 4 You have been a refuge for the poor, a refuge for the needy in his distress, a shelter from the storm and a shade from the heat. For the breath of the ruthless is like a storm driving against a wall 5 and like the heat of the desert. You silence the uproar of foreigners; as heat is reduced by the shadow of a cloud, so the song of the ruthless is stilled. 6 On this mountain the Lord Almighty will **prepare** a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine — the best of meats and the finest of wines. 7 On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (NIV, bold for emphasis)

Mark 10:40 but to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. (KJV)

Just as God's Holy angels are doing in this circumstance, we too are to be acting on the instruction, abilities, and strength, God has given us. God wants His people prepared. Later, in Revelation, preparation describes the church (believers):

Revelation 19:7-8 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 ["has made ready", "prepared"].  
8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

How God enables our preparation is part of His plan. God's plan and purpose will stand (Isaiah 46:10).

God uses all seven trumpets to announce the same subject – they have one unified message. His use of seven represents spiritual perfection and completeness. John records details of their soundings in sequence yet their contents show these visions are parallel. Each sounding trumpet repeats and stresses the earlier, providing extra details and description and multiple perspectives. There is too much information to express in one pass, God gives John seven to provide all the detail we need.

Trumpets 1, 2, 3 and 4 are one grouping. These trumpets stress the physical, or earthly, impact of their proclamation (part of the symbolism of the number 4).

Trumpets 5, 6 and 7 are the second grouping. These trumpets stress the spiritual behind-the-scenes events driving the visible result and conclusion (the number three typically representing the spiritual). The seventh trumpet, while part of the 5-7 grouping, is relatively unique – this we will examine later.

Returning to the first cluster of trumpets (1-4). As already mentioned, it is necessary to read these first four together. They are brief and clearly intended to be a grouping – boxed by two external events, first by an extra angel at the altar and later by a flying messenger. Many propose these four trumpets are sequential events. Their unity is without question; John ties them tightly together using the Greek word "kai (and)." While "and" can mean sequential, I propose the trumpet sound is a sevenfold trumpet sound. This follows earlier sevenfold symbolism, such as the seven spirits which are the sevenfold Spirit of God. Further, these seven trumpets belong to the seven-sealed scroll, these seals overlapping and repeating their scope of history as well. This final judgment vision, witnessed by John, is one unified message and event. God heralds this singular event by seven trumpets to picture the various intertwined features of it.

Revelation 8:7-13 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.

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.

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.

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. (NIV, bold for emphasis)

<b>Trumpet</b>	<b>Using</b> (actual or looks like)	<b>Target</b> (affected)	<b>Scope</b> (who)
<b>1</b> (8:7)	Hail/Fire/Blood	Earth (Ground, Grass, Trees)	1/3 (all green grass)
<b>2</b> (8:8)	Blazing Mountain (Fire/Blood)	Sea (Salt Water, Sea Creatures, Ships)	1/3
<b>3</b> (8:10)	Blazing Star	Fresh Water (Drinking water)	1/3 "Many" People
<b>4</b> (8:12)	Unknown (Not Specified)	Sun, Moon, Stars (Natural light)	1/3

John describes the vision he is seeing. While this description includes readily identifiable objects and events (including scorched, burned up, or dried green grass), many other descriptions are "looks-like" statements.

These first four focus on the physical impact of the sevenfold trumpet sounding (drawing on the "four corners of the earth" symbolism of the number 4). Taken together, John saw an event which created a major atmospheric and environmental catastrophe. Its primary scope is one-third of the earth, producing weather effects of hail, lighting (fire) and what looks like raining

blood. He uses a twofold description of the object causing this, first calling it a blazing mountain and secondly a blazing star. The latter suggests an origin in space, but not decisively. The descriptive word “star” does not have to mean a literal star (which would instantly destroy the whole world) but rather any burning or lit item flying or appearing in the sky. The aftereffects produce reduced light from the sun, moon and other normal night stars, now blocked from sight by over 1/3 of the world. John further hints that while the worst is on a third of the earth, there’s a worldwide impact. All green grass burns up and the number of people who die is “many” rather than the fixed one-third scope of the primary event. (It’s possible one-third is merely another way of saying many, a parallel statement).

Some think the fourth trumpet is only spiritual symbolism, since darkness heralds God’s judgment on the ungodly (see Isaiah 13:10). While Old Testament symbolism is part of the picture John describes in this trumpet, here we don’t have complete darkness (“sun will be dark at its rising”). Also we have events affecting other physical items with no symbolic ties, including grass. Grass symbolizes evildoers in Psalms 92:7, but this imagery would see the death of all wicked here, something the context shows untrue. Grass represents humankind in Psalms 103:15 and Isaiah 40:6 (also 1 Peter 1:24); this imagery would have the death of all people here, something excluded by context. Revelation 8:7 ties grass to other physical items used in judgment, drawing on imagery of literal Old Testament judgments (see Exodus 9:23-24; compare to Ezekiel 38:21-22). Literal partial darkness accompanies God’s partial and limited judgment on His physical creation.

Before leaving these first four trumpets and their focus on the physical world of creation, I must mention a possible parallel between creation (Genesis 1:1-25) and these four trumpets. Revelation, here, repeats many specifics in common with creation. God’s judgment comes on a now-tainted and fallen creation; the ground and vegetation, the seas and all that is in them, plus the sun, moon and stars. Impact on humanity (“many” dead) is almost a minor part of these four trumpets. People are not the primary focus here; their inclusion is to show externals, the physical impact on humankind. Most detail about humanity, the peak of God’s creation from day six (Genesis 1:26-27), awaits the final three trumpet soundings yet to come. Why mostly separate treatment? Because people are chiefly spiritual beings and that message is for the final three trumpets. Physically dead is one issue, spiritually dead is far worse and it needs more detail.

Much speculation has gone into the name of the “star,” namely Wormwood (Revelation 8:11). Many try and tie it to known objects through its name. This exercise is futile. The name’s only significance comes from providing emphasis on the effects of the object, with waters becoming

bitter or poisoned. The text doesn't claim the peoples of earth call the object "Wormwood," the one sending it, namely God, called it Wormwood.

Further scriptures are where we would normally look for more detail on this flaming object. A standard principle for interpreting scriptures is the Bible interprets the Bible. Yet, here, this procedure provides no help for trying to further identify or provide details about this object used by God in this final judgment. No further Bible references apply. Its existence and scant detail appears only in this Revelation passage. The word "Wormwood (Greek: 'apsinthos')" appears twice in the New Testament, both times in this verse. Beyond this end-time star, the name refers to a known common plant. The Old Testament mentions Wormwood, a bitter substance grown in Israel (and used to deter moths from eating clothing):

Proverbs 5:1-6 My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, 2 that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. 3 For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; 4 but in the end she is bitter as gall [KJV, NASU, ESV: "wormwood"], sharp as a double-edged sword. 5 Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. 6 She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Amos 5:4-15 This is what the Lord says to the house of Israel: "Seek me and live; 5 do not seek Bethel, do not go to Gilgal, do not journey to Beersheba. For Gilgal will surely go into exile, and Bethel will be reduced to nothing." 6 Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. 7 You who turn justice into bitterness ["wormwood"] 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. 11 You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. 12 For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. 13 Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. 14 Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. 15 Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord



God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

In summary, these two passages use wormwood for immoral sexual acts and corrupted justice. Both show they bring bitterness of the soul and unquestionably lead to punishment for sins. Jeremiah uses the term in this latter manner.

Jeremiah 9:13-17 The Lord said, "It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law. 14 Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts; they have followed the Baals, as their fathers taught them." 15 Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: "See, I will make this people eat bitter food ["wormwood"] and drink poisoned water. 16 I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their fathers have known, and I will pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed them." (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Some historicists reduce Revelation's wormwood to being attacks by Attila the Hun. Others make it entirely symbolic for all bitterness on the earth during troubled times. There's no question wormwood represents hardship and punishment for sin in the Old Testament. This is exactly what God uses this flaming object for in this final judgment. There's no reason to reject this as an actual object described by John. While wormwood is not inherently poisonous (except in larger amounts), it is likely that John's vision intends to call to mind Jeremiah's passage, where he links wormwood to drinking poisoned water.

Wormwood clearly has disastrous effect on much of the planet. This catastrophe is outside humanity's control and obviously people cannot stop or restrain it. You might think those involved would turn to God. With two-thirds of the planet relatively unaffected, perhaps those spared would show gratitude to God? Do they? Without jumping ahead, even now we can ask: Why do the lost often curse God for cataclysmic events rather than thank Him for sparing or protecting them?

The first four trumpets are only the beginning of the end, three follow. Their message completes the given picture of how the end unfolds. But first, another event punctuates the text after the first four:

**Definition**

Aetos – A Greek word generically representing any bird of prey or fierce scavenger.

Revelation 8:13 As I watched, I heard an eagle [Greek “aetos”] 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!" (NIV)

The King James, New King James and the Geneva Bible present 8:13 as saying “I heard an angel” rather than eagle. This wording comes from using a late manuscript variant including a (likely) unintentional error. The Greek word used is similar to the original, sharing both the start and end. It’s also possible that it was an intentional change by someone believing that an angel was what John intended. In fact, if John had intended an angel here, he most likely would have introduced it – as he did the earlier extra angel which began the chapter (Revelation 8:3) – by saying “another.” Many early manuscripts bear witness the word should reference a bird.

Remember that John is using wording filled with imagery. God is using images that represent specific objects and ideas. What bird is John referencing? All later English translations present the word as “eagle” but this is too specific. I believe that John’s understanding of this imagery comes from the Septuagint and related Hebrew use of the word in the Old Testament. While eagle is one valid specific translation, the text implies a broader understanding of the word. Looking to the Old Testament...

Job 39:27-30 [God speaking to Job] Does the eagle [LXX Greek: “aetos”, Hebrew: “nesher”] soar at your command and build his nest on high? 28 He dwells on a cliff and stays there at night; a rocky crag is his stronghold. 29 From there he seeks out his food; his eyes detect it from afar. 30 His young ones feast on blood, and where the slain are, there is he." (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Proverbs 30:17-19a "The eye that mocks a father, that scorns obedience to a mother, will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley, will be eaten by the vultures [LXX Greek: “aetos”, Hebrew: “nesher” a large bird of prey]. 18 "There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: 19 the way of an eagle [LXX Greek: “aetos”, Hebrew: “nesher”] in the sky... (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

While modern translators prefer the majesty of an eagle soaring through the sky, a vulture flying past is another legitimate view. Overall, I believe John intends a general statement, better to say “I heard a bird of prey...”

This wording stresses there are multitudes dying in this time of judgment, a further emphasis of the message in the first four trumpets. This death is not the worst. People rank physical death

to be horrible from an earthly perspective, but there is something far greater. This is the message of woe assigned to the final three trumpets.

### **Definition**

Woe – In Greek this is the word “ouai.” It is a New Testament Semitism, a Semitic or Hebrew word carried directly into New Testament Greek, the Hebrew word being “hoy” or “oy.” It is a cry of grief or indignation, expressing lament and pain.

The word translated “woe” bears examination. God uses it three times here for emphasis. The verse’s English wording could also read; “woe, more woe, and much woe.” The Hebrew word “oy” we sometimes hear in the Yiddish expression “oy vey!” The “oy” is the ancient Hebrew word joined with a newer equivalent, “vey,” coming out of Aramaic. This relatively modern expression is saying “woe, woe.” (There is also a longer form, “oy vey ist mir,” which is a comparable exclamation of “woe is me”). Interestingly, Latin carries a form of this too, having the word “vae” with a common meaning. The Persian language (Farsi) uses a similar triple statement to stress something is bad: “vie, vie, vie.”

When a person cries out woe, they are ascribing personal grief or pain to their circumstances. But – as in this case – when another decrees woe on someone, it is tantamount to cursing them, calling for pain, grief, indignation, or catastrophe on them. New Testament Scriptures use woe many times; some examples:

(Singular)

Matthew 11:21 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. (NIV)

1 Corinthians 9:16 Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (NIV)

Jude 10-11 Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals — these are the very things that destroy them. 11 Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion. (NIV)

Revelation 12:12 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." (NIV)

(Twofold)

Revelation 18:10

Revelation 18:16

Revelation 18:19

[The KJV inexplicably uses "Alas" instead of "Woe" in all six spots in these three verses. It otherwise uses "woe" for this word in all forty-one remaining New Testament passages].

(Threefold)

Luke 11:42-44 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. 43 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. 44 "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it." (NIV)

Revelation 8:13 (the passage at hand)

(Fourfold)

Luke 6:24-26 "But woe (#1) to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. 25 Woe (#2) to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe (#3) to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. 26 Woe (#4) to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. (NIV, parenthesis for clarification)

I don't know about you, but one God-given woe sounds severe enough, let alone three or four. The threefold woes announced in this final judgment of humankind have unprecedented worldwide scope. I find it interesting the God never even uses "woe" for the worldwide flood of Noah's day. Perhaps this is because the events of Noah's day included far more mercy than this judgment coming on earth dwellers at the end.

The second cluster within the seven trumpets is numbers five through seven. These move from focusing on the earth's physical judgment to the spiritual background accompanying this judgment. In contrast to the number four, referencing especially earthly creation, the latter symbolism is that of three, being mostly spiritual. This spiritual focus does not replace or follow the physical events; God has intertwined the physical and spiritual in His judgment.

Remembering this is a grouping of three, Revelation's layout makes it necessary to consider numbers 5 and 6 together before continuing to the seventh and final.

<b>Trumpet</b>	<b>Using</b> (actual or looks like)	<b>Target</b> (affected)	<b>Scope</b> (who)
<b>5 (9:1)</b>	Star from heaven, smoke, locusts	Torment unsaved mankind	All unbelievers who did not die.
<b>6 (9:13)</b>	Released bound angels and their army	Mankind	1/3

In the third trumpet, John describes a great star falling to the earth causing vast physical damage (Revelation 8:10). And while there may be great physical damage and destruction, they pale in comparison to things causing spiritual harm. This fifth trumpet moves to the spiritual realm. And yet, John continues to describe it with physical looks-like descriptions.

Revelation 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. (NIV)

This opening verse proves the described fallen star is not a literal star. The star represents an intelligent entity (ascribed will and intellect and action) – which can be even better seen by translations which keep the Greek word referencing the star as “he”...

Revelation 9:1 And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he [!] was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. (ESV, also NET, NASU, KJV, HCSB, square parenthesis for emphasis)

The key given him represents limited authority; God gives him a specific task. Why use a star to represent someone? In one of the oldest books of the Bible, stars are a representative term for angels, used in parallel with the word angel, describing intelligent beings present from early in creation.

Job 38:4-7 "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. 5 Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? 6 On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone— 7 while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? (NIV)

John's referenced star is an angel. The only other candidate is Jesus, also called the "morning star" in Revelation 2:28, but the text later excludes this possibility. Notice the NIV's wording about this star: "that had fallen." Yes, the Greek stresses past tense. The star wasn't falling during John's vision; it had fallen at an earlier time.

Luke 10:17-20 The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." 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." (NIV)

Also Revelation 12:9 (giving detail from a later trumpet)

This fallen angel is clearly the devil, or Satan. A few verses later, John even makes this clearer by describing this entity as the king over the other spiritual beings God is about to release.

Revelation 9:11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. (NIV)

Abaddon and Apollyon are both names that mean "Destroyer." The Old Testament says this:

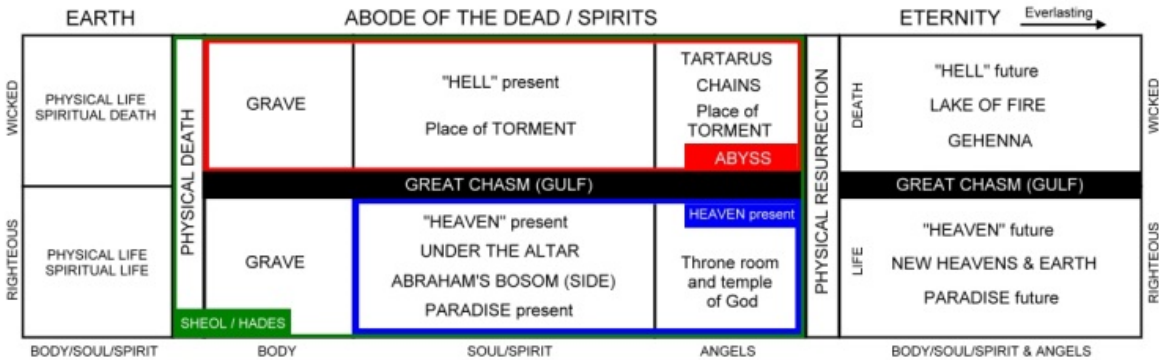
Proverbs 15:11 Death and Destruction lie open before the Lord — how much more the hearts of men! (NIV)

Comparing the Holman Bible's wording, the connection is clearer.

Proverbs 15:11 Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the Lord— how much more, human hearts. (HCSB)

Sheol is the land of the dead and spiritual beings. Both Sheol and the Destroyer (Abaddon) are an open book before God. Yes, another name for Satan is the Destroyer. Jesus, while calling him a thief, also stressed that his primary mission aligns with that ancient name "Abaddon."

John 10:10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (NIV)



God gives Satan the key to the “bottomless pit (NASU)” or “the Abyss (NIV).” In a related study of the afterlife (see appendix), we showed the Abyss is a generic term for the part of Sheol (Hades) occupied by the lost. Hades is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew Sheol. This broad use of Hades is rare and only appears once in Scriptures (Romans 10:7). A more focused view comes with all further uses of the term including in Revelation. Here, John is referencing that portion of Hades (Sheol) where God has confined fallen angels (demonic beings).

Demons fear this place of torment, the Abyss. They fear confinement there, a place where God restrains them from interfering with the affairs of humankind and the physical world:

Luke 8:27-33 When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. 28 When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!" 29 For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places. 30 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. 32 A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. 33 When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned. (NIV)

Without question, Jude and Peter both reference this same place as a destination for hosts of wicked of fallen angels:

Jude 6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home — these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. (NIV)

2 Peter 2:4 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell [Tartarus, a synonym of the Abyss], putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment (NIV)

God originally confined these remarkably wicked demons in the Abyss, and it is God who now allows their release by their chosen master. God has every right to do so, and His temporary emancipation of them does not contradict earlier statements claiming them bound or held for judgment. It merely shows that God, who is fully in charge, has one more task or purpose for them (in their wickedness) before He completes final judgment on them. This also displays God's confidence in His own power and authority; there's no fear or concern that these beings will escape or be a problem to recapture later. No, God himself preplanned every detail of their limited release. I imagine that Satan, and these released beings, are all self-deluded into thinking that they somehow have gained the advantage and that they are effecting their own plan. Like all lost beings, they somehow think they are in control of their own destiny.

Revelation 9:2-4 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. (NIV)

While focused on spiritual matters and beings, the present imagery joins the physical conditions and pictures presented in the first four trumpets. Reference to the physical help show these spiritual events belong to the already mentioned events. Places and beings, while spiritual, are both literal and able to impact the physical world. The fallen star is a spiritual and normally unseen being; the Abyss is a real place but normally physically unseen. The smoke rising from the unseen Abyss is also of that physically unseen nature. God enables John to see it rising into the natural world (the normally sunlit world) – showing that what is about to come from the abyss will impact the physical world. The physical part of this judgment caused a limited 1/3 darkening of the sun in the fourth trumpet (Revelation 8:12). The unseen smoke now



superimposed onto the natural world shows a darkening of the entirety of the sun and sky. This spiritual-on-physical picture highlights the global impact of what is coming with this smoke.

Out of the smoke come locusts (9:3). Again, these are not earthly locusts; they are spiritual beings with appearance as a dark swarm of locusts. If nothing else, this likeness shows the quantity and scope of their potential threat. Scriptures portray dragons, snakes and locusts as naturally hostile to humankind, each easily transferable to spiritual allusion as symbols of active spiritual evils in the world. In substance, these spiritual entities granted temporary release from the Abyss are the worst-of-the-worst of fallen demonic beings. They use the powers given them like scorpions, meaning they sting and bring pain and anguish, but don't kill.

Revelation 9:4 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.

While the physical happenings of the first four trumpets will impact believers and unbelievers alike, there is a limit to the spiritual side of this judgment. Similar to how God limited what Satan could do to Job (Job 1:12; Job 2:6), here at beginning of this cluster of three trumpets, God sets clear boundaries for these demons. Twin limits prevent them from targeting...

#1. The physical world (pictured by plants and trees). During this time, God reserves judgment on the physical world for himself. The four trumpets show Him already pouring out His physical judgment in measured quantities and none is to interfere or expand on that. God alone chooses when He wants to use others to carry out His judgment.

#2. Believers. God prevents them from harming any believer. This spiritual attack's pain and anguish is only on unbelievers. Limiting demonic beings in this way also presumes something: believers are still present on the earth during at least this part of the final judgment. And yet, even as God protected His people from the worst of the plagues in Egypt (Exodus 12:12), God is here protecting His people against this planned spiritual attack.

Revelation 9:5-6 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. (NIV)

Some imaginative end-times movies have portrayed all death stopping for five months and people not being able to kill themselves no matter how hard they try (perhaps becoming half-zombies). Remembering that this is a spiritual attack, by spiritual beings, all creating spiritual

and mental pain and anguish; the agony is internal. No one can make it go away. Their mindset becomes "I wish I would just die" and yet, God has prevented these demons from inflicting their wanted physical harm. This passage could translate in a fashion showing this more clearly (adding in supplied Greek words commonly left untranslated, but assumed in the English):

Revelation 9:5-6 They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And [this torment that] they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. 6 During those days [these] men will seek [this] death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but [this] death will elude them. (Translation mine)

The mentioned five months matches the natural lifespan of physical locusts. John uses this duration to explain a torment of relatively short, yet limited, duration. These tormented individuals earnestly want death from their spiritual tormentors, yet God has prevented their demonic persecutors from granting their wish.

Revelation 9:7-11 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. (NIV)

John continues to describe spiritual beings using earthly imagery. Here he uses imagery that parallels, to a degree, Joel's image of locusts as an army, also similar to horses (see Joel 1:4; 2:4-5). It's fitting he draws on Joel, as that Old Testament event looks to an inescapable, yet temporary, period of God's judgment. Notice that when anyone describes a spiritual being in Scriptures, even holy angels appear strange to us. For example:

Revelation 4:6b-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." (NIV)

Ezekiel 10:11b-14 The cherubim went in whatever direction the head faced, without turning as they went. 12 Their entire bodies, including their backs, their hands and their wings, were completely full of eyes, as were their four wheels. 13 I heard the wheels being called "the whirling wheels." 14 Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle. (NIV)

Isaiah 6:2 Above him were seraphs [literally "fiery or burning"], each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

While various places in the Bible speak of demonic beings, normally the text provides no physical description. I believe that this is intentional so we would remember the Apostle Paul's visual warning:

2 Corinthians 11:13-14 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. (NIV)

If we had imagery all through Scriptures describing grotesque or classically demonic creatures, we would perhaps view them as easily recognizable rather than the devious wolves in sheep's clothing that they typically are. Middle Ages and Renaissance artworks of hideous devils and demons, plus modern caricatures of the devil in a red bodysuit with a pitchfork, have all done what Scriptures took care not to do.

John's description of these demonic beings is unique in Scriptures – but, again, he is writing what he saw, the entirety of the viewed seals being visions to communicate a portion of their full contents.

Is John describing these creatures as being evil or malicious in appearance? I don't believe so. Their wickedness he clear shows by identifying their king or head. References to their actions highlight their wickedness. The continuing imagery describing the demonic creatures uses language invoking awe and perhaps wonder. Reading the passage again, make note of the number of times John uses expressions "looked like," "resembled," "was like," and similar intentionally descriptive terms:

Revelation 9:7 The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces.

- Locusts picture sheer numbers beyond count
- Looking like an army of horses shows size and strength (consider the majesty of a herd of horses in full battle array)
- Having human looking faces is typical to angelic beings
  - o Every angelic being, whose appearance Scriptures describes, appears as a man (for example Genesis 18:2, even the idea behind Hebrews 13:2) or has at least one face like a man (see Ezekiel 10:14 again).
- Wearing something that looks like crowns of gold pictures a ruler or exalted soldier.
  - o John specifically used Greek wording for “crowns like gold” or “crowns similar to gold.” These demonic beings have an appearance of authority or honor or right to rule, but in fact, they have a limited mandate. Their time to act is short and their crowns will quickly crumble. This is in contrast to the crown of gold Jesus wears (Revelation 14:14) and even the crowns given to the church (Revelation 4:4).

Revelation 9:8 Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth.

In the continuing “looks like” description of these demonic beings it says their hair was like women’s hair. Don’t imagine a creature literally having every physical feature in John’s description, something that would look grotesque. The individual features are merely a visual way of saying that they were majestic or beautiful in appearance. In both Testaments a woman’s hair symbolizes beauty.

1 Corinthians 11:15a but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? (NIV)

Even Solomon uses terms of majesty and beauty (specifically her hair) in describing the one he loved:

Song of Solomon 6:4-5 You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, majestic as troops with banners. 5 Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Gilead. (NIV)

Song of Solomon 7:5-6a Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel. Your hair is like royal tapestry; the king is held captive by its tresses. 6 How beautiful you are and how pleasing... (NIV)

Teeth, specifically lion's teeth, similarly describe something not merely ferocious but also beautiful, majestic, and powerful (for example, Joel 1:6). Even the continuing description builds on this theme:

Revelation 9:9 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.

Consider an army arrayed with iron breastplates, their movement causing the thundering sound of a vast horde of horses and chariots. While they may strike fear if opposed to you, they also invoke a sense of incredible awe and beauty. John portrays this demonic horde not as something grotesque or naturally evil looking but rather something of seeming beauty, majesty, and power. His use of these symbols in this manner makes sense; evil commonly displays itself as something beautiful, enticing and powerful, mirroring their king:

2 Corinthians 11:14-15 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. (NIV)

The felt beauty shrouding many sins is pleasure, prosperity, and luxury (see Hebrews 11:2; Luke 12:19 and James 5:5). Pleasure and prosperity are not sin; both are God-given blessings. They become sin when used to cloak wickedness and selfishness.

Satan and his demons likely kept the majestic appearance God created them with. There is nothing naturally sinful in this appearance, it's as God designed them. Their form was fitting for standing in His presence. Only after their fall does their beauty and majesty become a masquerade, disguising the raw wickedness lying beneath. This external likeness enables these fallen beings to blend in and appear among holy angels assembled before God. However, regardless of appearance, their speech and actions betray their present wickedness. Consider the same true for human beings. God created us in His image; we keep some majesty and beauty from the day God created us. Yet, in our natural fallen state, the best of this external appearance is merely a masquerade trying to cover what we have become; full of wickedness and deceit. Why is it that those with striking appearance or best natural or artificial beauty often find it easier to sway people and spread wickedness? Examples:

Appearance	Saul	1 Samuel 9:2 (also 1 Samuel 16:7)
Appearance	Absalom	2 Samuel 14:25-26
Natural beauty		Proverbs 6:24-26
Artificial beauty	Jezebel	2 Kings 9:30 (also 1 Timothy 2:9-10; 1 Peter 3:3)

Natural wisdom and strength are added parts of many masquerades:

Jeremiah 9:23-24 This is what the Lord says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, 24 but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the Lord. (NIV)

Returning to John's description of these newly released demonic creatures in Revelation. Only at the end of his depiction does he remind us that these demonic creatures, no matter how majestic, powerful looking, or beautiful, have something that follows them everywhere.

Revelation 9:10 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. (NIV)

Anywhere wicked beings go – whether demonic or human – misery and the effects of sin are sure to follow. (The reason God describes all creation as frustrated and groaning, subjected to sin "not by its own choice." Romans 8:19-23). For the supernatural beings in Revelation 9, this idea of sin following appears as tails able to sting. Again, their stings cannot kill – something God has prevented them from doing – they torment. Torment doesn't need to be physical, mental and spiritual is as probable – an agony that preys on the fallen, desperate, and futile minds of the lost.

Ephesians 4:17-19 So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. 18 They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. 19 Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more. (NIV)

Isaiah 59:2-8 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear. 3 For your hands are stained with blood, your fingers with guilt. Your lips have spoken lies, and your tongue mutters wicked things. 4 No one calls for justice; no one pleads his case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments and speak lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil. 5 They hatch the eggs of vipers and spin a spider's web. Whoever eats their eggs will die, and

when one is broken, an adder is hatched. 6 Their cobwebs are useless for clothing; they cannot cover themselves with what they make. Their deeds are evil deeds, and acts of violence are in their hands. 7 Their feet rush into sin; they are swift to shed innocent blood. Their thoughts are evil thoughts; ruin and destruction mark their ways. 8 The way of peace they do not know; there is no justice in their paths. They have turned them into crooked roads; no one who walks in them will know peace. (NIV)

The earlier words, in Revelation 9:6, where these people “long to die,” show there can be no satisfaction in all the felt pleasures or schemes of wickedness. Not surprisingly, even now many feel life is not worth living and choose (or want) to commit suicide. How many would join them if plagued by evil spirits whose entire task is to torment?

The Bible shows evil spirits able to mentally impact people, affecting both their senses and actions:

- Citizens of Shechem (Judges 9:23-25) – Robbery and violence
- Saul (1 Samuel 18:10-11) – Attempted murder
- Man in the Synagogue (Mark 1:23-26) – Controlled his words and self-violence.
- Man in Graveyard (Mark 5:1-9) – Supernatural strength, external and personal violence (including cutting himself). Controlled his words.
- Boy (Mark 9:20-26) – Caused convulsions, prevented him from hearing or speaking, caused him to try to hurt or kill himself.

God normally restrains evil spirits, only allowing some of them to carry out their wicked schemes and torments. The worst of these evil spirits He has temporarily bound and imprisoned in the Abyss. But woe to earth’s unsaved inhabitants that will experience more of the wickedness they so readily embrace. Even these formerly captive spiritual beings are eager to return to their wickedness. They readily embrace the torment they freed to inflict – their king is Abaddon, or Apollyon, the Devil himself.

Revelation 9:12 The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come. (NIV)

As difficult as it is to imagine, the previously referenced torment is a beginning, the first of God’s threefold perfect dose of woe. Details of the balance are coming. It’s worth reminding that God has decreed these woes for the lost and not His elect. Isaiah’s wording, given before one of Israel’s times of judgment and woe, still applies to God’s people.

Isaiah 3:8b-11 ... their words and deeds are against the Lord, defying his glorious presence. 9 The look on their faces testifies against them; they parade their sin like Sodom; they do not hide it. Woe to them! They have brought disaster upon themselves. 10 Tell the righteous it will be well with them, for they will enjoy the fruit of their deeds. 11 Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done. (NIV, emphasis mine)

The fifth angel brings the first woe, the sixth and seventh angels the second and third. Their separate grouping, a group of three within the seven trumpets, points to their spiritual nature and final perfection of God's plan in using these woes.

The second woe, the sixth trumpet, begins again with a spiritual scene. The decree issues from heaven, in the spiritual realm, and the effect of the decree is to release more previously bound spiritual beings. We then see that both the physical death and suffering of the sevenfold trumpet are from spiritual beings acting on this world (at God's direction, of course).

Revelation 9:13-19 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. 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. (NIV)

The fifth trumpet reminded that humans are spiritual beings. Now this sixth trumpet shows the spiritual world can also impact the physical world, if so allowed (or ordained) by God. The scene, once again, focuses on spiritual beings that are part of God's judgment during this sevenfold trumpet sound. While so-called natural disasters are happening (as shown in trumpets 1-4), that can cause many human deaths (Revelation 8:11), spiritual forces can directly or indirectly cause similar harm if allowed by God.

To recap; in trumpets 1 to 4 people are mostly indirect casualties of natural disasters poured out in judgment. In trumpet 5, God frees a vast horde of fallen spiritual beings from the Abyss,



to torment unbelievers but not kill. Now, the release of (merely) four more spiritual beings sets in motion the death of 1/3 of humanity.

Revelation 9:13 The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God.

John does say God himself gives this order, but it is unquestionably at His command. He tells us the voice is coming from the horns of the golden altar, namely the altar of incense first introduced as God gave out the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:1-3). This reminds us the command now given is still in answer to saint's prayers rising to God from this altar (Revelation 8:3-5).

Revelation 9:14 It [the voice from the horns of the altar] said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

John is typically clear in his portrayal of spiritual beings, using descriptions making it easy to learn whether he is referencing holy angels or fallen angels. Some see ambiguity in this one passage of Revelation, questioning whether we can know for sure if the four released angels are God's angels or demonic entities. Some observations:

#1. It doesn't matter if they are holy angels or demons, God commands and directs both to carry out His will.

#2. John clearly calls them "bound." This specific word and related forms (for example, in masculine form) appear more than sixty times in the New Testament, mostly to describe restraint against one's will. Examples include: Paul in prison, Acts 24:27; Paul in chains, Acts 22:30; the demon-possessed man in chains, Mark 5:4 and Luke 8:29; Jesus in chains, Mark 15:1; and John the Baptist in chains, Matthew 14:3. Jude uses it to describe specifically punished wicked fallen angels:

Jude 6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home — these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. (NIV)

#3. If Revelation 9:14 refers to holy angels, it reduces bound to casual restraint (as some assert). Why would John even need to mention their bound state? Would not Holy angels only do what God had told them to do?

#4. John also gives a further clue about these angels by describing where God held them...

Revelation 9:14b "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates."

Euphrates is a name used in Genesis and Revelation. The original Euphrates is one of four rivers flowing out of Eden.

Genesis 2:10-14 A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. 11 The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. 12 (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) 13 The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. 14 The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. (NIV)

This original river was, of course, destroyed in the great flood of Noah's day. Noah's descendants later name a river Euphrates in memory of that original. Post flood, all Old Testament references to the Euphrates refer to the still existing river which flows through modern Turkey, Syria and Iraq. The Tigris and the Euphrates are the defining rivers of ancient Mesopotamia.

In Genesis 15:18, God uses this well-known River as the boundary of the Promised Land given to Abraham and his descendants. God again stresses this to Moses at Mt. Sinai.

Deuteronomy 1:6-8 The Lord our God said to us at Horeb, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain. 7 Break camp and advance into the hill country of the Amorites; go to all the neighboring peoples in the Arabah, in the mountains, in the western foothills, in the Negev and along the coast, to the land of the Canaanites and to Lebanon, as far as the great river, the Euphrates. 8 See, I have given you this land. Go in and take possession of the land that the Lord swore he would give to your fathers — to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — and to their descendants after them." (NIV, see also Deuteronomy 11:24)

Once more, in Joshua 1:1-5, God highlights this boundary immediately before Joshua's conquests of the Promised Land. Yet, not until Solomon's reign did Israel actually rule the land all the way to the Euphrates. This vast territory was only briefly controlled by Israel, beginning and ending in Solomon's reign.

1 Kings 4:21 And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. These countries brought tribute and were Solomon's subjects all his life. (NIV)

Returning to Revelation, in a text (and chapter) so filled with symbolism, why does God reference the Euphrates? Alluding to the original boundary between Israel and all other nations, God uses this River as a symbolic boundary between God's kingdom and the world.

In keeping with the earlier given limits to not harm God's people (Revelation 9:4), John is making two simultaneous points by referencing the Euphrates. First, the angels bound at the Euphrates are outside God's kingdom. Second, in releasing these Euphrates angels God is still protecting those within His kingdom. He sets these angels loose to carry out their wickedness on those beyond the Euphrates (symbolically and spiritually the rest of the world). This best fits within the sevenfold parallelism (and uniform message) of the seven trumpets.

The image of lands in the kingdom and others outside must not be taken too far. Some present God as ruler only over His immediate kingdom, with the lands beyond the Euphrates (the world's kingdoms) ruled by the Devil. Scripture's big picture clearly shows all lands owing devotion to the Great King. Though the Devil and his minions believe themselves in charge, David had it right:

Psalms 72:8-11 He will rule from sea to sea and from the [Euphrates] River to the ends of the earth. 9 The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. 10 The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. 11 All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

As this Messianic passage so clearly portrays, Jesus will rule from the River Euphrates to the ends of the earth – all nations will serve Him!

Revelation 9:15 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. (NIV)

Why four angels? Upholding the symbolism of the number four, their actions impact the ends of the earth (the four cardinal directions of the compass).

God kept these angels bound for countless days with one purpose; to carry out the task He planned for them. The plan's details, down to the year, month, day, and hour under God's

control and by all signs unknown to the angels. Why did God withhold final judgment on these fallen beings when He first bound them? Because it served His purposes to delay it and to use their willful rebellion to carry out part of His plan at a later time. Why does God delay immediate judgment on humankind, even those who will never turn to Jesus in faith? Because God has planned the time (or times) when their willful acts of rebellion will serve His purpose and fulfill His eternal plan. This was true of the pharaoh of Moses' day leading to the Exodus (Romans 9:17) and for Judas Iscariot (John 17:12). God's delay is intentional for every wicked person (or being) in history.

Romans 9:19-24 One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" 20 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? 22 What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath — prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— 24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? (NIV)

The scope again is one third, this time specifically of people. It implies another 1/3, beyond the "many" referenced in the first four parallel trumpet sounds. Why do I believe so? Consider the first four trumpets dealt solely with physical (or natural) means of death (though supernaturally started), and these later trumpets, while parallel, are dealing with spiritual (or fully supernatural) means of judgment. Here God directs these fallen angels to kill, unlike the tormentors from the Abyss of the last trumpet (Revelation 9:5). Yet, even here, God restrains the scope of their murderous actions, limiting them to another third.

Though spiritual beings inflict this judgment, the effect is physical as targeted individuals die. It's also spiritual because those dying are also dead in their transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2:1). It highlights vast numbers going to their deaths spiritually lost.

How could four fallen angels kill 1/3 of the humankind? Remember that angelic beings, holy or fallen, as created entities they are unlike God. They are not omnipresent, time and events limit them (see Jude 9 and especially Daniel 10:12-14). Consider theoretical numbers. Let's round the present world population of 7 billion up to 9 billion. If trumpets 1-4 killed 1/3 (though the text says "many"), that would leave roughly 6 billion. If these four angels kill another 1/3 of the original total (likely since the trumpets are parallel), they would target another 3 billion people. Altogether this leaves another 3 billion alive on the earth. If they perform their task in the

same period as the torment inflicted by the Abyss demons (Revelation 9:5) they need to kill more than 5 million people each day for all five months. One angel can do much in one day, consider the angel of death during the Exodus (Exodus 12:12, 23, 29-30). But, the continuing scene shows these four angels have help:

Revelation 9:16-19 The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number. 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. (NIV)

Dispensationalists turn these mounted troops into something human; oddly claiming theirs is a fully literal interpretation. Of course they then say those humans are in battle gear described by John with looks-like statements. It's estimated that a physical army of this size would be a column a mile wide and eighty-five miles long. Preterists turn the quantity into a number merely meaning "a lot," if they consider the troops physical humans at all. Remember, Preterists believe everything in Revelation deals with the past. They're forced say the number cannot be a literal count of people because the given number is astronomical in the Roman period. John saw 200 million! Estimates (done by other researchers and scientists) place the entire population of the world in 1 A.D. at 150 million. Even if you wanted to believe that this army was human and literal, as late as 1700 AD there were only an estimated 600 million people on the planet (including men, woman and children). Even in 1700 it would stretch credulity to believe in a literal army comprised of one third of the world population including children.

The context shows these troops to be spiritual. Again, this account belongs to the second grouping within the seven trumpets. This three-cluster focuses on the spiritual and supernatural. In the first grouping, God prevented the released demons of the Abyss from killing, only allowing them to torment (Revelation 9:5). Here these four bound angels (bound apart from the ones in the Abyss) carry out another task. They kill. These four angels are not alone. They raise an army of other fallen beings, a massive army of 200 million, to help with their goal and task. The implication here is the released four take leadership over never-bound demons. Many demons remained earthbound, never in the Abyss, allowed to remain relatively free to roam the earth throughout history. An added 200 million demonic warriors make the task of killing 3 billion people easy. Each would only need to kill 15 people, not remotely

needing the “five months” given to the Abyss demons to torment (allowing time for other mayhem). Consider again the description John gives of these troops...

Revelation 9:17-19 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.

Once again, John uses majestic wording and imagery to describe something supernatural, even as he did with the hordes released from the Abyss. He pictures vast arrayed troops on horseback, complete with decorated breastplates showing divisions, all invoking of awe and splendor. He continues by associating the horses’ heads to those of lions, not to portray something grotesque, it’s further imagery of a majestic being.

Only in the following and intertwined description does John show the result of what these majestic supernatural beings are coming to do. He now uses images of items accompanying death and widespread destruction – fire, smoke and sulfur. And, again, he portrays what follows these creatures as something harmful and wicked: using tails like snakes, with a goal of injury. This army doesn’t merely injure to torment (as did the earlier), this is injury to kill.

The earth, already reeling from the impact of the natural judgments poured out on it, suffers a second and equally devastating blow – carnage and death unprecedented in the history of the world. To clarify, it’s an unprecedented event by numbers, not by percentage, because the flood’s judgment held the record for the later. How does the world react? Showing the vain condition of fallen hearts and minds, chapter 9 ends with these grim words:

Revelation 9:20-21 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.  
(NIV)

Remaining unbelievers, helpless to stop God’s plagues, having no control over their own destiny (as unbelievers so often believe they have), continue to trust in themselves and the gods they have fashioned for themselves. Perhaps the greatest irony in this is that they worship directly, or indirectly, the demons that torment them or have killed so many they knew. Apart from

God's intervention, the heart of a sinner is prone to keep on sinning. This lost condition is so well shown on this day of God's judgment. Solomon describes this fallen state of mind in colorful language...

Proverbs 26:11 As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly. (NIV, also repeated by Peter in 2 Peter 2:22)

This people, who refuse to recognize God even in this Day of Judgment, show themselves to be slaves to sin and depravity (Romans 6:17, 20; 2 Peter 2:19).

Revelation's dark imagery of troops bringing death parallels threatened imminent judgment on the Israelites, pronounced hundreds of years earlier in the Old Testament.

Joel 2:1-12 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand — 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. 3 Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste — nothing escapes them. 4 They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. 5 With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountain tops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. 6 At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. 7 They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. 8 They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. 9 They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows. 10 Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 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? 12 'Even now,' declares the Lord, 'return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.' (NIV)

John already made clear that only God's redeemed will stand (or endure) in the Day of Judgment. Joel's earlier call on behalf of God, to "return to me," given to a rebellious people, anticipates Jesus' words "come to me (Matthew 11:28)." This message stands to today, but not forever. When final judgment is on the earth, it's too late. As Revelation 9:20-21 states about all nonbelievers in that day: the rest did not repent. God's church is complete, leaving no

further reason for Him to delay the fullness of His justice and judgment. This fits with Jesus' words that "all the Father gives to me will come to me (John 6:37)" and what we saw in Revelation chapter 7. God withheld this final judgment until He sealed the last believer. In this final judgment, no more lost will come and no more will stand. This knowledge of no need to delay any longer permeates the words which follow (in chapter 10).

Revelation 10:1-4 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." (NIV)

We are still in the second "woe" of the sixth trumpet. Yet, after John gave the message of the sixth trumpet on the earth, his gaze returns to heaven where he sees another great event. John says that he sees "another mighty angel" to distinguish it from the angels he saw with the trumpets. Earlier John had seen a "mighty angel" who had called out to the entirety of creation asking who was worthy to open the scroll (Revelation 5:2). All creation heard the voice of the first mighty angel; here too this mighty angel gives a "loud shout" implying its reach to the entire world, whether at sea or on land.

John notes he saw the angel coming down, this shows his vantage point has shifted again from heaven to the earth. An angel standing on water and land is not to say there are 10,000-foot tall angels, rather it reinforces imagery of the angel's power, portraying him as being mighty. The reach of his message is planetary, across water and land.

Revelation 10:1b 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.

In trying to identify this angel, speculation is rampant (as any quick journey through various commentaries will show). Two popular alternatives include:

#1. An archangel. Yet this is only speculation, the text provides no specific name or office of this mighty angel.

#2. Jesus. They claim this identification based on the description given, because it uses so many symbols associated directly with God. This is a mistaken idea because Revelation (and the



entire New Testament) never portrays Jesus as an angel. He's clearly shown to be different from the angels (Hebrews chapter 2) and superior to them (Hebrews 1:4). Also, worship accompanies every appearance of Jesus in Revelation. No worship accompanies this angel or are angels to be recipients of worship (and the angels know this: Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9).

Speculation aside, this is (as John said) a "mighty angel," coming from and serving the Living God. He speaks a specific and majestic message from God. God (or Jesus) does not have to appear in the form of an angel to have His message faithfully pronounced. With mere angels so described, consider the greatness of God's majesty (some elsewhere revealed in John's portrayal of both the Father and the Son).

Specific to the angel's description:

- Robed in a cloud. Clouds show the angel came from God. These commonly attend the presence of God, here showing the angel comes with a message from God. The Exodus makes a definitive association of God with clouds (Exodus 13:21) and Deuteronomy further ties them to His majesty (see the appendix for symbolism of clouds):

Deuteronomy 33:26 "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. (NIV, "Jeshurun" is from the Hebrew word "upright" and is used to represent Israel as the upright people of God, e.g. Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5, 26; Isaiah 44:2)

Isaiah and the Psalmist portray clouds as means of transport for God (Isaiah 19:1), and the latter ties objects associated with clouds, namely wind and lightning ("flames of fire") with His messengers.

Psalms 104:1-4 Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. 2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent 3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. 4 He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. (NIV)

Robes of clouds associate this angel with the Father and the Son. The Son comes on the clouds of heaven as He enters the presence of the Father.

Daniel 7:13-14 "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. (NIV)

The Book of Revelation specifically ties Jesus' role in judging the earth with clouds:

Revelation 1:7 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. (NIV)

Revelation 14:14 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. (NIV)

With clouds surrounding him, John makes clear the message of this heavenly messenger is of utmost importance, a communication from the throne room of God.

- With a rainbow above his head. Rainbows only appear six times in the Bible, twice in Revelation and three times in the Book of Genesis. All Genesis references are in chapter 9 (verses 13, 14 & 16) and are about the sign God set that He would never again flood the entire earth to destroy all life. God set up and honored this everlasting post-flood covenant. Yet, Revelation's symbolism barely draws on this early rainbow event. At best, in that regards, it is a reminder that God keeps his covenants. Or, in other words, God keeps His word. Here, in Revelation, God is keeping his word and acting on what He foretold "It is mine to avenge; I will repay (Deuteronomy 32:35; Isaiah 1:24; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30; Revelation 6:10)."

It's the remaining, isolated, passage in Ezekiel that helps us understand what John is representing with his heavenly rainbow reference.

Ezekiel 1:26-28 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 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. (NIV)

A rainbow represents the glory of the Lord (see also Revelation 4:3). Even as clouds represented divine majesty, here the rainbow adds imagery of God's glory. These are clear signs that this messenger speaks God's behalf, also showing how important his message is.

- Face was like the sun. Those claiming this mighty angel is Jesus, often latch onto this feature in John's description and immediately tie it to:

Matthew 17:1-2 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. (NIV)

Yes Jesus' face shone, but Scriptures also show other with this supernatural appearance. Moses is one similar instance. His occurred while speaking directly with God, who gave Moses a specific message for His people.

Exodus 34:29-35 When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the Lord had given him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. 34 But whenever he entered the Lord's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the Lord. (NIV)

John's imagery of the angel's face in Revelation identifies someone to listen to whom has comes directly from God with an important message. Before moving past this attribute, also note the Bible says that one day, all believers will so shine from being fully in the presence of God:

Matthew 13:43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (NIV)

Even now, believers figuratively shine brightly in this dark world:

Philippians 2:14-16 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15 so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe 16 as you hold out the word of life — in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. (NIV)

- Legs like fiery pillars. This is a portrayal of strength combined with imagery of holy and purifying fire.

Psalms 104:4 He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. (NIV)

This imagery of pillars of fire invokes thoughts of events from the Exodus. During the Exodus God used a pillar of fire to show His presence and protection of His people, but also to confound and carry out judgment on those in rebellion against Him.

Exodus 13:21-22 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. 22 Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people. (NIV)

Exodus 14:24-25 During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. 25 He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt." (NIV)

That God is protecting His people even during this time of judgment is something that we have already seen in earlier events.

Moving beyond the mighty angel's description, his actions are now in view:

Revelation 10:2-4 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." (NIV)

The mighty angel was holding a little scroll, seemingly insignificant in the hands of one so grandiose. We previously heard of two scrolls in the Book of Revelation, this is the third and last. For the record, all three scrolls:

1. John was to be writing on a scroll all that he saw (Revelation 1:11). This was a summary scroll including portions of the later scrolls.
2. The scroll written on both sides, sealed by seven seals, opened by the Lamb (Revelation 5:1-9). This scroll revealed God's plan for the world (all creation) from beginning to end.
3. The little, open, scroll held by a mighty angel (Revelation 10:2-10). This scroll contains a shorter, more focused, message.

This little, open, scroll is the accessible message of the gospel. While associated with the second woe, it's the unchangeable message offering blessing (salvation) for those who follow the Lamb and a curse (judgment) on those in rebellion against Him.

The mighty angel plants his left foot on the land and the other on the sea. This symbolizes that his message extends around the world, encompassing land and sea. Readers must not take John's symbolic language to claim an angel bigger than the earth literally places its feet on these two physical planetary features. Again, by context, he is using looks-like imagery to communicate ideas.

The angel's shout – sounding like the roar of a lion – points to loudness (meaning all will hear) and to majesty and authority. Revelation 5:5 calls Jesus the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," so this could be reminding the listener the message comes from Jesus. This association is weak. Even the devil, with his limited power and majesty, is "like a roaring lion" in 1 Peter 5:8. Overall, here in Revelation 10, the imagery chiefly shows authority and a resounding noise. Also, a lion's roar could represent a warning – it's dangerous to ignore such a roar.

John often draws on Old Testament imagery in the Book of Revelation, making other Old Testament passages about the roar of a lion worth considering:

Hosea 11:9-11 I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man — the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. 10 They will follow the Lord; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. 11 They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes," declares the Lord. (NIV)

This passage in Hosea, where God is displaying His care for the remnant of His people, could be part of John's thought in Revelation. Yet, other Old Testament prophets are more likely...

Amos 3:7-8 Surely the Sovereign Lord does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. 8 The lion has roared — who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken — who can but prophesy? (NIV)

Jeremiah 25:30-31 "Now prophesy all these words against them and say to them: "The Lord will roar from on high; he will thunder from his holy dwelling and roar mightily against his land. He will shout like those who tread the grapes, shout against all who live on the earth. 31 The tumult will resound to the ends of the earth, for the Lord will bring charges against the nations; he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword," declares the Lord. (NIV)

The words of Amos and Jeremiah unquestionably parallel what John is witnessing and will witness. The roar has sounded. The need to prophesy is immediate (retelling what God has done and what He's going to do) and God is bringing judgment on all the earth's rebellious. More description of the angel's shout follows:

Revelation 10:3b-4 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."

The sevenfold thunder is symbolic of a perfect message, a message coming from God. John knew of David's words in Psalms 29, describing the thunder of God. The psalmist uses a sevenfold description of this thunder. As you read, note the seven appearances of "voice of the Lord" in this passage:

Psalms 29 Ascribe to the Lord, O mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness. 3 The (#1) voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord thunders over the mighty waters. 4 The (#2) voice of the Lord is powerful; the (#3) voice of the Lord is majestic. 5 The (#4) voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The (#5) voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. 8 The (#6) voice of the Lord shakes the desert; the Lord shakes the Desert of Kadesh. 9 The (#7) voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!" 10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King

forever. 11 The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace. (NIV, numbered parenthesis for emphasis)

Revelation 10:3-4 makes clear what Psalms 29 suggests. The thunder of God's voice is not merely noise; it contains a clear and concise message.

Revelation 10:4 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." (NIV)

John, all along, is writing what he hears and sees. But here, a heavenly voice orders him to not write. All heavenly revelation is good because it comes from God. Yet, regardless of its goodness, it's only good for us when revealed at its proper time. In restraining John from writing these words, God is saying the proper time to hear this pronouncement is only when it takes place. Everyone present in that final day will hear this message because God means it for them.

Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law. (NIV)

God alone reveal secrets He has kept for His purposes. What He chooses to reveal to His people belongs to His people for a purpose. If God decides to not reveal something to us it remains a secret belonging to God and for a purpose that He alone knows. Sealing, or not sealing up, a vision or revelation exists in other prophetic or eschatological passages, including elsewhere in this book and in Daniel. First, later in Revelation:

Revelation 22:10 Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. (NIV)

God restricted what John could reveal of all He saw and heard, yet God did not seal the overall message (the book of Revelation). Revelation's total message is for immediate release "because the time is near." This doesn't mean the last event in the book of Revelation was necessarily days away. It meant the events now revealed were starting. Nowhere does this phrase speak to the duration of the described period, only that its beginning was imminent.

Second, further examples of sealing from Daniel:

Daniel 8:26 "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future." (NIV)

Daniel's visions included events taking place hundreds of years later and others further away still (about the end times). God's messenger directed him to seal up his vision. This was not to say that people couldn't read it – as people immediately alive in His day surely did. It was God's way of saying the message was not for the people of Daniel's day, rather He would later grant understanding to an intended group. Again, God is the revealer of heavenly secrets and mysteries. Another longer passage in Daniel, also using similar terminology, is worth examining:

Daniel 12 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. 4 But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

5 Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. 6 One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?"

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."



11 "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. 12 Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days.

13 "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." (NIV, underlining and square for emphasis) [Antiochus IV also erected an "abomination that causes desolation" and stopped the daily sacrifice (compare Daniel 11:31), some feel that the Romans later did so too, prior to the temple's destruction in A.D. 70.]

Debate over the meaning of this passage spans history, from Daniel's day until now. Lack of uniform understanding perhaps suggests we are not the intended recipients (believers to whom God will grant a greater or complete understanding). The Jews felt it had at least partial fulfillment in the days of Antiochus IV and the later Roman events in the time of Vespasian and Titus. Yet, careful examination of details in Daniel's account show possible fulfillment of some details but no fulfillment of others. Combine this with wording alluding to the final resurrection and judgment, and I believe this account points towards a greater (and final) fulfillment in the end. The two earlier events are merely a shadow of the true fulfillment to follow.

There is an appearance of a roughly three and a half year period in Daniel's passage. Focusing on this detail, many have offered events including such a time frame as possible candidates for prior fulfillment. An excerpt from one commentary provides two divergent examples:

Josephus says expressly, in his book of the Wars of the Jews, that Antiochus, surnamed Epiphanes, surprised Jerusalem by force, and held it three years and six months, and was then cast out of the country by the Asmoneans or Maccabees. Christ's public ministry continued three years and a half, during which time he endured the contradiction of sinners against himself, and lived in poverty and disgrace; and then when his power seemed to be quite scattered at his death, and his enemies triumphed over him, he obtained the most glorious victory and said, It is finished. (from Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, Daniel 12:5-13)

I will not needlessly speculate over possible end times scenarios or what the given number of days means. (Even those pointing to earlier events only have rampant speculation on which they hang those numbers). Again, I believe this prophecies' meaning will be fully and properly understood only by those God intended finally to understand it.

Daniel's "time of the end" and John's "time is near" are both relative expressions. The first raises the question, "end of what?" The second similarly leaves you asking, "near to what?" If the latter's answer is the end of this present creation (the end of the last days events reviewed in Revelation), the expression's goal is to remind people constantly to be ready. Daniel's "time of the end," leading to the "end of days," refers to the same era which began in Jesus' day and extends to His triumphant return.

Revelation 10:5-7 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." (NIV)

The mighty angel of Revelation 10:1 swears, or makes an oath, in the name of the creator God himself. Some have misinterpreted Jesus' words in Matthew 5:33-37 (and related 23:16-22) as saying that all oaths are wrong. Avoiding an exhaustive examination of this subject, it is safe to say our Holy God allows some (lawful) oaths. The God-ordained actions of this holy angel, God's servant, provide proof of this fact. (Jesus responding to one is another great example: Matthew 26:63-64).

This angel solemnly affirms the coming imagery of the seventh seal will finish the portrayal of the mystery of God. What is this "mystery of God" the angel claims God announced to His prophets? Paul clearly proclaims what this mystery was:

Romans 16:25-27 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. (NIV)

Ephesians 3:2-6 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. (NIV)

The gospel, God's plan to create one people in Christ, is a "mystery." The world cannot naturally understand the gospel, or recognize its truth. The church only recognizes this mystery because of fuller revelation given us by God so we may now understand. Without God's full revelation by His Son and His apostles, it remained a greater mystery in the Old Testament. New Testament prophets understood this mystery but even Old Testament prophets did in part. God revealed to them a shadow of what was coming. Consider, for example, Moses writing of Abraham:

Genesis 22:15-18 The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, 18 and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me." (NIV, also Genesis 12:3, 18:18, 26:4)

Paul makes clear that this promise was an early announcement of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

Galatians 3:8-9 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (NIV)

The Psalmist foresaw a descendant ruling "from sea to sea (Psalms 72:8a)" and "to the ends of the earth (Psalms 72:8b)." All kings would bow down to Him "and all nation will serve (Psalms 72:11)" Him. Not only does "his name endure forever (Psalms 72:17a)," He fulfills the prophecy given to Abraham:

Psalms 72:17b All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. (NIV)

This is the mystery finding completion in this final trumpet: God's church finished, the fulfilled salvation of God's redeemed and the end will come. This revelation given to John serves the same purpose as the brief reminder given by Peter:

2 Peter 3:8-13 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. (NIV)

John's revelation provides far more detail than Peter. The reminder of both stands; God's patience is for a time and specific purpose, giving time for every believer comprising His final church to come to repentance. When God sets the last stone of this living temple, the mystery is complete and the end of the old order will come. This picture is the message of this final seventh trumpet.

Revelation 10:8-11 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." (NIV)

John's experience is similar to one of the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel. He too received a scroll with instruction to eat, one also described as sweet as honey in his mouth.

Ezekiel 2:7-3:4 You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. 8 But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house; open your mouth and eat what I give you." 9 Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, 10 which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. 3 And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the house of Israel." 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. 3 Then he

said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth. (NIV)

John's instance, though similar, has a few details that are different. These include:

- 1) The text calls the scroll a little scroll
- 2) Ezekiel's message was to the nation of Israel; John's message is to "many people."
- 3) Though sweet in the mouth of both, John provides a record of his following response: "my stomach turned sour."

Questions arising from this Revelation passage include:

- A) What does the scroll represent?
- B) What meaning comes from eating the scroll?
- C) Why does it first taste sweet?
- D) Why does John say in turned his stomach sour?
- E) Who is John's message intended for?

A. The text identifies the scroll as little to give contrast to the earlier scroll of Revelation 5:1, which contained seven seals and featured writing inside and out. That larger scroll contained the plan for all people and events throughout all history. This smaller scroll comes with a command: "prophesy!" What does it mean to prophesy? Prophesying for God means faithfully proclaiming God's truth as given. Although God gave John a glimpse, in images, of the larger scroll's contents, and even some portions God forbid him to speak (Revelation 10:4), the smaller scroll represents a universal message for all humankind. All preachers and teachers of Jesus Christ are to be proclaiming this clear message: the revealed, unchanging, gospel of Jesus Christ spanning both the Old and New Testaments. While awaiting God's coming revelation of the detailed events of the larger scroll, we rest in His present message, the fully proclaimed gospel of Jesus Christ. Here Revelation portrays this gospel and the need to proclaim it as a little scroll presented to John by a heavenly messenger.

While some spend too much time trying to speculate all that may be in the larger scroll, God makes clear all we need to know in these present evil days is the smaller subset. Focus on His gospel, the specifically selected revelation made known to us through His appointed messengers.

Paul said:

1 Corinthians 13:9-10 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. (NIV)

What we know and prophesy “in part” is not imperfect because of any flaw; it’s imperfect because it doesn’t contain the whole. This complete message awaits revelation in God’s timing.

B. God’s angel tells John to take and eat the scroll, showing that knowledge of the scroll, or gospel, is not enough. We are to take it personally, to fill ourselves with God’s Word, and to find nourishment in His Word. Jesus used similar imagery when responding to the devil’s temptation:

Matthew 4:4 Jesus answered [the devil], "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (NIV)

It’s likely the angel’s command would have also reminded John of these words he recorded in his gospel:

John 6:32-35 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. (NIV)

Imagery of God’s word as food is not unique to the New Testament; it comes from the Old – bringing us to the next question:

C. The Psalmist claims God’s word is sweeter than honey, as he also uses imagery of eating it.

Psalms 119:103-105 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! 104 I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path. Nun 105 Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. (NIV, see also Psalms 19:9-10)

All believers find God’s word sweet, something pleasant, and something we want more of. The sweetness of His word fills our mouths enabling our lips to share God’s word with others. In response to the gift of this sweet food it provides us words to praise God who nourishes us.

D. John's observation, over the swallowed sweetness of God's message turning his stomach sour, pictures the power of this perfect and purifying word. God's word passing from the mouth into the stomach shows taking the word into our inmost being. His message goes beyond something remaining on our lips and spoken from our mouths, the word affects us personally. Scriptures tell us how:

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. (NIV)

Hebrews 4:12-13 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. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (NIV)

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. (NIV)

Perhaps first in its tasks, God's word teaches us personally. It reveals still hidden and treasured sins, and it rebukes our sinful thoughts. This is a personally painful procedure and if this doesn't turn your stomach, nothing will. But there's more to upset your stomach; God's word creates opposition from sinful people. The sweet message that brought truth and life to the believer, brings with it persecution, opposition, oppression, and possibly even physical death. The world constantly shows its opposition to God's Word by attacking all who embraced it. Speak its truth or live by Scripture's message and you are a target. Consider some God-given warnings over embracing the message of the gospel:

Matthew 10:34-36 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' (NIV)

John 15:18-19 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (NIV)

Revelation 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. (NIV)

2 Timothy 3:12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (NIV)

1 Corinthians 1:21-24 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. 22 Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (NIV)

In summary, the gospel eater is someone likely abandoned by natural family and friends, hated by the world, persecuted, possibly killed and viewed as a speaker of foolishness. We have many scriptural reasons to reach for antacids to calm a sour stomach.

E. Unlike Ezekiel's message to Israel, God tells John his message concerns the entire world.

Revelation 10:11 Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

The word "again (or 'concerning' NASU)" stresses the message of this little scroll belongs to more than Israel, rather to the whole world. Earlier prophecies in Revelation already belonged to "many peoples, nations, languages" and kingdoms, now there is another.

Hosts of people hearing God's word reject it. The message is neither sweet nor a mere source of discomfort, for them it's a cause to stumble and fall. Unbelievers will never taste the sweetness or experience the sanctification that comes from this Holy word. Whether any accept the message or not, we are a chosen people called to declare God's praises, His word, and the entirety of His gospel (– even as the apostle John was).

1 Peter 2:6-9 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. (NIV)

The narrative in Revelation continues by showing the scope of who will prophesy, or proclaim God's gospel. John who was specifically told "you must prophesy (Revelation 10:11)," beyond him, is there anyone else? These next verses clearly answer the question...

### **Who will prophesy?**

Revelation 11:1-12 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. 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.

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.

Identifying John's "holy city" is central to understanding this passage. Most interpreters embrace one of two opposing views:

#1. The holy city is the physical city of Jerusalem. In support of this view, proponents cite mostly Old Testament references to Jerusalem using similar terminology (see Nehemiah 11:1, 18; Isaiah 48:2, Daniel 9:24). In the New Testament, two passages, both from Matthew, admittedly use similar wording for physical Jerusalem (see Matthew 4:5, 27:53). Returning to the Old Testament, they often cite one significant passage in Daniel:

Daniel 9:24 "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. (NIV)

To use this Daniel passage, dispensationalists need a long delay ("church age") before the seventieth week, otherwise it could only mean the old Jerusalem of Jesus' day. The Preterist, of course, claims the holy city was, in fact, the old Jerusalem destroyed in A.D. 70.

#2. The holy city is spiritual, representing a spiritual entity. Proponents of this position recognize that Scriptures does use "holy city" for physical Jerusalem, but all further uses of the phrase, except one, are in the Book of Revelation itself. Rules of Scriptural interpretation automatically, and normally, place greater weight on the more immediate use of any terminology. This means looking to the passage's immediate context first and then to the context fixed by Revelation as a whole. An interpreter cannot skip over the Revelation context and randomly grasp at ideas from other books. Moving directly to the Old Testament would only, perhaps, be acceptable if this passage was quoting an Old Testament passage.

Since Revelation 11:2 is not citing an Old Testament passage, John's use of the term "holy city" in Revelation 21:2, 9b-10 & 19 become our primary means of settling what John meant by this phrase.

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

Revelation 21:9b-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. (NIV)

Revelation 22:19 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. (NIV)

The Old Testament exception, the only other passage using “holy city” for something other than the physical location, comes from the Old Testament book of Isaiah:

Isaiah 52:1-3 Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. 2 Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion. 3 For this is what the Lord says: "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed." (NIV, which continues into the Messianic passages that end chapter 52 and continue into 53, culminating in 54:11-14...)

Isaiah 54:11-14 "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: Tyranny will be far from you; you will have nothing to fear. Terror will be far removed; it will not come near you. (NIV)

What Isaiah's passage sees in shadow, Revelation make clear. The true and final “holy city” is spiritual, a means of referencing the bride of Christ. This makes the holy city a synonym for “all believers” or “spiritual Israel (comprised of Jews and Gentiles).”

This second (spiritual) understanding, based in consistent context within Revelation, is also in keeping with the imagery immediately preceding it.

Revelation 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.

John has focused on a single temple of God so far in Revelation. Beginning with the first appearance of the word in Revelation 3:12, the temple is a heavenly one versus the last earthly one destroyed in the year 70. [Preterists want John to have written Revelation before 70 because their view needs most references to the temple to be a still standing earthly one of Jesus' day]. The next temple reference, in Revelation 7:15, has the same meaning. The present reference in chapter 11 is next (a double reference as verses 1 & 2 both have the word “temple” in the Greek, something the NIV omits in verse 2). Obeying rules of context, this passage must still refer to a spiritual temple and not a physical one. Only if this passage itself clearly shows John referencing something different, an earthly temple, would it overrule the

settled context. This verse sets no opposing view leaving the continuing context to guide proper interpretation.

I'll repeat this important detail one more time. There is nothing in the immediate passage that removes us from the already proved heavenly context. For the record, there are 16 total uses of the Greek word temple in Revelation. All, except the last two, reference a heavenly temple, Revelation 11:19; 14:17, 16:17 each specifically and clearly saying "temple in heaven" or "temple of heaven." The immediate context of those final two references, both in Revelation 21:22, look to the new heavens and earth. They go out of their way to say that no physical temple exists any longer; rather God and the Lamb are the temple! Simply put, it's bad exegesis trying to force a historical earthly temple (or a yet future end-times earthly temple) onto the temple referenced in Revelation 11:1-2. Whether Preterist, seeing only a past earthly temple, or Dispensationalist, seeking a future end-times earthly temple, Revelation 11:1-2 provides no support for either position.

I can hear the protests already: "So, wait a minute, isn't an altar mentioned here too? Isn't this the old temple's altar (destroyed in A.D. 70)?" Others would change that second question to an altar in a rebuilt future temple.

Revelation 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.

Since the immediate passage clearly shows this altar is present in the temple we just examined, the context says no to both protests. Some might ignore all we have already proved about the temple John sees. In support of our existing conclusion, based on the overall context of Revelation, the same exercise is worth doing for this altar.

It is true most altar references in the New Testament, apart from the Book of Revelation, belong to the previously standing temple of Jesus' day. Yet, Hebrews makes clear an altar beyond those old Jerusalem ones is more important.

Hebrews 13:10 We have an altar from which those who minister at the tabernacle have no right to eat. (NIV)

Looking to the other 26 books of the New Testament is premature, this is not where an interpreter should first look to settle context. First is the immediate context of the verse (here placing the altar in a heavenly temple). This should be sufficient. But, if it wasn't, second, we move to the rest of Revelation.

In Revelation 6:9, the first “altar” instance of eight in the book, we learn about souls under the altar, souls that by context are in heaven. Revelation 8:3, 5, has an angel attending to God at an altar with prayers of the saints, again in heaven (accounting for the second and third uses of “altar”). Jumping Revelation 11:1, the passage under consideration, Revelation 14:17-18 speaks of an altar associated with the “temple in heaven.” Finally, Revelation 16:7 finishes these references with a speaking altar, also associated with God’s temple in heaven (16:1). All seven instances surrounding Revelation 11:1 are about a heavenly altar! In parallel with our previous word study of Revelation’s use of the word “temple,” Revelation’s context clearly shows the altar of Revelation 11:1 can only be a heavenly altar. Again, Preterists and Dispensationalists find no support for their views here.

Revelation 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.

John receives a measuring rod with specific instruction. The rod is to measure a specific place or area. John’s focus is on the true worshippers of God, represented by the heavenly temple of God and its altar. Take note:

- 1) John receives no defined time frame to make his count. The implication is that he should count during the time encompassed by this second woe (or sixth trumpet).
- 2) Though told to count, the instruction does not direct John to reveal the specific number and nor does he.

If John received supernatural ability to count everyone there, his number includes all believers spanning human history, including some yet to die. From a spiritual perspective, all believers are with Christ in heaven already.

Ephesians 2:4-7 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. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (NIV)

Spiritual presence in heaven, only, may not be necessary for John’s count. If his tally continues to the end of this woe, as the text implies, the final believers will be fully present. This woe runs to the end, until the last saint dies and joins all earlier believers in God’s temple at the altar. We will soon see believers are about to die as part of this woe.

God never directed John to reveal his count because he previously revealed all we need to know about the number of people there:

Revelation 7:9-10 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." (NIV)

God wanted John to count, rather than estimate, to show He has a planned number of believers. By the end of this second woe, God will gather this completed people, finished in the time frame He fixed from the beginning. Measuring their gathering place shows that God planned and prepared necessary space every one of them.

John 14:1-4 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going." (NIV)

This idea of having enough space for each believer readily goes with imagery John used in the opening letters to the churches starting the book of Revelation:

Revelation 3:12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. (NIV)

This temple of God isn't haphazard, with random pillars here and there, or a few pillars short because enough didn't come through. No! From the beginning God set the number of needed pillars and makes sure that all will be available, and, of course, assures there is room for all.

Revelation 11:1b ... count the worshipers there. (NIV)

While we can see and understand that John is counting believers, consider the specific word employed here, "worshippers!" Every believer worships God and the Lamb, all who will eternally worship Him. If worship normally bores you, you are not yet ready for heaven!

What does this word "worship" mean?

The specific Greek word employed here is “proskuneo (NT:4352).” I say specific, because many other Greek words can be (and are) used to represent worship. The word John selected is significant in the way it portrays worship, alluding to actions that are foreign to our western way of thinking.

### **Definition**

Proskuneo (NT:4352) – One of several Greek words representing worship (or aspects of worship). Other words, by their Strong’s numbering, include: (e.g. NT:2356, 2357, 2317, 2150, 2151, 2124, or 4576, 4573, 2323 or even 3000, 1401, 1398, 5256, and 3008). Some lexicons describe this term with words or phrases such as “to kiss, to adore, to worship, to do obeisance, to show respect, to fall before, or to prostrate oneself in homage.” The Complete Word Study Dictionary (NT) states the word literally means “to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage.” This definition misses the attached idea of prostrating oneself in reverence or adoration. These actions are inseparable from how a first century reader would understand this word.

Styles of greeting in ancient Middle Eastern customs, remnants of which still exist in that region today, included salutatory kisses. While varying by specific culture or nation, customs of the Persian Empire (from the Babylonian captivity, taken over by the Persians) influenced Israel and lands extending from India to Egypt and the borders of Greece. This spread knowledge and use of the following practice:

1. People of equal standing or equivalent rank greeted each other with a kiss of the lips.
2. People with slight difference in standing or rank kissed each other on the cheek.
3. People with much lower standing or inferior rank would fall on their knees and bow to the ground while throwing kisses toward their superior. They completed this prostration by touching their forehead to the ground.

The Greek word “proskuneo,” as used by John, expresses this third form of reverence, of kneeling and prostrating oneself. This act of worship is a natural response of a people who recognize God alone as worthy, One who is of far superior rank. Consider again scenes showing this worship, earlier described for us in heaven:

Revelation 4:10-11 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."  
(NIV)

Revelation 5:9-14 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. (NIV)

Take note that this is the form of worship the Devil demanded in his temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:9). Unbelievers offer the same act of worship in their service of demons and idols (Revelation 9:20).

As previously mentioned, "proskuneo" worship of God is a natural response for all believers. Consider wording Paul uses about even a newly convicted unbeliever:

1 Corinthians 14:24-25 But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, 25 and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, "God is really among you!" (NIV. This text uses "proskuneo" and a second phrase, literally "falling on his face," to make sure the reader recognizes the humbling prostration involved here).

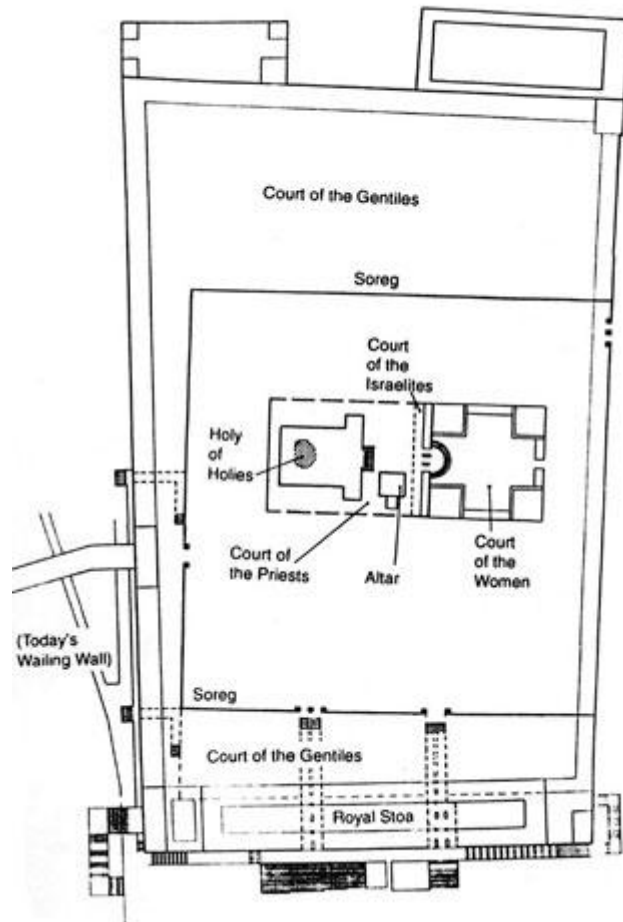
In our modern western nations and culture people consider such an act abnormal, perhaps degrading. Should bowing before God in this manner continue in Christian worship? Are such visible acts of worship important? Each believer and local church must answer these questions. Much of today's church culture spends more time portraying Jesus as a friend or buddy. Have we lost any way to show our submission to God, recognizing His superior rank, while also our friend and Father? If sensed harm to self-esteem is the only reason we don't do this, or an equivalent practice, perhaps we need to rethink our understanding of God's majestic authority. I don't believe any believer thoughts will be about appearance as the entire crowd bows before their Lord around His throne.



Revelation 11:1-2 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. (NIV)

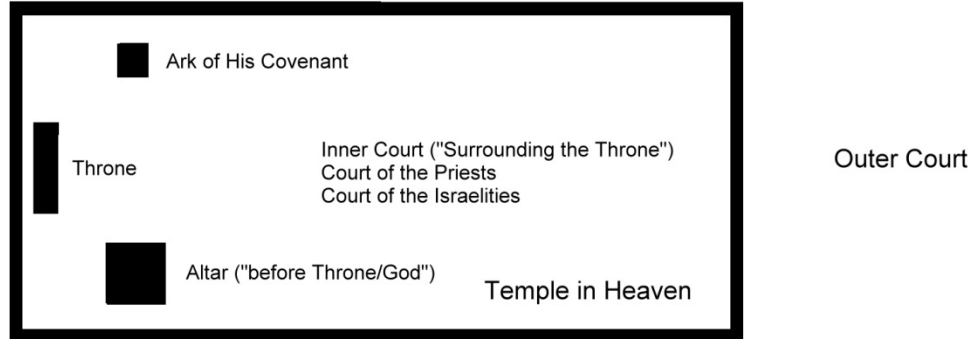
The instruction to measure the temple and count worshippers there creates a contrast with what follows in verse two. The word the NIV translates "but" beginning verse two is the Greek word "kai" which also can mean "and," a word designed to tie these divergent ideas together. In contrast to believers of all generations, Jew and Gentile, who worship God, the second clause shows people outside. Earlier the Euphrates was used as an illustration of a boundary between God's kingdom and those outside of it (Revelation 9:14). Here the pictured boundary is the "outer court."

In the now-destroyed temple in Jerusalem (see diagram below), there were multiple inner courts, specifically the courts of the Israelites, the Priests, and the Women. An added site appears in this area as well: the Holy of Holies.



John's view is different from this earthly temple. Take note that in his heavenly temple there are only two areas in total: the inner court and the outer court. The inner court is a threefold gathering place of all believers with God. First, the inner court is a combined and expanded Holy of Holies (for God meets with us there). Second, it is simultaneously a court of Priests (all believers are now God's priests). And third, it's a court of the Israelites (because all believers are part of spiritual Israel). The court of the women (formerly used by men and women) is no longer necessary. In the heavenly, men and women both access the entirety of the inner court. In the old temple, women could not pass into the inner courts of the Israelites or Priests, let alone the Holy of Holies. The simplicity of the heavenly temple, revealed here by John, is striking (see diagram below):

## Temple of God



This Revelation view of the heavenly temple shows all believers dwelling in the house of the Lord forever, a fulfillment to David's prophetic prayer.

Psalms 23:6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (NIV, also Psalms 84:4; 101:7)

The scene later progresses from the present heaven to the New Heaven and Earth (Revelation 21) and God does away with the present. There the bride herself (the New Jerusalem) is the eternal temple with God in her. Believers remain in their Lord's house for all eternity.

Returning to John's outer court, it's describes as a place "given to the Gentiles" or nations of the earth.

Revelation 11:2 But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles ["Ethnos"]. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

What does John mean by the term "Gentiles?"

### Definition

Ethnos – This Greek word (NT:1484) translates as "nation," "nations," "peoples," "heathen (meaning not of God's people)," or "Gentiles."

The Greek word "ethnos," translated "Gentiles" by the NIV, has multiple meanings. John uses it 22 times in Revelation, but only once does it appear in the NIV as "Gentiles (Revelation 11:2)!"

Their translators use “nation” or “nations” for all 21 other references. Beyond the NIV, other translations of Revelation 11:2 vary. For example, the NASU uses “nations” and NET “Gentiles” while footnoting both possibilities.

What was John saying, which translation is correct? Word use elsewhere in the New Testament and, most importantly, passages contextually linked to John’s use in Revelation become important for discovering a correct answer. Scripture writers commonly used the Greek word to reference all nations other than Israel. Dozens of New Testament passages feature this common use. One example from Luke shows him using the term in direct contrast to Israel:

Luke 2:27-32 Moved by the Spirit, he [Simeon] went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, 28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying: 29 "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. 30 For my eyes have seen your salvation, 31 which you have prepared in the sight of all people, 32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles [ethnos] and for glory to your people Israel." (NIV)

“Ethnos” sometimes references the nation of Israel itself, appearing in English translation as “nation.” John uses it in this fashion, in His gospel, four times in chapter 11 alone (verses 48, 50, 51, 52).

With such divided common use, where should we first look to understand John’s specific meaning in Revelation 11? Apart from the immediate context of the verse, other uses in the book of Revelation become the highest basis for correctly interpreting this passage. Starting from the beginning of Revelation, some passages to consider:

Revelation 2:26 To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations [ethnos]— (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Revelation 5:9-10 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 [Greek, literally “out of of”] every tribe and language and people and nation [ethnos]. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Revelation 7:9 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation [ethnos], 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. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Revelation 10:11 Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations [ethnos], languages and kings." (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Without finishing all remaining references in Revelation (as mentioned, 22 in total), know that all following Revelation 11:2 are similar to those prior. It is safe to say that John uses the term "ethnos" in its broadest possible form throughout this entire book. When he says "ethnos" he means "nations" spanning all nations on planet earth. Unquestionably many of these passages show his use of "ethnos" stressing unbelieving peoples. The nations then are unbelievers versus God's people drawn from these nations (see Revelation 5:9-10 again). Restricting Revelation 11:2 to mean only "Gentiles" is out of place with John's normal use of this word and out of place and unlikely based on book's context

Some translators favor "Gentiles" in Revelation 11:2 solely because it lines up with the outer court being the court of the Gentiles in the former earthly temple. They wrongly assume the old earthly temple, or a similar newly erected Jerusalem temple, to be in view.

Read this passage again, now knowing the outer court is all earthly nations (unbelievers).

Revelation 11:2a But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to unbelieving earthly nations. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. (BJM)

The unbelieving nations of the earth trample on the holy city. This raises the question, what does John mean by "the holy city?" Once again, we must first look at John's overall use in the Book of Revelation. This verse (11:2) is his first use of this term and nothing in the immediate setting clearly defines the holy city. In fairness, all familiar with the Old Testament would naturally think of earthly Jerusalem since the prophets referred to that city in this manner many times. Regardless, immediate context overrules popular understanding. Following standard rules for understanding language, if Revelation itself shows different meaning, its sense bears greater weight.

Revelation 21:2, 21:10, and 22:19 are the remaining uses in the Book of Revelation. All of these unquestionably show John using the term "holy city" to refer to the entirety of the church. The holy city, also called the New Jerusalem, is all believers both Jew and Gentile – spiritual Israel. This holy city contrasts the "ethnos" or unbelieving nations of the world.

**Definition**

Pateo – A Greek word (NT:3961) meaning “to tread on” or “to trample on.” It’s meaning can be intentional or casual, including deliberate trampling or a benign excess of walking on something.

Finally, in Revelation 11:2, what does John mean by saying they will “trample on [Greek, ‘Pateo’]” the holy city? Some examples of similar word use:

Old Testament (Septuagint) use (positive or neutral):

Isaiah 42:5 This is what God the Lord says — he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on [“trample,” Septuagint “Pateo”] it: (NIV)

The term only appears 5 times in the New Testament, including the passage we are looking at in Revelation.

The first New Testament use (a rare positive):

Luke 10:18-20 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." (NIV. Consider also Psalms 91:13 as found in the LXX as Psalms 90:13).

Two further examples from the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 14:20 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. (NIV)

Revelation 19:15-16 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. (NIV)

The remaining example sounds similar to our passage in Revelation 11:2:

Luke 21:24 [Jesus speaking] They will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to all the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. (NIV)

The two extra Revelation passages (above) unquestionably belong to God's judgment, and the same is true for Revelation 11:2 and even Luke 21:24. Because of John's further use in the Book of Revelation, I believe it's safe to say the intended use of the term in Revelation 11:2 is more than benign or neutral. He's using it as something negative, belonging to an act of judgment. This fits within a trumpet and second woe filled with judgment.

John is saying the nations of the world, unbelievers, will trample God's church (called "a holy nation" in 1 Peter 2:9). The "nations of the world" focuses on unbelievers, the central emphasis of this passage. Believers would not typically trample themselves. Yet, while living among the nations, saints sometimes fall into sin, acting more like the world than saints. Consider how often Christians trample other believers, because of remaining sin, either willfully or unintentionally. Of course some pretended believers, acting in this manner, are wolves in sheep's clothing.

Is this trampling, from both unbelievers and possibly some believers, something legitimately called judgment? I believe so. It's not a judgment to condemn but a purifying judgment God is using to perfect His church. Consider these words of Peter to that effect:

1 Peter 4:12-19 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. (NIV. See also Romans 5:3-4)

How long will this trampling of God's people take place?

Revelation 11:2b They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. (NIV)

Speculation about this being a literal 42-month end-times period is rampant, especially among Dispensationalists. Revelation 10:11 provides context for this value; the angel tells John he will "prophesy again." The given scope is the entire world, including "many peoples and nations and languages and kings", all who were to hear the message of the little scroll, the gospel of Jesus Christ. The outer court is the physical world, in contrast to the temple where God's people alone are in his presence. In this outer court, the world, believers and unbelievers alike mingle, even as Jews and Gentiles could gather in the ancient court of the Gentiles. Here unbelievers readily trample on believers. This scene has played out since New Testament times! John uses "42 months" to represent a fixed and limited period of time that we are not to know the end of (but God does!). Jesus refers to this same period as the "times of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24)," a period we are still in. Further proof that this 42-month period is ongoing comes from verses following.

John uses a three-part example to show the same time frame. His three examples, each representing the same period, are:

- 1) The holy city's trampling by the nations.
- 2) The period of prophesying by two witnesses. (Revelation 11:3...)
- 3) The time of the woman's desert stay. (Revelation 12:1...)

These three examples picture the entire duration of the gospel's proclamation (the little scroll), spanning the time of Jesus until the return of Jesus.

John uses short duration terms to show the temporary nature of this time frame. "Months" and "Days" give hope for a coming end versus using long-sounding years or centuries. A literal value would reveal timing for Jesus' return (which we are not to know). Yet God gives a number to show He has set a predetermined, fixed, and limited time frame for this period.

In each of the three illustrations John gives the same number, in differing form, showing he is referring to the same period of time. The longer third example further has two different, yet parallel, statements of time in it (numbered 3a & 3b).

#1. 42 months (Revelation 11:2).

#2. 1260 days (Revelation 11:3) – which is 42 months of 30 days each).



#3a. 1260 days (Revelation 12:6) – which is 42 months of 30 days each).

#3b. Time, Times, and half a Time (Revelation 12:14). – A form of 3½ years (or 42 months), simultaneously a broad statement to picture the longer period of time to which these numbers allude.

This final expression (3b) is functionally identical with much older Aramaic wording in the Book of Daniel (7:25), a passage also dealing with end times. John uses this particular wording to show he is referencing the same time frame as Daniel. Daniel's prophecy was then far future and temporarily sealed up. To understand Daniel 7:25 we must detour and examine two longer primary passages in Daniel (chapters 7 & 12), plus an introductory passage from that book (chapter 2).

Daniel 2:27-46 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. Your dream and the visions that passed through your mind as you lay on your bed are these:

29 "As you were lying there, O king, your mind turned to things to come, and the revealer of mysteries showed you what is going to happen. 30 As for me, this mystery has been revealed to me, not because I have greater wisdom than other living men, but so that you, O king, may know the interpretation and that you may understand what went through your mind.

31 "You looked, O king, and there before you stood a large statue — an enormous, dazzling statue, awesome in appearance. 32 The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. 34 While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

36 "This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. 37 You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; 38 in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

39 "After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours. Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth. 40 Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron — for iron breaks and smashes everything — and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. 41 Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. 42 As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

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.

"The great God has shown the king what will take place in the future. The dream is true and the interpretation is trustworthy." (NIV)

This passage set the stage for following prophecies in the book of Daniel. God revealed to Daniel a glimpse of coming kingdoms in the shape of a statute. It's in the last period of these revealed kingdoms that John's expression "time, times, and half a time" appears. (See also this article: [www.liontracks.org/roarlion/danielprophecy.htm](http://www.liontracks.org/roarlion/danielprophecy.htm))

A breakdown of the kingdoms likely represented by Daniel's statute (benefiting from historical hindsight):

Head of Gold (Daniel 2:32a, 37-38): King Nebuchadnezzar, the key ruler of this period, ruled before Christ around 605-562. If broadly representative of the Babylonian Empire and their control over the Jewish world, dates of 586 to 539/538 B.C. could apply.

Chest and Arms of Silver (Daniel 2:32b, 39a): The kingdom of the Medes and Persians, biblically associated with the rulers Cyrus and Darius (also called the Persian or Achaemenian [alt. Achaemenid] Empire). This period dates from the fall of Babylon. Dating by influence over Israel, dates would be about 539/538 to 332 B.C.

Stomach and Thighs of Brass (Daniel 2:32c, 39b): The empire of Alexander the Great, spreading Greek culture over a vast area. The following Ptolemaic and Seleucid dynasties are extensions of this same kingdom. Dating would extend from 332 to 63 B.C., especially about Israel for the latter date (when Rome claimed Jerusalem).

Legs of Iron (Daniel 2:33a, 40): The Roman Empire. This empire broke into two pieces, east and west. Starting at 63 B.C. for both branches: The west's end is 476 A.D. (fall of Rome) and the east 1453 A.D. (fall of Constantinople).

The Feet of Iron and Clay (Daniel 2:33b, 41-42): The weak and divided remnants of the Roman Empire. Since all earlier kingdoms of Daniel's prophecy directly followed one another, it's unlikely there is some major gap and then another set of kingdoms sometime future. Some have held the Roman Catholic Church is the successor to the Western Roman Empire, but that would seemingly make the Greek or Eastern Orthodox Church the successor to the east. Neither religious successor works well with Daniel's vision. Political empires and kingdoms are Daniel's focus. It's likely the divided nations arising from the Roman world's ashes are in view [and this could include the Muslim empire that took over the East and Russia, the self-declared successor of the Byzantine Empire].

Interpreters occasionally combine the legs and feet of Daniel's statue as one empire. It becomes necessary because of how they view the Rock in verse 34 and 44. To them, the Rock is God's kingdom only in a spiritual sense, appearing during the first coming of Jesus. They need the Rock's arrival during the time of the Roman Empire before its division. Rolling the feet into a broad category including the legs of iron accomplishes this. I reject this because the context clearly stresses the legs apart from those of the feet and toes, implying successive division of the divided Roman Empire.

Daniel is dealing with literal and physical kingdoms and there is nothing in the immediate context leading us to believe the Rock is referencing anything other than a final literal and physical kingdom of God. This best matches a physical return of Jesus (second coming), ushering in a final and eternal kingdom.

The ten toes of humanity's final earthly dynasty are important. This imagery of 10 appears later in Daniel and in Revelation. This latter empire could be 10 literal kingdoms, but symbolic is most probable in Revelation's context. Using common symbolism of the number 10, it represents a perfect number of kingdoms as ordered by God. Again, John's prevalent use of symbolic values throughout Revelation makes it likely the value is figurative.

God gave Daniel a later vision of beasts which repeats the earlier time frame of the statue while also highlighting extra details.

Daniel 7:1-27 In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream, and visions passed through his mind as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the substance of his dream. 2 Daniel said: "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me were the four winds of heaven churning up the great sea. 3 Four great beasts, each different from the others, came up out of the sea. 4 "The first was like a lion, and it had the wings of an eagle. I watched until its wings were torn off and it was lifted from the ground so that it stood on two feet like a man, and the heart of a man was given to it. 5 "And there before me was a second beast, which looked like a bear. It was raised up on one of its sides, and it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. It was told, 'Get up and eat your fill of flesh!' 6 "After that, I looked, and there before me was another beast, one that looked like a leopard. And on its back it had four wings like those of a bird. This beast had four heads, and it was given authority to rule. 7 "After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast — terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns. 8 "While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth that spoke boastfully. 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. 11 "Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. 12 (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) 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.

Pausing mid-passage, I need to point out some details:

The four primary divisions of the statue have parallels in this vision of four beasts. He represents the feet here as horns growing out of the fourth beast. The 10 horns represent the same idea as the statute's 10 toes. God assembles the court of heaven for final judgment in the days of these horns. The only valid way to interpret this passage is to accept this is the end times judgment and establishment of the final eternal kingdom. (A later passage in Daniel, chapter 12, further stresses this end of time understanding).

In the days of the ten horns, a new horn comes on the scene uprooting some that came before. Daniel wanted to know more about this newcomer:

Daniel 7:15 "I, Daniel, was troubled in spirit, and the visions that passed through my mind disturbed me. 16 I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. "So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: 17 'The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. 18 But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever — yes, for ever and ever.' 19 "Then I wanted to know the true meaning of the fourth beast, which was different from all the others and most terrifying, with its iron teeth and bronze claws — the beast that crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. 20 I also wanted to know about the ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell — the horn that looked more imposing than the others and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. 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. 23 "He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. 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. 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.' (NIV)

The end is sure, the beasts and horns (meaning world's empires and kingdoms) will all fall. They will come to judgment and only the eternal kingdom of Jesus Christ will endure.

Notice that before the end, that little horn – “little” representing the scope of its power when it first appears – becomes the kingdom best known for oppressing the saints. This kingdom is antichrist, opposing God’s people, and is in opposition to all of God’s plans and decrees. It’s possible the Antichrist is a single individual over that one kingdom. It’s just as likely it represents the leadership of this empire, spanning multiple rulers across whatever time frame this kingdom encompasses. Again, it needn’t be one “king,” rather it’s the office of “king,” regardless of how many fill that position over an expanded time frame. For example, the Roman Empire had many rulers, all with unified purpose; Caesar was “king” over that empire.

Take note that, for God’s reasons and glory, He hands His saints over to this final horn, meaning believers will suffer and perhaps die for their faith during this time. How long does this continue? God’s messenger tells John the time of the horns and fourth beast is “a time, times and half a time.” God limits this period, there is an end! When it’s all over, victory belongs to God as He has decreed in advance.

Daniel 7:25 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. (NIV, emphasis mine)

The NIV translators present the Aramaic word “ad” (identical in Hebrew) in English as “for.” Equally valid alternate translations include “until,” “during” or “within.” This passage in Daniel is compatible with Revelation’s portrayal of “a time, times, and half a time” spanning the entire time of the first beast (from the Roman Empire until the return of Jesus). Here Daniel is saying this later feature of that beast, a ruler arising to subdue three earlier rulers, will do this “during” this time frame. In keeping with Revelation’s clarifications, this event will be within that time, times and half a time, likely late in this period. Translating Daniel in this way has 7:25 reading as...

Daniel 7:25 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 **during** a time, times and half a time. (BJM, emphasis mine)

Daniel concern has him again asking about the time frame, this coming at the end of his book.

Daniel 12:1-13 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those

who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. 4 But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

5 Then I, Daniel, looked, and there before me stood two others, one on this bank of the river and one on the opposite bank. 6 One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long will it be before these astonishing things are fulfilled?" 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.

11 "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. 12 Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days. 13 "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." (NIV)

Once again, God stresses the end of this vision belongs to the far future, a time identified with the final resurrection (and not the temple's destruction as Preterists somehow assert). Again the speaker reemphasizes the time frame as "a time, times, and half a time," but cryptically he also gives a set value of days. These two day values both exceed three and half years. With the last value he assures us something wonderful is coming after the time set for the church's persecution (a period including the days of that final horn).

I am not the first to see that the apostle John is completing and clarifying Daniel's vision. One ancient writer (writing around 180 A.D.) recognized the same:

In a still clearer light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicated to the Lord's disciples what shall happen in the last times, and concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules [the earth] shall be partitioned. He teaches us what the ten horns shall be which were seen by Daniel, telling us that thus it had been said to

him: "And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, who have received no kingdom as yet, but shall receive power as if kings one hour with the beast. (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, 5.26.1)

We now return to Revelation 11 with Daniel still in view. Daniel and John's "time, times, and half a time" are the days of the gospel, during which the church spreads the gospel. This spans from Jesus earthly ministry until the end the last human kingdom. This period includes the days of the last beast, the ten horns and the little and final horn. The end of this period will see the beast (and horns) judged, and Daniel's statue forever broken, as God replaces the kingdoms of men with the everlasting kingdom of Jesus Christ.

The following chart shows many parallel or roughly parallel illustrations use by Daniel, John, Jesus and the other apostles:

Duration	Passage	Description	Ends at...
42 months (12 x 3.5)	Revelation 11:2	Period of trampling by the nations (Gentiles)	Determined time by God
1260 days (30 x 12 x 3.5)	Revelation 11:3	Time of prophesying by the two witnesses	Witnesses overpowered by beast / resurrection of witnesses
1260 days (30 x 12 x 3.5)	Revelation 12:6	Duration of the woman's stay in desert	Determined time by God
Time, Times, ½ Time (3.5)	Revelation 12:14	Duration of the woman's stay in desert & dragon's attacks on offspring.	
42 months (12 x 3.5)	Revelation 13:5	Period of persecution by the Beasts	Period of great persecution of saints by second Beast & Harvest of the Earth.
Last Kingdoms	Daniel 2:40-46	Kingdom of Iron and kingdoms of iron and clay	Destruction of earthly kingdoms and establishment of eternal kingdom
Time, Times, ½ Time	Daniel 7:7-27	Last Beast with 10	Saints being



(3.5)		horns and final little horn	overpowered by the beast. Destruction of beast, final judgment and establishment of the eternal kingdom
1290 days / 1335 days (30 x 12 x 3.5 + 30 / 30 x 12 x 3.5 + 30 + 45)	Daniel 12:1-13	Period of purification and wickedness (wise and unwise).	Saints defeated, Resurrection to everlasting life or death
Time until Justice	Luke 18:7-8	Time for saints cry out for justice.	A time when faith appears to be missing, then God gives justice.
Time for Patience	2 Peter 3:3-13	Days of God's patience until all are saved.	Period of Scoffers ends with return of the Lord, judgment, recreation, New Heavens & Earth.
Time to Stand Firm	Matthew 24:4-31	From Birth Pains until Delivery.	Period of persecution and death, false prophets, great tribulation, apostasy (v12) visible church defeated (v22), return of Jesus and gathering of elect.
Times & Dates	1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 (4:14-18)	Don't need to know the time or date. Live alert and self-controlled.	People falsely claiming "Peace and Safety," return of Jesus and Resurrection. Eternity with Jesus.
Time for Patience	James 5:7-11	Wait patiently for the Lord's return while standing firm.	When the time is ready, Jesus returns.
Time until the Coming	2 Thessalonians 2:1-15 (consider also Daniel 11:33-45)	Don't be deceived even in the face of counterfeit signs,	A major rebellion occurs, man of lawlessness revealed,

		wonders, and miracles.	then Jesus returns.
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Revelation's beasts refer to kingdoms or empires and not individuals. Scriptures identify the Antichrist (man of lawlessness) with a beast, but he is not synonymous with the beast. This man arises in that empire's time. Nothing in the text convincingly says he is part of the empire. Even if he arose outside it, unquestionably that anti-Christian power will welcome and follow him (or at least work in common purpose with him). We will look further at the beasts of Revelation in the verses and chapters which follow (especially chapter 13).

Revelation 11:3-6 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. (NIV)

Does the text identify the two witnesses? Those trying to pick specific people have proposed Enoch and Elijah, both because God translated them into heaven (Genesis 5:24 & 2 Kings 2:11), the only two who never died. Early church fathers Tertullian and Irenaeus were perhaps the first to offer this suggestion. Somehow this gives speculators enough probable cause to suggest God sends these two back for a final mission. The witnesses' ability to perform miracles no more points to Elijah than any other Biblical prophet or apostle, and nowhere does the Bible hint that Enoch performed any miracles. This Enoch and Elijah theory lacks biblical support and I discard it as, at best, a guess. Others suggest Moses and Elijah (because of Deuteronomy 18:15 & Malachi 4:5) and still others have selected their favorites from a host of other Biblical figures including some New Testament apostles. Again, these offer pairs are all textually unsupported guesses.

Remember John uses three examples, each representing the same time frame:

- 1) The holy city's trampling by the nations (Revelation 11:2b)
- 2) The period of prophesying by two witnesses. (Revelation 11:3...)
- 3) The time of the woman's desert stay. (Revelation 12:1...)

The second of John's parallel examples is now in view. The first example spans a vast period of time. So too these two witnesses, making them best understood as being symbolic, even as the following woman is in the third example.

What two witnesses, or perhaps better worded, twofold witnesses, are in view throughout the time of nations trampling the holy city? Unquestionably, it is the church of Jesus Christ, both Jew and Gentile. This twin appearance is in keeping with earlier imagery representing the church as 24 elders (12 each for Jews and Gentiles. See Revelation 4:4, 10).

It is Jesus' church God gives the gospel to (see chapter 10 that preceded these examples), the witness that calls the world to repent and come to faith in Him. Their message is for the entire world, all peoples, nations, languages and kings (see Revelation 10:11 and 11:9).

Dispensationalists who believe these are two literal witnesses, during a short period, claim worldwide television or media will make their message and image available to the whole world (see the Left Behind series of books). Their excessively literal understanding of the two witnesses, for consistency, demands 100%. Every person (11:9) must hear the message, an unlikely result. Even if everyone had coverage, they likely wouldn't hear the real message. While some country's media would cover such an event, everything we know of our mostly anti-Christian modern media is they would make sure little of the true message would come through. Most event coverage would feature pundits and commentators providing their analysis of the message's absurdity. Setting aside these unfounded speculations, again, the context better shows these are a pair of symbolic messengers, as we have already shown.

Another interesting note over the text representing the witnesses as a pair: God consistently says people are to settle matters by the testimony of two or three witnesses. This was true in the Old Testament Law of Israel (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; Hebrews 10:28; John 8:17). It remained true in the New Testament church for discipline (Matthew 18:15-16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; and 1 Timothy 5:19). Consider that God uses his twofold church, Jew and Gentile, as a twin witness against those who will appear before His judgment seat. Indeed God has a threefold witness in this passage; the two bring with them the third witness: God's Word.

Hebrews 4:12-13 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. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (NIV)

Jesus is inseparably the Word of God (John 1:1, 14). Stating the word of God judges is to say God himself is that third and most important witness. The coming judgment of the Word of God is a message the two witnesses consistently bring:

Romans 2:16 This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares. (NIV)

Jude 14-15 Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." (NIV)

The church, Jew and Gentile, are the twofold witness that will appear with God when He judges the world.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 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! (NIV)

Jesus was all about sending out his disciples in pairs during His earthly ministry (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1). This allowed people to hear the message of truth from multiple witnesses. Later events show the apostles kept up this practice on many occasions (e.g. Acts 3:1; Acts 8:14; Acts 15:40; and even three: 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1 in context of Acts 17:13-15). I believe this is one reason God wants multiple elders to teach and lead His local churches. Their unified message is testimony from the mouths of two or three witnesses!

Revelation 11:3-4 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. (NIV)

John further describes the two witnesses as being two olive trees and the two lampstands. Lampstands appear earlier in the Book of Revelation (e.g. 1:12, 20; 2:1, 5) where they unquestionably represent the church. With John here saying the witnesses are a lampstand, he is clearly stating the witnesses are figurative of the church (not individual believers). John is also using these figurative expressions to draw on Old Testament imagery from Zechariah chapter 4. That chapter speaks of both twin olive trees and a lampstand and ends with these words:

Zechariah 4:11-14 Then I asked the angel, "What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?" 12 Again I asked him, "What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?" 13 He replied, "Do you

not know what these are?" "No, my lord," I said. 14 So he said, "These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth." (NIV)

John draws on Zechariah's imagery to show the twin lampstands, the church Jew and Gentile, is also a twin olive tree. God has anointed them to "serve the Lord of all the earth" – specifically through proclaiming His gospel. [On a side note: Early Jewish speculation over these twin-anointed led to mistaken conclusions. One major idea was two messiahs: Messiah son of Joseph and Messiah son of David. Supporters of this idea believed two messiahs were necessary as they could not see one Messiah could both rule and suffer. In the same way they couldn't see fulfillment of God's words to Abraham that through his descendants He would bless the whole world (Genesis 12:3; Galatians 3:8). This blessing is the twin lampstand and olive trees!]

Why do the witnesses appear dressed in sackcloth? Forty-seven uses of the word throughout Scriptures uniformly use sackcloth to represent mourning (sometimes associated with repentance) or being in distress, leaving this 48<sup>th</sup> case to mean the same. [A final 49<sup>th</sup> reference is a looks-like statement describing the black appearance of sackcloth made of goat hair. See Revelation 6:12]. Why is the twofold church shown mourning or in distress? This returns to prior imagery where Revelation 11:2 shows nations trampling the holy city (God's church). We mourn for our persecuted brothers and sisters and those dying for the cause of Christ. We long for the end of this period of trampling, crying out with martyrs "How long O Lord? (Revelation 6:10)." Consider that some of God's messengers literally wore sackcloth (for example John the Baptist, Elijah, and Isaiah), back when the act meant something. Their example showed people how offensive their sin was to God, all while warning of coming judgment. The church mourns for issues the world can never understand.

John 16:20 I [Jesus] tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. (NIV)

The church, like someone wearing sackcloth in ancient times, displays repentance while proclaiming the gospel to the whole world. Sackcloth symbolizes wearing our repentance in a way the world sees it by our deeds.

Acts 26:20 [Paul speaking to Agrippa] First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. (NIV)

Note the contrast found here in the Book of Revelation. To the world we appear dressed in black and uncomfortable robes of sackcloth, while to God we appear dressed in white robes of fine linen (Revelation 7:9, 13-14; 19:8). So how do we see ourselves? How should we see ourselves? Do we view our actions as dark and uncomfortable or white and luxurious? I'm personally inclined to think the more we learn to serve out of love, the more we learn to see them as the latter (as God does).

These two witnesses proclaim their message until the end of the age (the time frame represented by the 1,260 days) in fulfillment of the Great Commission (Mark 16:15). When their witness is over, God removes his church and the outpouring of His final wrath begins.

Revelation 11:3-6 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. (NIV)

John describes the witnesses as able to do miracles because God fills the church with His power. We proclaim the message through His power and have available everything that God has enabled His people to do throughout history. John uses well-known examples of this power from the days of the Old Testament prophets to show how mighty our God is. The fiery example doesn't say the church literally calls down fire on its enemies – as the disciples learned:

Luke 9:54-55 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them (NIV)

The church is to love our enemies and do good to those who mistreat us (Luke 6:27; Matthew 5:44), even though we have God's power like the Old Testament prophets.

Because the church doesn't physically call down fire and invoke plagues, we see the spiritual truth behind the passage. How does the world try to harm us? By silencing our message! But the church cannot be silenced. God's word comes out of our mouths anyway, as an unquenchable fire. It is this living and active word (Hebrews 4:12) that burns and eventually consumes every enemy of the gospel.

Hebrews 12:29 for our God is a consuming fire. (NIV)

Though the church could call on God for the physical miracles He did through Moses (with the plagues) or Elijah (with no rain), we...

Romans 12:19-21 Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NIV)

John's words clearly point out the church has at its disposal the ability to call on God for everything it needs – as God sees fit.

Matthew 17:20 He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (NIV)

Matthew 21:21-22 Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done. 22 If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer." (NIV)

James 5:16-18 The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. (NIV)

If the church has power to do all these great miracles, we unquestionably have power to do what our Lord has commanded us to be doing. Specifically, we're to be living a life of love towards our enemies, opponents of the gospel we proclaim. Loving them doesn't minimize our need to stand on and express God's unchanging truth, it underlines it!

Take note that even with all this divine power available to these witnesses it does not prevent them from being finally overcome, when they're finished the task God has assigned to them. Again, miracles are of God's choosing and He enables them in answer to our prayers only when He wants and always for His purposes. [Remember that even the great apostle Paul, who did

many miracles, had a companion he could not heal: 2 Timothy 4:20] Here in Revelation the text shows that when the witnesses complete their task, God seemingly leaves them unprotected for His greater purpose:

Revelation 11:7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. (NIV)

Late in time, as the world nears its end, the kingdoms of this world will seemingly triumph over God's church. Will the church literally be dead, gone from earth, for a time? I think Scriptures imply God always has a remnant, no matter how small (Romans 11:1-5). Yet, being near the end, perhaps God plans a temporary complete absence. Or, maybe the remaining church is so small and weak the world can no longer see it as alive. This event is the time pointed to in Jesus' words:

Luke 18:8b However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth? (NIV)

Another gospel description well-describes this faithless period:

Matthew 24:10-12 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold... (NIV)

This is not the "gates of hell" prevailing over God's true church, something Jesus promised would never happen (Matthew 16:18). In the greater picture, the church prevails no matter her temporary condition in place or time.

How does the world react to the seeming death of Christ's church, this twin witness long known for their tormenting message and righteous acts? The next verses reveal the world for what it is; enemies of both God and His people (Philippians 3:18; James 4:4). They will gloat and celebrate when they believe no one remains to point out their wickedness and sinful acts and thoughts. They celebrate because the stench of truth, the aroma of Christ, is no longer in their nostrils (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Why describe the beast as come "up from the Abyss (Revelation 11:7)?" John calls it "the beast," even though he has not yet introduced it, leaving further details to appear later in his book. We'll example this beast's qualities when we get to those chapters (especially chapters 13 and 17). For now, John reveals this one detail, the beast's origin. All the beast thinks and does is from the Abyss, where God imprisoned the worst of fallen spiritual beings (demons)



(see Luke 8:31). As we saw in chapter 9, at fifth trumpet's sounding, He releases those imprisoned in the Abyss, for a time, to torment the earth (Revelation 9:1-5). Their king's identification is "Abaddon" and "Apollyon," namely the Devil himself (Revelation 9:11). If Satan is king over those in the Abyss, we know his instruction and inspiration comes with all rising from the Abyss. Every entity coming from the Abyss belonged there. The beast isn't Satan himself, for the beast represents a kingdom or empire (even as beasts did in the Book of Daniel). Satan is the behind-the-scenes motivator and power of this beast. It's called "the beast" because the church is "overcome (11:7 NASU)," during this kingdom or empire. Defeat of the saints is unique to this beast (Daniel 7:21) and faith looks extinct on the earth (Luke 18:8) during its tenure. (This picture is contrary to utopian ideas espoused by some embracing Dominion Theology who see the church taking over world governments and ruling the world with biblical principles).

The "man of lawlessness" appears during beast's era. This final special Antichrist opposes all that God is and all that God has fixed as being right and true (see 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Specifically we learn the Antichrist sits (meaning "rules") in God's temple, proclaiming he's God (unbound by any rule except himself). Our physical body is a temple for worship of God (see 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Corinthians 6:19; 1 Corinthians 3:16), turned a pagan temple by unbelievers. The Antichrist is an arrogant human claiming he's God in the flesh (a false Messiah). While of note for his final rebellion, he's not much different from multitudes of atheistic rulers and despots claiming themselves accountable to no one throughout history. Scriptures assure many antichrists with similar goals appear before this last Antichrist.

1 John 2:18-19 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. 19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us. (NIV)

Notice that antichrists commonly go out from God's church. While not directly stated in Scriptures, the final Antichrist may be a self-proclaimed or former Christian, a person who has abandoned the true faith. The Man of Lawlessness comes with "the rebellion (2 Thessalonian 2:3)," rebellion being the Greek word "apostasia." This word includes rebellion against authority and abandonment of the faith. Many think the mentioned rebellion is a broad burst of disobedient doings worldwide. It's as likely there's more focus to this final rebellion – a worldwide rebellion or apostasy in the Christian church. This Antichrist will appeal to both the corrupted Christian church and the world.

Returning to the text in Revelation 11, the Holman Bible better shows the three instances of “their (dead) bodies (Greek: ‘autos ptoma’)” across these two verses:

Revelation 11:8-9 Their dead bodies (#1) will lie in the public square of the great city, which prophetically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 And representatives from the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will view their bodies (#2) for three and a half days and not permit their bodies (#3) to be put into a tomb. (HCSB)

The first two instances are singular in Greek, stressing they represent one corporate body, God’s church. Showing these singular uses, the passage can read:

Revelation 11:8-9 Their dead body (#1) will lie in the public square of the great city, which prophetically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. 9 And representatives from the peoples, tribes, languages, and nations will view their body (#2) for three and a half days and not permit their bodies (#3) to be put into a tomb. (Mine)

Returning to verse 8...

Revelation 11:8 Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. (NIV)

This gruesome event takes place in “the great city.” What great city is John referencing? The provided clues:

“Great city”

“Figuratively called Sodom”

“Figuratively called Egypt”

“Where their Lord was crucified”

Some claim John was trying to identify a literal city. (Those trying to say literal cite Jeremiah 22:8 as proof Scriptures once called Jerusalem a “great city.” They then assume John was looking forward to a rebuilt Jerusalem in the end times). This goes against context and all immediately preceding this verse. The “great city” is spiritual wording, a spiritual portrayal; the city is a metaphor for a spiritual entity. The NIV’s “figuratively” or the HCSB’s “prophetically” is the Greek word “pneumatikos,” meaning “spiritually.” John uses a spiritual likeness.

John is here contrasting two cities, shown by the overall context of Revelation. In Revelation’s imagery only two cities are ever in view. The second city, the final city (later clearly introduced),

is the one all believers long for. It's the eternal "holy city," representing the entirety of God's true church:

Revelation 21:9-10 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. (NIV)

Here, in chapter 11, John references a different city that is *not* holy. Instead he describes it as being only "great." Further assigned qualities merely serve to reinforce that this metaphorical city is corrupt. Like Sodom, ten righteous aren't in it. Like Egypt, it is a place working to hold captive God's people. The world, itself, fits this description.

While some Old Testament prophets equated earthly Jerusalem or national Israel with Sodom (Isaiah 1:9-10; 3:9; Ezekiel 16:46, 48-49), nowhere is the city or nation ever equated with Egypt. John uses a new symbolism because it encompasses something the Old Testament prophets only saw in part.

The text associates this place with Jesus' crucifixion. It was at His crucifixion a self-declared covenant people of God turned their backs on Him. In the Old Testament this was Israel, commonly represented by its capital Jerusalem. And yes, people crucified Jesus outside the gates of this ancient city. John's imagery is decidedly broader; he wants his readers to think on a worldwide scale. In the New Testament, the rejecting people are no longer merely one nation or one small geographic area. John's "great city" is the world, including the apostate church. Remnants of the visible church on earth, pretended yet fake, are a worldwide part of this "great city," in complete contrast to God's true church, His holy city (comprised of all believers). In great city, the world, daily crucifies Jesus by their unrepentant actions. Worse, in the apostate church, they repeatedly crucify and disgrace Jesus:

Hebrews 6:4-7 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. (NIV)

Why does John specifically say the great city is where "their" Lord died? This pronoun points out Jesus is Lord of the two witnesses (to whom the pronoun references) and not the great

city's inhabitants. Some people who comprise this city call Him Lord but they are not His in reality:

Matthew 7:21-23 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (NIV)

Dispensationalists (especially of the Left Behind book series style) claim the need of modern technology, such as television or internet, for the next verses:

Revelation 11:9-10 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. (NIV)

The great city (the world) is viewing reminders of God's once visible church all around the world. It doesn't need technology to view these bodies. Empty gathering places are now dead shells absent the Spirit (once present in the people gathered there). The true church's death will be visible to the entire world, and yes, the world will celebrate. Consider the reasons the world will celebrate:

- 1) No one now exposes their lies and evil deeds.

Ephesians 5:11 Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. (NIV)

- 2) The smell of death is gone.

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. (NIV)

- 3) Their felt enemies are dead.

James 4:4 You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is

hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. (NIV)

4) This great object of their hatred is dead.

1 John 3:13 Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. (NIV)

5) Those God used to expose their shame is dead.

1 Corinthians 1:27-29 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things — and the things that are not — to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. (NIV)

6) Everyone left in the world listens to them.

1 John 4:5 They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. (NIV)

Yes, the world feels tormented by the mere presence of God's true church. God's people proclaim the truth of the one true God and His son Jesus Christ, teaching what God has said to be right and wrong. The world rejects God's absolute truth, seeking to be rid of it and everyone speaking it.

The world easily will view the corpse of the true church in the plethora of buildings (empty or full) the visible church has scattered over the entire earth. The building can remain full, but if true believers aren't present, it's still dead body. Even where there are no church buildings, saint's physical bodies are corpses to gloat over. Killing saints isn't new to this beast; it's been a hallmark of worldly beast throughout history.

John uses "three and a half days" to show passage of time for the world's celebration, during which the witness of the church is missing. It represents a brief time frame in contrast to the 42 months or 1260 days where the church's witness is widespread and known.

Notice the slightly different wording of the NASU, in verse 9, which uses a more specific word, "tomb," in place of the NIV's "burial."

Revelation 11:9 Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb [Greek “mnema”]. (NASU, parenthesis for clarification)

### **Definition**

Mnema (pronounced “mnay-mah”) – A Greek word meaning a grave, a tomb, a burial place. It comes from the Greek word “to remember,” so the emphasis is on the location as a memorial or monument being used to preserve the memory of someone.

This issue is less the church’s burial (as worded in the NIV), rather it’s any monument to their prior existence. The world wants no burial of these witnesses because they want no tomb monument. They want nothing to remind them of their former existence for they wish to live and act as though the witnesses’ message never existed.

There’s implication here that perhaps a small remnant of the true church still exists, but only in hiding (allowing the church to appear dead to the watching world). Who would want memorialize the true church or mark their grave? Not likely the world, but perhaps surviving believers. Yet the world, that killed or silenced the whole church, prevents any isolated holdouts from their worldview from doing so.

Revelation 11:11 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. (NIV)

An incredible event now happens. When the world sees the twin witness of the church as permanently dead and gone, God gives them life again. It is God who grows and builds His church! Now, at the end, God brings His witnesses back to life for one last testimony against the world. Their renewed existence testifies to three facts:

- 1) God is in control
- 2) The world cannot stop what God is doing
- 3) God’s people are recognizably different from the world in message and actions (which exposes the world’s sin)

The world’s reaction progresses from its opening felt “torment,” followed by a brief celebration, now into one of “terror.” They finally realize the worst they can do, their best efforts, cannot stop God’s message (and His messengers as God enables them).

Revelation 11:12 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. (NIV)

### **Definition**

Ouranos (pronounced """) – A Greek word meaning "sky" or the heavens directly above the earth. It may also be used of heaven, the dwelling place of God, but this must be seen by context.

Nothing in the immediate context makes the voice have to come from "heaven," the dwelling place of God, so an alternate translation of Revelation 11:12 uses "sky":

Revelation 11:12 Then they heard a loud voice from the sky [ouranos] saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to the sky [ouranos] in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. (Mine)

Immediately following a time when the true church appears dead (or is dead on earth), yet later shown by God to be alive (or made alive), the voice of God proclaims "Come up here!" This call is for God's witnesses, His church, to join Him in the clouds of the sky. This Greek word "ouranos," which translates as heaven or sky, appears in Matthew 24:30 (where it commonly appears as "sky" in at least its first two instances)...

Matthew 24:30-32 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky [ouranos], and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky [ouranos], 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 [ouranos] to the other. (NIV, also Mark 13:26. Consider also Mark 14:62 & Matthew 26:64. Square parenthesis for clarification)

Revelation's "come up here" is when God finally gathers all of His people, His twin witness throughout history, to Him. Remember the words spoken by the angels after Jesus rose into heaven.

Acts 1:9-11 After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky [ouranos] as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky [ouranos]? This same

Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven [ouranos]." (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

The text portrays the witnesses as dead. Consider for a moment that this may mean an extermination of the true church on earth – in this brief late-in-time period there may be no true believers left living. If so, the statement that God gave them “a breath of life” likely is directly indicative of the final resurrection, when God bodily raises His dead saints to eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 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. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words. (NIV)

Paul's words imply a hope for the existence of living believers at the return of Jesus, but there is no provided certainty here. The certainty is the dead in Christ will rise first and if there are any living believers they go second. Both live and formerly dead, they join the Lord in the clouds as our passage in Revelation also proclaims.

Another certainty is the whole world sees this event. These passages provide no hint of some secret rapture of the church; the enemies of the church are watching (Revelation 11:12). The church's resurrection is a testimony and witness that God has given His people complete victory over all enemies of God (whether human or demonic). Consider again earlier words John wrote in the first chapter of Revelation:

Revelation 1:7 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. (NIV)

Even as Jesus' resurrection, following His crucifixion, included a “violent earthquake (Matthew 28:2),” the final resurrection of God's church includes a similar event:



Revelation 11:13 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. (NIV)

The results of this earthquake target the “great city” previously referenced in verse 8, noting the death of a tenth of this lost city, including the apostate church. Survivors – meaning those left alive, even those having a form of godliness in counterfeit churches – now recognize it’s God judging them in this event. But, as other passages show (see Revelation 9:20), they do not repent. As we will hear again (Revelation 11:18), the time for judging has come and time for repentance is past. This earthquake is part of God’s Day of Judgment and we receive more details in the next woe.

John uses an Old Testament title for God here: “the God of heaven.” It appears in Revelation twice (11:13 & 16:11), both times in context of unrepentant sinners who refuse to repent of their sins while undergoing judgment. Its use in the Old Testament comes with proclamations of God in the presence of nations or peoples apart from Israel: Ezra 1:2 (Persia), Nehemiah 1:4 (Persia), Daniel 2:18-19 (Babylon), Jonah 1:9 (Nineveh). It is fitting that John uses this title when God has removed true (spiritual) Israel and only pagans (unbelievers and fake Christians) remain.

Number values in this symbolic passage need not be literal (as the context sets up a symbolic understanding). Seven thousand is a combination of seven and 1000, implying a perfect (or complete) multitude (10 x 10 x 10) will suffer judgment in this event. Dispensationalists force a literal understanding on this number, also wanting the city to be earthly Jerusalem. A literal 7000 leaves them with a problem; if precise it would mean the city originally had only 70,000 inhabitants. By 2013 Jerusalem’s population already exceeded 804,000. That only a tenth of the great city dies let us know that more of God judgment is still to come. He allows most of these unbelievers to live (at least for a short time) until they too experience judgment in another fashion.

Notice the change in time frame terminology. This account began with large periods, represented by many months and more than a thousand days (11:3), followed by the much briefer end of the true church’s witness, represented by three-and-a-half days (11:9). Finally, this judgment is “at that very hour.” Unquestionably immediacy and brevity is in view.

Revelation 11:14 The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon. (NIV)

Only now does the second woe end (the first ended back in Revelation 9:12) and the final woe, the third woe, is about to begin. Each woe has been successively worse; each trumpet of the sevenfold sounding has increasingly placed more emphasis on the end, though each spanned a vast time period. When John's account returns to affairs on earth, we'll see far more of what God has planned for His final judgment. We do not return to earth events immediately. The focus of John's attention first returns to heaven, to the temple of God and the throne room there. The seventh trumpet sounds with a final and incredibly important message, finishing this sevenfold sounding.

Revelation 11:15 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." (NIV)

God gave over earthly kingdoms, for a limited time, to Satan – but that time is now past. Consider one title earlier given Satan, "ruler of the kingdom of the air." This title applies only for that God-limited time, until Jesus permanently removes him.

Ephesians 2:1-2 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. (NIV)

Satan offered Jesus these same kingdoms, if only Jesus would bow and worship him.

Luke 4:5-7 The devil led him [Jesus] 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." (NIV, also Matthew 4:8-9)

Now, at the end of time, Jesus takes full control over all kingdoms of the world. Satan's restricted authority is over. Remember, even during Satan's time of limited authority over the kingdoms of the world, he couldn't do anything beyond limits God set (Psalms 103:19). But now, God removes every trace of the Devil's control; clearly revealing his kingdoms belong to someone far greater! Loud heavenly voices proclaim the victor from heaven; the word "voices (plural)" implying the message is not merely from God, but also echoed by some or all of those surrounding the throne. Whether this includes holy angels or saints we cannot say with certainty. This heavenly scene fulfills ancient prophecies about the Messiah:

Psalms 2:7-9 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." (NIV. Compare Hebrews 1:5)

Daniel 7:13-14 "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. (NIV)

Obadiah 21 Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the Lord's. (NIV)

There is one everlasting kingdom belonging to God alone. All believing they can control or exploit this kingdom, including Satan, will clearly see there is only one Lord and true Sovereign.

Psalms 110:1 The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (NIV)

God will humble His enemies in the time of this final judgment. His enemies are nothing but a footstool under His feet.

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 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. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (NIV)

Psalms 10:16 The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. (NIV)

The 24 elders introduced earlier (Revelation 4:4; 5:8) respond to the message of the seventh angel. They represent the entire church (Jew and Gentile) present in the temple of God. All present are "worshippers" (Revelation 11:1).

Revelation 11:16 And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, (NIV)

Their worship is a prayer, offered direct to God. We presently offer prayers directly to God, a God we cannot see. There they see His face. Now gathered around God's throne, openly in His presence, their words are still prayers. Prayer is bringing our thoughts and words, including needs, thanksgiving, and praise, to the one with complete control over all these issues. Consider the contents of the prayer offer by these elders here prostrated in worship:

Revelation 11:17-18 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." (NIV)

Overall, the elder's words are a prayer of thanksgiving including praise. I cannot imagine prayer needing anything else when we are in God's presence. On earth we spend so much time asking God for help and for needs or wants. I see all these earthly requests flowing from our being saints who still struggle with sin or concerns from living in a fallen world. When we're with God, no longer prone to sinning, with every need supplied and needing nothing more, what could I ask of my Lord? This leaves thanks and praise to fill our prayers for eternity, focusing on who He is and all He's done and continues to do!

More details (Revelation 11:17-18):

"We give thanks to you." An attitude and way of thinking continually giving God thanks isn't something needing to wait for eternity. Paul makes clear this way of thinking is something we're to be learning and practicing now:

Ephesians 5:20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)

David, in many psalms, expressed the same need for thanksgiving and praise. We're repeatedly reminded that we give thanks to God himself:

Psalms 106:47-48 Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise. 48 Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the Lord. (NIV)

"Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was." The KJV, NKJV, and Geneva Bible (1599) continue this phrase with "and who is to come." Dealing with this quickly, the manuscript evidence for this extra ending comes mostly from late documents. The earliest manuscripts lack it. Why was the verse expanded later? It's likely from a scribe thinking the manuscript he was copying had accidentally omitted it, because Revelation 4:8 earlier has it in a longer form. John didn't hear and record the longer form this later time. It's no longer necessary, since the seventh trumpet has sounded and the end has come. With the eternal kingdom proclaimed and launched, there's no further need to add "and who is to come." God's eternal kingdom is now.

Sometimes God the Father and Jesus identify themselves with identical titles. Both use the titles, "Lord" and "who is and who was." Either could be the focus of the elder's prayer. Praise given to the Father or the Son is praise of the one true God. (Consider the title "I am" for God, Exodus 3:14, and Jesus, John 8:58. Also the title Alpha and Omega for God, Revelation 1:8, 21:6, and for Jesus, Revelation 1:17, 22:13). Yet, because this passage adds another title, "Almighty," it appears the elders are directing their praise specifically to the Father. The title "Almighty" isn't common in the New Testament, found mostly in the Book of Revelation (9 of 12 times). Its New Testament uses follow that of the Old Testament focusing on God the Father.

"Because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign." God reigning is not something new. This declaration does not imply a time when God did not reign. The Law, specifically in the Song of Moses, includes affirmation that God continuously reigns:

Exodus 15:18 The Lord will reign for ever and ever." (NIV)

Centuries later, Jeremiah echoes Moses' thought.

Lamentations 5:19 You, O Lord, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation. (NIV)

This statement in Revelation makes clear that God now reigns in fulfillment of prophecy, with everything now directly under His control. Satan, the prince of the power of the air, no longer

has *any* authority nor do the rulers of *any* earthly kingdoms. From this point onwards, God directly reigns over all. One eschatological passage in Isaiah looks forward to this time:

Isaiah 24:23 The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously. (NIV)

Even as scriptures call earthly authorities to punish wrongdoing (Romans 13:4), God's open rule over all nations now brings with it direct accountability to Him.

"The nations were angry; and your wrath has come." God exercises His justice against angry nations. Why "angry?" Anger is a symbol of wickedness, a mark of those still in sin (see Ephesians 4:31; Colossians 3:8 and 1 Timothy 2:8). Theirs is not righteous anger, rather this anger flows from their rebellion against God. (In contrast to their sinful anger, out of His righteous anger, God is angry with "all nations." See Isaiah 34:2; Zechariah 1:14-15.)

The nations are angry because they see God at work, pouring out His just judgment on sinful creation. In response they react in anger rather than repentance. Their reaction contrasts that of all believers around God's throne. Each of God's redeemed, at one time, recognized their own sin and understood they too should be recipients of God's Holy wrath. Instead of anger, they repented and placed themselves at God's mercy, recognizing He alone could give mercy. Even now, in this heavenly setting, there's no anger seeing God pour out His judgment, rather they praise God for all He's doing and all He's done.

Revelation 11:18b 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." (NIV)

This prayer of thanksgiving and praise takes place now for a reason. The time has come for God's answer to an age-old constant prayer of the saints:

Revelation 6:10 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?" (NIV)

Habakkuk 1:2-3 How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? 3 Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrong? (NIV)

Psalms 94:3 How long will the wicked, O Lord, how long will the wicked be jubilant?  
(NIV)

Psalms 74:10-11 How long will the enemy mock you, O God? Will the foe revile your name forever? 11 Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the folds of your garment and destroy them! (NIV)

Now, finally, God's time has come for a long awaited event:

"Judging the dead." The text uses the term "dead" to represent all people. No one escapes this looming time of judgment following the end of this physical life:

Hebrews 9:27 And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:  
(KJV)

Judging the dead is one event, yet two results are possible (both referenced earlier by Daniel):

Daniel 12:2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (NIV)

These two endings, noted by Daniel, are still in view in our passage in Revelation. John records these two, and only possible results, as:

#1. Rewarding God's servants (including all saints, from well-known prophets to the nondescript).

God rewards every one of His slaves (Greek "doulos") out of His grace. Reward has nothing to do with our own efforts, talents, skills, or merits. It's all about God-planned and God-enabled works.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)

Every believer is God's slave, even as every nonbeliever is a slave to sin (John 8:34).

Romans 6:16-18 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? 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. (NIV)

God made us. God saved us. God planned out what we will do. God enables us to do it. And then God rewards us for doing it! He alone deserves all praise for every part of it. He blesses “small and great” alike:

Psalms 115:12-13 The Lord remembers us and will bless us: He will bless the house of Israel, he will bless the house of Aaron, 13 he will bless those who fear the Lord — small and great alike. (NIV)

#2. Destroying those who destroyed the earth.

All sin committed by every person, whether made out as small indiscretions or overt wickedness, has helped to destroy the earth. (John also pictures part of this in a later example; the great prostitute of Revelation 19:2.)

Back in the sixth seal (Revelation 6:17), John presented the question “For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?” This book shows the answer. Every person who corrupted the earth, and remains guilty of this offense, will fall. Sinful people abuse the earth and its resources, they corrupt their own bodies, sinful people lure others into sin, and they encourage people in their sins (see Luke 17:2).

Romans 8:19-22 The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. (NIV)

Though, clearly, angels (demons) sinned too, the Bible charges the earth’s corruption to humankind...

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned (NIV)



Human fueled sin taints all of creation, the entirety of the earth, beginning with the Garden of Eden and continuing throughout the ages (Ephesians 2:1-3). Imagine if no one came to faith in Jesus Christ, leaving all without God's grace and forgiveness. If we remained in our inherited sin, we would still be part of those who destroyed the earth, deserving God's destruction. Praise God, He gave us life!

God "destroying those who destroyed" means receiving justice at the hands of a God who is Just and Holy. It is a fearful matter considering repayment for *any* wicked deed let alone *every* wicked deed (compare Hebrews 10:28-31; Revelation 2:23; Romans 12:19). Any sin against an eternal God is an everlasting offense needing unending destruction.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 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. (NIV, also Isaiah 66:24; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 25:41, 46)

The scene is still in heaven, in God's temple. Now something unique happens.

Revelation 11:19 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. (NIV)

The thunder and lightning, hail and earthquake, are not unique. These have accompanied earlier events in this revelation (i.e. Revelation 8:5). For unique, focus on the starting statement: "God's temple in heaven was opened." In this visual, God is making clear the world will now know He is acting – that this punishment is coming from Him. People in the outer court will see that God is acting.

The world will see: "the ark of his covenant." In the old temple, the ark was a symbol of God's presence. Further, it was a place for an annual reminder that God keeps His covenant with His people (pictured by the high priest's actions at the ark: Leviticus 16:13-17). Moses placed a copy of God's law in the ark, showing that God judges by His unchanging (literally set in stone)

standards (1 Kings 8:9; Hebrews 9:4). Of greatest importance, the ark represented the place where God met with His servants (Exodus 25:22).

The heavenly Ark of the Covenant represents similar ideas. God removed the veil in the old temple and no veil appears in this heavenly temple. The ark has clear presence in God's temple, surrounded by His people. This shows that God's servants (slaves) are eternally in His presence and meeting with God face-to-face. The whole scene shows that God is the sovereign lawgiver who will judge by His authority and standard. In this judgment, God's eternal covenant with His people is in view.

Genesis 17:7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you [Abraham] and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

The eternal covenant isn't a contract of law or works; it is a covenant of grace and faith (producing works). Old Testament prophets spoke of this covenant:

Jeremiah 31:33-34 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (NIV)

In summary, when God opens His temple in heaven, in the days of the seventh trumpet and third woe, He removes the veil between Himself and the world. The time has come for sinful humanity to look at God whose unrestricted presence and holiness consumes His enemies. The world will unquestionably see and understand God is judging and God is avenging His people.

Revelation 12:1-6 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. 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. (NIV)

Chapter 12 begins another example picturing the 42 months period (Revelation 11:2) encompassing from the time of Jesus until God completes His church. With heaven's temple open, no one can miss this "great and wondrous sign." This sign's wording clearly introduces us to symbolic characters:

#1. A woman clothed with the sun, having the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. The description itself makes clear readers must view the woman symbolically as no physical woman wears the sun while standing on the moon crowned with physical stars. Readers need to understand who this woman represents.

By the middle ages, some speculation claimed the woman was Mary (the mother of Jesus). Others believed her to be the church (specifically the Roman Catholic Church). Today, others view her as the nation of Israel. None of these diverse suggestions fit into the repetitive nature of John's illustration. John is again showing, with new imagery, the idea already pictured by the two witnesses. This example supports and stresses the former. The woman represents God's true church (the only church in view throughout the book of Revelation). Throughout history the visible church, in varying percentage, is a mixture of true believers and fakes (Matthew 13:24-30). Revelation strips this surface appearance away, portraying the counterfeits as part of the beasts or citizens of the great city versus belonging to the Holy City, the bride. Again, only two women appear in Revelation, described by various names, the Bride or the Great Prostitute; here the text points to the former.

God's true church is all His covenant people, Old Testament and New (Hebrews 11:39-40). This uniquely clothed woman is the covenant mother of God's people, giving birth to both the Messiah and all other believers (who call Jesus brother!). She in faith looked for an offspring to crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). God gave her the sign a virgin would be with child (Isaiah 7:14). She is the true Israel of God (Romans 9:4-5), which now includes the Gentile church grafted in by God (Romans 11:11-21). God's called-out ones, the Bride, is the woman clothed with the sun.

The sun, moon and stars draw on an Old Testament illustration:

Genesis 37:9-12 Then he [Joseph] had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10 When he told his father [Israel] as well as his

brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?" 11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind. (NIV)

The woman's clothing includes items representing true Israel – God's covenant people of faith. Following Genesis, God continued to use illustrations including the sun, moon, and stars in His assurances of His faithfulness to His people and to the Messiah...

Jeremiah 31:35-37 This is what the Lord says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar — the Lord Almighty is his name: 36 "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the Lord, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before me." 37 This is what the Lord says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the Lord. (NIV)

Psalms 89:34-37 I will not violate my covenant or alter what my lips have uttered. 35 Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness — and I will not lie to David — 36 that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; 37 it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." (NIV)

God keeps His covenant. God's faithfulness in His agreements is the message of Scriptures as a whole and the Book of Revelation in specific.

Revelation 12:2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. (NIV)

This figurative woman is about to give birth, a specific event in the life of Mary. This statement shows John's vision has moved back in time, awaiting the coming of the Messiah – Jesus. Mary didn't stand on the moon or have the sun for clothing. She was the appointed means for God's true church to receive the long awaited son, the Messiah. Highlighting the pain of childbirth shows the child came in flesh into a world tainted by sin and the curse which followed (Genesis 3:14-16).

Before we can find out more about this child, and verify his identity, John introduces another character:

## #2. The Huge Red Dragon

Revelation 12:3-4a 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. (NIV)

Without getting into the theme and details of chapter 20, that later chapter makes 100% certain who the dragon represents in the Book of Revelation:

Revelation 20:2 He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. (NIV)

John soon shows the dragon is a figurative representation of the Devil here in the immediate chapter and passage as well (see verse 9). He alone, in Scriptures, refers to the devil using the illustrative term “dragon.” We more commonly see the devil referred to as a serpent, beginning with his first appearance in the Garden of Eden. The serpent imagery is more fully developed by Isaiah:

Isaiah 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. (NIV)

The Book of Job (chapter 41) describes the historically literal creature called Leviathan as one breathing fire (Job 41:18-21) and Psalms 104:26 as a sea serpent. This makes John’s idiom “dragon” visual fitting. This image doesn’t line up with the less-than-impressive garden snake portrayals often associated with Garden of Eden events, as commonly employed in Sunday School materials.

Readers cannot take “then another,” in verse 3, as chronological for the dragon’s appearance. It shows the order in which John sees the signs (the woman first, the dragon second). The devil appeared far before the birth of Jesus; after creation yet before humankind’s temptation in the garden. At the dawn of human history, the red dragon appeared in heaven when a mighty angelic being chose to rebel against his Creator.

**Definition**

Pyrros – A Greek word meaning “fiery red,” in other words, “the color of fire.”

Red (Greek “pyrros”) is dragon’s color because it’s the color of blood and war (similar use appears in Revelation 6:4). The imagery of seven heads and ten horns returns later in Revelation (13:1 & 17:3) associated with a demonically powered beast. John’s introduction here assures the later beast is associated with this dragon.

The dragon is symbolic of a specific individual. This symbolism continues with the numbers associated with its heads and horns. Seven represents completeness and ten, similarly, is decimal fullness or perfection. Both values represent the dragon’s control over the entire world and all its powers and kingdoms. As the “ruler of this world (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11)” Satan has seized power that does not belong to him. Though he believes it to be his, God has only tolerated his actions and allowed him to hold it for a time. As witnessed already in Revelation, the close of this time is near in John’s building narrative. While a limited period, consider all the devil’s exercise power on the earth (directly or indirectly) has influenced worldwide, from empires and authorities to philosophy and politics.

The seven crowns on the dragon’s heads sum up what the dragon believes he has – the right to rule and conquer. For a time he has exercised this self-claimed right, yet we see is no more than an invented or pretended royalty. He is a usurper. In reality Satan has no claim of birth, or right to rule (as does our Creator and Savior). When God finally strips away all pretense of authority from him forever, everyone will clearly see this.

Figurative language continues. The stars of the sky (or “heaven” in NASU) aren’t literal stars. The dragon couldn’t fling the solar system’s stars to the earth without fully destroying it. These stars are words with meaning, symbolic language. The ancient book of Job used similar imagery of stars to describe the angels which witnessed God’s completion of creation (Job 38:4-7). John aptly uses this wording speaking about the fall of many of those angelic beings who joined the devil in his rebellion against God.

The text implies nothing figurative over John’s use of one-third to describe the number of angels the devil swept up in his rebellion. It appears that literally a third of the innumerable angels God created chose to follow Satan. I find it easy to imagine a majority choosing to stay loyal to their Creator and God. It boggles my mind that a third of these created beings, all beings directly in His presence, could choose to follow a usurper and pretender to God’s throne.

Notice it was the dragon (Satan) that cast his angelic followers to the earth. From the beginning Satan has wanted his demons to work to destroy God’s creation – especially the unique

creation of humankind (1 Peter 5:8; John 10:10). And, unquestionably, the devil didn't want anyone coming to the aid of man:

Revelation 12:4b 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. (NIV)

Satan wanted to stop the coming of the Messiah (Genesis 3:15). Towards this end, he motivated rulers and kingdoms to do everything they could to wipe out the Messianic line (Exodus 1:16; 2 Kings 11:1-3; Esther 3:6; Matthew 2:13, 16). And yet, the Dragon failed in his plans. Despite his self-professed might and authority, he was incapable of interfering with or stopping God's eternal plan.

### #3. The Child

Revelation 12:5 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. (NIV)

The birth of Jesus! He is the prophesied male child with a right to rule. John's wording alludes to this Old Testament passage:

Psalms 2:8-9 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." (NIV)

This child was a direct assault on the Dragon's claim to be ruler of the earth and this wicked creature wanted Him dead. Never realizing Jesus' death was part of God's eternal plan, Satan and his followers got what they wanted: Jesus' death by crucifixion.

1 Corinthians 2:8 None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (NIV)

The Dragon never understood what Jesus' death and following resurrection would do. At Jesus's unexpected resurrection, He rose victorious over the grave, showing Himself triumphant over this world at its worst. Further, Jesus clearly showed he was victorious over the devil himself. His ascension to the Father's right hand was everything the Devil didn't want. Now, in heaven, Jesus stands with proven power and authority to rule, with clear right to remove the usurper from God's earth.

There is no speculation in stating the male son represents Jesus. John uses messianic language, from the Old Testament, clearly fulfilled in Jesus. While verse 9 of this Psalm is specifically in view, it's worth reading that verse within its context:

Psalms 2:7-12 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." 10 Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (NIV. Verse 7 is directly applied to Jesus in Hebrews 1:5, 5:5)

When Revelation 12:5 says "And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne," many Bible passages confirm this represents Jesus taking His rightful place alongside the Father.

Hebrews 1:13 To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? (NIV, quoting Psalms 110:1)

Acts 2:32-35 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. 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. 34 For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand 35 until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" ' (NIV, also quoting Palms 110:1)

Revelation 3:21 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. (NIV)

Matthew 26:63b-64 The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (NIV)

The Dragon could do nothing to stop the Son from taking his place alongside His Father, so he turned his attention to the woman. Later in verse 13 we see that God protects the woman. Here in verse 6, in advance, God reveals that He will protect her.



Revelation 12:6 The woman fled into the desert [or “wilderness” as in NASU] to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. (NIV)

This symbolic story shows God’s true church (the woman) fleeing into the desert (a word also translated wilderness). In this wilderness, a place prepared for her by God, God takes care of her. This imagery parallels literal Old Testament events, specifically the Exodus from Egypt. During that key event, God took His people (a people both persecuted and hunted) and led them into the wilderness for a time of testing and purification. This Sinai wilderness was a place prepared for them by God and a place where God supernaturally provided for them, both water and manna.

In John’s earlier gospel, he recorded Jesus using this Old Testament event as an illustration showing there is a greater bread and provision from God for His church (His “called out ones”):

John 6:29-40 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent." 30 So they said to Him, "What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'HE GAVE THEM BREAD OUT OF HEAVEN TO EAT.'" 32 Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. 33 For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." 34 Then they said to Him, "Lord, always give us this bread." 35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. 39 This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day." (NASU)

The church’s symbolic wilderness or desert is this brutal and fallen world. We don’t belong here, we’re just passing through. In this harsh environment the corrupted natural belongings and inhabitants oppose our enjoyment and survival. Daily we’re dependent on God for His food (teaching) and our physical needs. Importantly, during our wilderness journey, God himself goes with us and cares for us!

The church's wilderness journey is 1260 days. John has again provided the same time frame, a representative period spanning the entirety of the church until God's church is complete.

Revelation 12:7-9 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. (NIV)

For full pacifists (of which there are Christian varieties), who claim that no war is ever necessary; take note God has His angelic servants fight a war in heaven. Undoubtedly God could have banished Satan and his minions from heaven by a word from His mouth, or destroy them by that same word. But God, for His purposes and glory, chose for His loyal followers to fight and win. This is God's version of a perfect "just war"! This war is not for subjective purposes, it sides with objective right and justice. Earthly war, for valid reasons, is sometimes necessary too:

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8b There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: ... a time for war and a time for peace. (NIV) [For more on "wars" see: <http://www.bibleistrue.com/qna/qna36.htm>]

While the Bible makes clear that "the battle is the Lord's (see 1 Samuel 17:47)," there are times that God, as the perfect commander in chief, has others fight in His battle. In this specific case, the text specifies this conflict is between Michael and his angels and the Dragon and his angels. Why might God want Satan and his angels defeated by other created beings rather than by God himself? Perhaps it was to show this arrogant creature how far fallen he is. These Old Testament words encompass the devil's egotism and overconfidence:

Isaiah 14:13-14 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." (NIV)

God's defeat of the Dragon at a similarly created angel's hands, energized and commanded by God, makes a clear statement. It unquestionably shows the utter futility of the Devil's thoughts in believing that he could even approach being like the Most High.

Revelation 12:8 But he [the Dragon] was not strong enough, and they [the Dragon and his angels] lost their place in heaven. (NIV, Parenthesis for clarification)

Previously it was the Devil who flung his following demons to the earth. He wanted them there meddling and causing damage to God's creation. Yet, as the Bible shows, the Devil and his demons held access to heaven. God's restraint showed His tolerance with these wicked and rebellious beings, all who continued to trample on heavenly ground and to spew their lies in His immediate presence.

Examples:

- Satan before God about Job: Job 1:6-12, 2:1-7
- Lying spirit before God about Ahab: 1 Kings 22:19-23; 2 Chronicles 18:18-22.
- Satan before God accusing high priest Joshua: Zechariah 3:1-2

What these demonic beings thought to be their right, they now find out was merely God's patience and part of His plan. That time is up and they are all banished from heaven forever, now awaiting their judgment on the selfsame earth they work to destroy:

Revelation 12:9 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.

Here John clearly calls the dragon "the devil," a name meaning "the accuser," and "Satan" — a name meaning "the adversary." Both titles appear in the Old and New Testaments for this fallen angel. The third title used in John's threefold statement is "that ancient serpent," clearly associating the Devil, or Satan, to the events of humankind's fall in the Garden of Eden.

When the text says the dragon leads the whole world astray, it portrays him as a fake shepherd who does not lead the sheep for their benefit but rather to their ruin and destruction. He is the thief Jesus contrasted with himself as the Good Shepherd.

John 10:10-11 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. 11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (NIV)

Imagery of lost people likened to sheep going astray extends into other New Testament books:

Matthew 18:12 "What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? (NASU)

1 Peter 2:25 For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (NIV)

While it's true that we, because of our own fallen natural inclination, are prone to wander (see James 1:13-14); take note the Devil actively seeks to lead everyone astray. And we, every single one of us, were willing to follow him:

Ephesians 2:1-3 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. (NIV)

One gospel passage speaks about Satan's fall...

Luke 10:18 He [Jesus] replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. (NIV)

This verse pictures the Devil's fall from heaven in fulfillment of Isaiah 14:12 and our passage in Revelation. In one regards, Satan fell from heaven when he first sinned, but his final fall from heaven was when God banned him from ever returning. Speculation about the exact time when this final ban took place (the end of that heavenly battle) can find no definite answer in Scriptures, but this we can say with certainty: When Jesus rose into heaven and took on His role as our advocate, standing at the right hand of the Father, Satan no longer had any place before God as our accuser. God assures believers His appointed is the only one who can now condemn or defend and we have no fear of Him. This is Jesus, "whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10:42b)."

1 John 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. (NIV)

Romans 8:34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (NIV)

1 Timothy 2:5-6 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time. (NIV)

Hebrews 7:24-25 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (NIV)

A few remaining thoughts are in order before leaving the verses we have just examined.

Jude 9 calls Michael, who leads the angelic forces, an archangel. Judaism, following their exile in Babylon, had legends about there being multiple archangels. Roman Catholicism and Islam assumed and developed this idea; the former especially drawing on deuterocanonical and apocryphal books (including Tobit and Enoch) to name some of them. Islam, in their Hadith, recognizes “Raphael (or Israfael),” the archangel the Catholics draw from Tobit, as being the angel who will blow the trumpet to signal the coming of Judgment Day. Why do I mention all this? Even Christians who claim to be using only the Bible (66 books) will often reference archangels (plural). Typically citing Gabriel (Luke 1:19, 26; Daniel 8:16; 9:21 – unquestionably a messenger) and Michael (Jude 9) as being two examples. Regardless of non-biblical innovation, be clear of this: the Bible only calls Michael an archangel and no other. Further, the Bible only uses the term archangel in singular form. With this in view, consider a well-known passage:

1 Thessalonians 4:16 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. (NIV)

So which archangel sounds the trumpet? Most Protestant Bible believing Christians will answer Gabriel – an answer based solely on tradition. The Bible does not give any name here. Yet, based on all Scriptures, this sole archangel is Michael. Gabriel, while described as an angel that stands in the presence of God (Luke 1:19), there’s never identification as an archangel. He’s no more likely an archangel than any Seraph also in the presence of God (Isaiah 6:2).

Michael’s also identified as “a prince” in the Old Testament (Daniel 10:21). Daniel refers to him as “one of the chief princes” (Daniel 10:13), some seeing a hint here of other archangels. This passage is inconclusive. Alternatively the Hebrew reads, “one of the princes, the chief.” This allows the archangel (singular) to be that chief over princely angels. The modern Jewish translation of The Tanakh (JPS) translates this line as “a prince of the first rank.”

Continuing in Revelation 12, the next three verses feature a heavenly proclamation:

Revelation 12:10-12 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." (NIV)

This declaration features many parts:

#### #1. A statement of the established kingdom

Over one hundred passages in the New Testament speak of this kingdom. Beyond this passage's "the kingdom," specific wording varies in other verses. Variations includes "kingdom of heaven," "His kingdom," "kingdom of God," "kingdom of their Father," and "kingdom of our father David." The list continues with "kingdom of Christ and God," "kingdom of light," "eternal kingdom," "kingdom of the Son," and "My (Jesus') kingdom." John referred to this kingdom in the previous chapter of Revelation:

Revelation 11:15 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." (NIV)

Paul looked forward to the full establishment of this kingdom when he wrote:

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 Then the end will come, when he [Jesus] 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. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

## #2. A statement of the established authority of Christ

Jesus' own words best summarize the extent of His authority:

Matthew 28:18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (NIV)

## #3. A statement that God has banished the accuser from heaven

There is no longer anyone to accuse us before God. The accuser, with a goal of accusing and condemning saints, has now lost his temporary privilege to appear before God.

Romans 8:33-34 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (NIV)

## #4. A statement that God's saints will overcome

Written from the perspective of the end, the statement views this promise as completed. Saints have overcome! Knowing the unchangeable end shows us that God keeps His promises:

Romans 8:37-39 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. (NIV)

1 Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)

1 John 5:4-5 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. 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. (NIV)

Saints overcome this wicked world "by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony." God's people know both keys to overcoming belong to them solely by the grace of God. The church's only testimony is "God has done it and I didn't deserve it!"

John's use of the phrase "blood of the Lamb" takes us back to an earlier portion of his heavenly vision. It was here that he saw the complete church, the great multitude, gathered before the throne:

Revelation 7:14 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. (NIV, in light of 7:9-17)

#### #5. A call to rejoice

God assures His people they will rejoice on seeing His Day of Judgment.

Psalms 96:11-13 Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it; 12 let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy; 13 they will sing before the Lord, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his truth. (NIV)

In Revelation 12:12 the heavens and its inhabitants alone rejoice (without the earth). They do so for the same reason given by the Psalmist; all God's people rejoice at every act of His righteous judgment. Every judgment of God restrains or removes wickedness. Believers will always rejoice at righteousness replacing wickedness. Why not heaven and earth rejoicing together here in verse 12? For a brief while longer, this rejoicing belongs only to the heavens and its inhabitants because the cast-out one still plies his wickedness elsewhere. The time for all heaven and earth to rejoice waits.

#### #6. A woe proclaimed on the earth and sea

The outer court trampled by the nations (Revelation 11:2), here represented by the earth and the sea, is where the cast-down devil focuses his rage. This wicked entity is "filled with fury," a fury chiefly directed at God. Satan is now well aware that he cannot defeat God. Nor can he exercise his fury directly against God. So he now focuses this fury on God's creation and specifically God's highest creation; people.

The devil has no interest in finding more followers; he had a great host that followed him in heaven (all arguably of great power and abilities). It gained him nothing. His earthly goal is not to make devil-worshippers, he's satisfied in having or making Satanists (who worship



themselves), or atheists (who ostensibly worship no one), or even self-deluded miracle working self-professed Christ followers (Matthew 7:22-23). To Satan it doesn't matter what deception you embrace, as long as it destroys you. This futile role and outlet for his anger is all that remains for him.

John 10:10a The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy (NIV)

1 Peter 5:8-9 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. (NIV)

The fullness of this heavenly "woe" rests on the lost. Believer may experience some grief, but their limited grief is only temporary. Even as the passage in 1 Peter 5 highlights, believers don't have to fear the devil; God provides saints protection from him (see also Ephesians 6:11-13; James 4:7). The worst the devil can do to believers, and only if God allows, is take their physical life (see Job 2:6; Luke 12:4-5).

#7. A statement noting the Devil's time is short.

This decree reminds us that Jesus is coming again. In His long awaited coming, and the final judgment, He will condemn all wickedness beginning with the devil himself (Revelation 20:10-15) and He will rule with righteousness forever (Isaiah 32:1; Psalms 72:7-8).

Hebrews 10:37 For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. (NIV)

James 5:8 You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. (NIV)

2 Peter 3:8-9 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. (NIV)

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. (NIV)

The devil knows and quotes Scriptures (to misuse it; see Matthew 4:3-10), so he knows everything God has decreed in His word has (and will) come to pass. Satan knows every verse previously cited and that Jesus is returning. He's familiar with his personal ending as decreed by God. All this enrages him all the more, for his time is short and he doesn't know how long he has left.

Revelation 12:13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. (NIV)

Verse 13 again stresses the devil forcible fall from heaven. This fall directly contrasts the male child who was "snatched up to God and to his throne (Revelation 12:5)." There the male child (Jesus) is beyond the devil's reach. Second to this "male child," the devil (the dragon), most of all, hates the ones God has called His "dearly loved (Ephesians 5:1; Colossians 3:12)." Therefore he relentlessly aims for the only ones still seemingly in his reach, the true church (the woman).

Revelation 12:14 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. (NIV)

The time frame that God cares for the woman (His true church) is, "a time, times, and half a time," meaning the entirety of time until Jesus returns. Under God's care, the woman has a place prepared for her "in the desert." To understand how she is "taken care of" we must understand both the desert imagery and the "wings of a great eagle."

David, when distressed, wanted to fly away to a desert. His desert was a place of solitude and refuge.

Psalms 55:4-7 My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death assail me. 5 Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. 6 I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest — 7 I would flee far away and stay in the desert; (NIV)

It is unlikely John is using the desert (or eagle wings) in David's manner. The more predominate imagery of the desert comes from its major use throughout the Old and New Testaments. God repeatedly reminds Israel and the church of the Israelite's period of testing in their stay in the Sinai wilderness (during the Exodus). It's commonly referred to as their time "in the desert (see Acts 7:36, 44; Hebrews 3:8, 17; Numbers 3:14; Psalms 78:19)."

This widespread desert imagery is applicable to the church. As God did in Sinai, He does today with his church in the desert of this world. He uses the world as our place of testing and trial. It is a place where we learn to trust in God and look to Him for daily provision (Luke 11:3). It is where God provides His people spiritual food from heaven (John 6:32-35). And, finally, God brings His church into His Promised Land (for this journey has a fixed duration. Hebrews 11:13-16).

The Spirit led Jesus himself, the founder of the church, into the desert at the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). He overcame and so do we (by His grace and in His strength). Throughout our desert journey, God protects His church and cares for us even as a mother bird does for its offspring. David used symbolic wording that expressed this idea in Psalms:

Psalms 91:1-8 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." 3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. 5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, 6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. 7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. 8 You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. (NIV)

John's wording in Revelation shows Divine care of the woman as though borne on wings. This descriptive phrasing recalls a passage in the Mosaic Law:

Exodus 19:3-7 Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." (NIV)

This is unquestionably the passage John is alluding to in his use of eagles' wings. A second Mosaic passage, in Deuteronomy, continues this eagle imagery.

Deuteronomy 32:9-12 For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. 10 In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He

shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, 11 like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. 12 The Lord alone led him; no foreign god was with him. (NIV)

Isaiah makes clear the entirety of the church, all who hope in the Lord, will have similar experience on wings like eagles:

Isaiah 40:31 but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. (NIV)

Don't miss the final words of this verse...

Revelation 12:14b "...out of the serpent's reach."

These few words remind us the true church is out of the devil's reach. Earlier we saw Jesus is out of his reach in heaven. Similarly, yet before we join Him in heaven, the church is safely unreachable because of God's protection here on earth.

Matthew 16:18 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. (NIV)

Hebrews 12:22-23a 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. (NIV)

The focus has been on the true church (the woman) and God's providential care and protection of her. Revelation continues by showing the means by which the devil (the serpent) attacks her.

Revelation 12:15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. (NIV)

John stresses the devil is a vocal liar by again using the term "the serpent" which points the reader to the events of Genesis chapter 3 in the Garden of Eden. Revelation and Genesis both show something coming from the serpent's mouth. The illustrative imagery of Revelation shows not just a lie or two, rather, a flood of lies pouring from the serpent's mouth like a river

of water. The church isn't a single building, or bound to one geographic location (as was the temple). Satan's attack on the church is broad, coming with a torrent of lies and deception reaching everywhere. Broad use of lies and deception has characterized the devil's modus operandi since the beginning, unchanged to this day. The devil seeks to deny everything the church stands for, whether creation events, humankind's fall into sin, or the birth of Jesus and His death, burial, and resurrection. Beyond these historical facts, what God has said to be good, the dragon claims as evil and what God has said is evil, the devil says is good (Isaiah 5:20). Satan achieves little through all of his effort; his lies cannot stop the church.

Revelation 12:16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.

The earth itself, representative of creation and the domain the serpent thinks he controls, works against the devil. Using figurative language, the earth opens its mouth (in contrast to the mouth of the serpent) and swallows up the lies the devil is spewing forth. God's creation itself refutes Satan's big lies denying the existence of God, a Creator, and that these items merely evolved by chance:

Psalms 19:1-4a The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (NIV)

Romans 1:20 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. (NIV)

Further topics of the earth, from archaeology to history itself, swallow up successive lies, testifying that God's word is true and the Bible speaks unchangeable objective truth. Innate knowledge of right and wrong, incorporated by God into His creation, stands firm against the devil's lies (Romans 2:14-15).

The waters spewed from the serpent's mouth likely picture a primary means of how he circulates his lies. A parallel example in Revelation 17:1 & 15 later use waters to represent "peoples, multitudes, nations and languages." In this understanding, Satan's spewing of these peoples represents his direction (and use) of the nations as they try to sweep away God's truth. Quantity's not a concern, whether a multitude or a majority, lies are still lies. A democracy didn't define truth, God did. Continuing this idea, the next verse says the earth swallows up the

river (or waters). Death eventually silences the mouths of all liars that compose these waters. In the end, the earth literally swallows them up in their graves.

Psalms 31:17-18 Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave. 18 Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous. (NIV)

Psalms 63:11 But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God's name will praise him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced. (NIV)

Since the devil's attacks on the true church as a whole are futile, where does the devil concentrate his efforts? He focuses on the individual believers that make up the church. His attack on the church as a whole (the woman) is general; the attack on her offspring is personal.

Revelation 12:17 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. (NIV)

Simply put, the devil hates believers. He (and his entire kingdom) is at war against everything you believe in and all you stand for. He wants to steal your joy, kill your testimony and destroy your witness (John 10:10a).

Further evidence the woman is not national Israel, or Mary, but is the true church, comes from Galatians 4:21-31. We and our eldest brother, the male child, are children of promise. We are children of "Jerusalem that is above" – God's true church.

Even as God protects all His church (the woman), He has not left believers (her offspring) without individual protection. We are at war! God, our Commander in Chief, has provided the armor and the battle plan.

Ephesians 6:10-18 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. (NIV)

Follow our Commander in chief's battle plan and there's a guaranteed result for every believer. God alone can give such a guarantee. This spiritual battle is different from other wars.

James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (NIV, also 1 Peter 5:8-9)

The battle belongs to the Lord, an unchanging fact whether Old Testament or New!

Psalms 124:1-5, 8 If the Lord had not been on our side — let Israel say — 2 if the Lord had not been on our side when men attacked us, 3 when their anger flared against us, they would have swallowed us alive; 4 the flood would have engulfed us, the torrent would have swept over us, 5 the raging waters would have swept us away. ... 8 Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. (NIV)

Revelation chapter 13 is a direct continuation of the account of the woman and her offspring (so ignore the artificial break caused by this chapter heading).

Revelation 13:1-4 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?" (NIV)

The last beast of history, originally represented as the feet and toes of mixed iron and clay by Daniel (Daniel 2:41-43), is the beast now detailed by John. In this final seventh trumpet and finishing third woe, though there is repetition with earlier trumpets, details increasingly highlight the end. Though other beasts came up out of the sea (Daniel 7:3) it's the final beast (Daniel 7:7) given an expanded examination by John. Even as Daniel used figurative language to

describe it, John does too. Since both writers use figurative language, there's no need to describe the beasts the same. John can change or add to the description to reveal features and qualities now needing emphasis.

Notice the disparity over the first words of this passage by various translations:

Revelation 12:17b And he stood on the sand of the sea. (ESV)

Revelation 12:18 He stood on the sand of the sea. (HCSB)

Revelation 13:1a And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. (NIV, NIV2011, also NASU)

Revelation 12:18 And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. (The NET Bible®, also ISV, NCV)

Revelation 12:18 And I stood on the sea sand. (GENEVA 1599)

Revelation 13:1a And I stood upon the sand of the sea, (KJV, also NKJV)

Why "I" or "He" or "Dragon?" Why end out chapter 12 (either as part of verse 17 or as verse 18) or start chapter 13 with it?

"I stood [estathen]" and "He stood (or 'it stood') [estathe]" are the same word in Greek except for one letter. A scribe's accidental drop or addition of a letter would easily arrive at either. Neither word dramatically changes this passage. Either God transported John to the seashore for a vantage point for coming sights or God located the object of the previous passage, the dragon, there. Translations that supply the word "dragon" here do so having accepted the proper term was "he stood" and then provide a specific for the "he."

The oldest manuscripts of Revelation now available, especially P47 from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., use "he stood." (Interestingly P47 has 666 as the beast's number and not the 616 found in others early texts). The manuscripts on each side of this textual debate include:

"he/it stood" (P<sup>47</sup> x A C 1828 2344 it<sup>ar,gig</sup> vg syr<sup>h</sup> arm1,3 eth Or<sup>dub</sup> Vict-Pett Prisc  
Ambrosiast Beat Tyc Prim Haymo Aldus NA27 {B})



"I stood" (P 046 051 f052 922 1006 1611 1841 2040 2053 2329 vg<sup>mss</sup> syr<sup>ph</sup> cop<sup>sa,bo</sup> arm4  
Andr Areth TR RP)

Again stressing nothing significant changes with either wording, I find greater weight for the "he stood" or "the dragon stood," not only from testimony of older manuscripts, but also for reasons of internal consistency. Every time John changes his physical position elsewhere in the Book of Revelation it's by instruction to do so (examples; Revelation 4:1b; Revelation 10:8). Assuming this passage to say "I stood" makes this instance an aberration; therefore it is easier to use this internal evidence as confirmation of the "he stood" of the earlier manuscripts.

Debate is irrelevant over whether this line should end of chapter twelve or begin chapter thirteen. The topic begun in chapter 12 continues and the chapter division is, at best, a distraction.

Revelation 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.

The dragon is the source of power behind John's Revelation 13 beast. This is hardly unique; the dragon powers all the beasts, including those revealed by Daniel and one to follow in verse 11. The dragon is the real power; it's through the proxy of the beast the world embraces the dragon.

Consider the imagery used to describe this same beast. Beginning as a part of Daniel's statue (Daniel 2:41), as feet and toes of iron and clay, it's later described as a unique beast with seven horns (Daniel 7:7). Now John describes it as a beast having ten horn and ten crowns. As mentioned previously, this could represent ten smaller kingdoms comprising the larger empire. Yet, in its solidly figurative context, the number ten is more likely symbolic. This value then represents a perfect number of smaller kingdoms or rulers (using 10's symbolic value showing ordinal perfection).

John adds an odd sounding detail. The beast has seven heads (the numbers of heads being something missing from Daniel's description). Literal drawings picture one beast with seven heads but vary over positioning of the horns (with no way to divide them evenly). Similarly, multiple crowns must appear on one or more heads, since crowns coincide with horns in John's vision).

The seven heads with blasphemous names, though they could represent a literal seven, are also more likely to be a figurative use of the number seven (representing perfection and completion). The Bible commonly uses horns to represent power (or rulers), but what of heads? A head normally focuses on thoughts and expressed thoughts (a location for the mouth, c.f. Revelation 9:17). The primary meaning of a beast's head, here in Revelation, is different. Revelation 17:9 describes later heads as being hills, or locations. Using this meaning, it's best to understand these seven heads as being geographic locations, settings for the blasphemies that fuel these rulers and kingdoms.

An inscribed blasphemous name is something that people would have understood in Roman times. Rulers commonly adopted names or slogans as titles by which they represented themselves to the people and nations. The Caesar of John's time (Domitian, reigned 81-96 A.D.) used the title "Dominus et Deus (Lord and God)," something that stayed in use for many following Caesars (documents show Aurelian, who reigned 270-275, still using it). In fact, Aurelian later added the title "Restitutor Orbis (Restorer of the World)."

It's not merely rulers who had such slogans or names. A few quick examples from history provide instances of movements and governments doing the same:

- The main slogan of the godless French Revolution (1789-1799) was "ni Dieu ni maître (neither God nor master)."
- Communism repeatedly touted the line "We communists are atheists" (Chinese communist leader Chou En-lai in 1955; Vladimir Lenin quoted him in *Proletary*, No. 45).
- Hitler's Nazi Germany was never atheist, as sometimes mischaracterized by American sources; rather it was highly religious often in the guise of Christianity. ("The Party represents a positively Christian position without binding itself to one particular faith." Twenty Five Points, 1920). Hitler's hated SS wore this slogan, "*Gott mit uns*, (God is with us)," on their belt buckles.

Is this any less blasphemous than a nation that acts sometimes more subtly against God's standards and proclaims laws in opposition to His truth while wearing a slogan echoing Psalms 118:8, "In God We Trust?" (This slogan similarly appears as "In God is our Trust" in the fourth stanza of "The Star-Spangled Banner").

Is it any less blasphemous for a nation to pass laws ignoring and condemning God's truth, yet wears labels claiming His favor? Inscriptions include "He shall dominion from sea to sea

(Psalms 72:8)” on the peace tower of the national parliament building (east side). They further call themselves the “Dominion of Canada,” and add “A mari usque ad mare” (Latin for: From sea to sea” to their national coat of arms.

The beasts, or empires of the world, proudly wear their blasphemous names or slogans. This Revelation beast’s primary difference is its great authority. As soon seen, it uses this authority to harm believers. It ignobly becomes the world’s worst in its efforts to destroy God’s saints (especially when paired with the second beast’s actions).

Revelation 13:2 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. (NIV)

Some believe John’s beast here is an amalgam of all four beasts of Daniel 7:3-7, rather than the last one. Likenesses in their “looks like” descriptions are the key evidence offered in support of this assertion.

Daniel’s Beasts	First Beast of Revelation
All Came Out of Sea	Came Out of Sea
Beast 1 – Lion, wings of Eagle	Mouth of a lion
Beast 2 – Bear	Feet like a bear
Beast 3 – Leopard, wings of Bird, Four Heads	Resembled a leopard
Beast 4 – Terrifying, Powerful, Iron teeth, Unique, Ten Horns, 3 uprooted	Ten Horns, Seven Heads, Wound which was healed Powerful

John didn’t merge the beasts; rather he drew on features from the earlier beasts (for example “mouth of a lion” versus looks like a Lion). His focus in Revelation is on the latter beast of Daniel, giving more details for this time period (dynasty) that would span from John’s day until the end. When describing his beast, he’s noting likenesses with the ancient beasts that came before it. His approach makes sense; in varying degree all kingdoms and empires of man have common characteristics, though specifics distinguish each.

To understand the big picture view of the beasts of Revelation, we must remember that they portray empires that span from the time of Christ until the return of Jesus. The first spans the entirety of this time; the second comes on the scene later and continues to the end. John is

providing details about the final empire (and kingdoms) that Daniel had sought more information about so long before. This was something the early church father Irenaeus saw and understood:

In a still clearer light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicated to the Lord's disciples what shall happen in the last times, and concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules [the earth] shall be partitioned. He teaches us what the ten horns shall be which were seen by Daniel (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 5, Chapter 26, Section 1, writing circa 180 A.D.)

John's portrayal of these beasts spans multiple chapters (from chapter 13 to 17) and all these passages are necessary to understand his depiction of these entities.

Both Daniel and John report the beast came out of the sea. The beasts are representative making a symbolic understanding of the sea consistent with the passage. Some interpreters speculate the sea is literal forcing the represented kingdom or empire to border a sea or ocean. Again, the symbolic nature of this passage (especially the beasts themselves) directs the reader to view the sea symbolically and not literally. If John meant a physical sea, the statement is close to useless as the Greek word for sea is broad. It's used through throughout the New Testament for smaller inland lakes such as Galilee (e.g. Matthew 4:18), but also of the Red Sea (e.g. Acts 7:36), the Mediterranean Sea (e.g. Acts 10:32), and the oceans of the world (e.g. Revelation 5:13; 20:13). Almost every nation and empire has multiple "seas," so this statement would clarify nothing.

So what does the sea represent?

Isaiah 17:12 Oh, the raging of many nations — they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples — they roar like the roaring of great waters! (NIV, also Isaiah 60:3-5 and consider uses in Jeremiah 51:42, 55-56; Ezekiel 26:3; and Daniel 7:2-3)

The sea represents the people of the world. These kingdoms or empires arise from this sea of people. Some might argue the sea specifically represents Gentiles, viewing the previously mentioned Old Testament passages as limited to only nations beyond Israel. While possible, all these passages don't demand this limit. Regardless, if Gentiles are the focus, Revelation consistently portrays God's people as Israel (with Gentile believers grafted in) versus the nations then represented by Gentiles. Either way, Revelation's beast comes from the sea, the lost peoples of the world.

Revelation 13:2b The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. (NIV)

Satan, even as he offered it to Jesus, can place his authority with anyone (Luke 4:5-6; compare John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:1-2). Here he gives his authority over earthly kingdoms to this one empire. Through it he rules the world and chases his wicked goals and wants.

Revelation 13:3 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. (NIV)

John identified the beast with Satan, the one who sought to seize that which rightfully belonged to Christ. Satan never aspired to surpass God, if that was even theoretically possible; his goal has always been one of perverted imitation.

Isaiah 14:12-14 How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! 13 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." (NIV)

Here, in Revelation 13:3, John has the beast weakly mimicking Jesus, almost as a parody. The text never says the beast itself is in danger of death, merely that one of its heads suffered a fatal wound later healed. Three possibilities exist here, possibilities not necessarily mutually exclusive:

- 1) One, or some, of the kingdoms or nations which comprise this divided empire may die, or seemingly die, for a time – later coming back on the scene.
- 2) Some see an allusion to what Jesus did on the cross to the Devil. Satan is the power behind this last beast, an entity built on the ruins of the preceding Roman Empire.
- 3) A great portion of the geographic territory of this beast (the fragmented nations of the Roman Empire) was, for a time, occupied or controlled by believers.

For the second and thirds points, some further thoughts (numbered 2 & 3, #3 being what I feel best fits the context):

For both #2 & #3: At the messiah's prophesied coming in the Garden of Eden, we learn He will crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). Here this beast's wound is by a sword (Revelation 13:14), a symbol of power and authority – unquestionably one that John displays Jesus wielding (Revelation 1:16; 2:12; 2:16; 19:15; 19:21). A sword is a symbol of God's Word. Possibility #2 sees Jesus, the living Word of God, make the wound. Alternative #3 sees God's written word (living and active), spread by His church, making the wound.

#2. When Jesus came the first time, it appears as a fatal blow to the head of the serpent (and his energized beast). And yet, in following years, the beast rises seemingly unharmed and stronger, acting through the power of this once-thought-dead and defeated serpent (head). Externally it's as though there's healing of the beast's fatal wound. (I find choice #2 weak because Satan isn't merely a head, with other equal heads; he is the head of this beast).

#3. The seemingly fatal wound to the beast may not represent the first coming of Jesus, it may be a wound caused by the widespread growth of Christ's church (and spread of His word). The Roman beast appeared unhurt by the events of Jesus' first coming (though this was powerful spiritual event). Life in the empire went on a normal. It continued its beastly actions unchanged with wickedness remaining the norm. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, the church starts to grow and multiply rapidly. Suddenly the empire (east and west) appears overcome by Christianity. This was the beast's ostensibly fatal wound. It looked as if the old wicked empire was gone for good. The wicked beast's wound came from the only possible weapon, the sword of the word of God. This wounding spans a large period of history. It shrank sometimes, including when the east fell to Islam. Other times the beast's wound expanded, the aftermath of the Reformation perhaps leaving the greatest gaping wound. This long-standing wound is now rapidly healing. The beast is again exterminating, ostracizing, and minimizing God's true church (who bears the sword of His word). Saints are becoming hard to find. Boldly standing on the unchanging truth of God's word in the public arena is becoming rare. In the west, holding to God's truth now equates to hate and laws increasingly ban Christian belief.

Amid current circumstances, there's hope. John reveals a true final and fatal blow will come to this wicked beast. When this beast finally falls, in whom Satan focused his power and authority; the devil will see that his days are ending.

Until it falls, the world follows the beast. Believers live in the world but are separate from this beast-following world. The authority of the beast enthalls the unbelieving world. They readily follow it because they don't recognize God's true power and authority. The lost world follows the beast because they're enticed by the power behind the beast – a wicked and false power opposed to God.

Ephesians 2:1-3 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. (NIV)

#### **Definition**

Proskuneo (NT:4352) – One of several possible Greek words used to represent worship (or actions of worship). Other words, by their Strong's numbering, include: (e.g. NT:2356, 2357, 2317, 2150, 2151, 2124, or 4576, 4573, 2323 or even 3000, 1401, 1398, 5256, and 3008). Some lexicons describe this term with words or phrases such as "to kiss, to adore, to worship, to do obeisance, to show respect, to fall before, or to prostrate oneself in homage." The Complete Word Study Dictionary (NT) states, the word literally means "to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage." This latter definition, while true, misses the attached idea of prostrating oneself in reverence or adoration.

John clarifies this association between the beast and the dragon who gives it power:

Revelation 13:4 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?" (NIV)

The question implies the world's answer; they believe the beast is invincible. They worship (Greek "proskuneo") the beast *and* the dragon. Their actions confirm that worship of anything apart from God is worship of Satan. The devil energizes these counterfeits, whether idols of stone or a formidable and long-lasting human empire.

Revelation 13:5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. (NIV)

The beast takes after its spiritual father, the dragon. He speaks the same words and proclaims the blasphemies inscribed on the dragon's heads. The text shows how long this continues, again using the representative 42-month period. This beast manipulates and devours from Jesus' time until the end. Appearing weaker (or dead) for a time, it never disappeared; before the end all will see its center stage vengeful presence.

Consider the history of the western church. Late in the Roman Empire (especially with the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D.) many believed the Christian world had triumphed and would continue to triumph. The church visibly became the driving force behind most rulers and kingdoms that comprised the resulting pieces of the Roman Empire. For a time many believed the worldly beast was dead. This utopian view was an illusion. As we have seen, especially in this last century, the worldly beast is back in force. In country-after-country all pretense of a Christian understanding, or loyalty to Christ, has disappeared. The worldly beast is back, in truth never gone. As John's Revelation vision shows, it never was dead, only one of its heads looked dead for a time.

### **Definition**

(Phrase, two Greek words) Laleo megas. The first, "laleo," means to speak or talk. There's another Greek word which references speaking out of one's reason or intellect, making this word commonly used for hollow or meaningless speech. (This common use isn't exclusive. Sometimes there is no assessment of content in its casual meaning, merely "he spoke" or "something said"). It especially appears for the endless talk of a child. The second word, "megas," means "big" or "great," either literally or figuratively. Together the two words mean "speaking big" or "speaking boastfully (similar to HCSB)."

The NIV says the beast will speak "proud words," the NASU calls this "arrogant words." The Greek literally says "speaking big (laleo megas)!" Power people like to talk big, as do powerful empires and kingdoms. Consider predominate movements or empires throughout history and you'll hear lines such as:

"The thousand year reich" [Nazi]

"Hasta la Victoria Siempre (Until the Eternal Victory)" [Marxist Che Guevara]

"All power to the Soviets" [Bolshevik slogan]

"The empire on which the sun never sets" [British Empire, 19<sup>th</sup> century]

"el imperio en el que nunca se pone el sol" (the empire on which the sun never sets)  
[Spanish Empire, 16th century]

"The Greatest Nation in the World" [USA]

The beast's big words are slander or blasphemy. The Greek word translated "slander" in NIV is a variant of the word previously translated blaspheme:



Revelation 13:6 He opened his mouth to blaspheme [“blasphemia”] God, and to slander [“blasphemeo”] his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

The latter word appears in Jude 10. There it’s translated “revile (NASU),” “speak abusively against (NIV)” or “speak evil of (KJV).” These renderings provide greater understanding of all this word encompasses. The beast comes by this compulsion for blaspheming naturally, showing the unregenerate nature of the unbelievers that comprise it:

Mark 7:20-23 He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' 21 For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, 22 greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander [“blasphemia”], arrogance and folly. 23 All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Reread Revelation 13:6 and take notice of whom the beast slanders or blasphemes. Not surprisingly, John gives a fourfold answer:

- #1. God
- #2. God’s Name
- #3. God’s dwelling place
- #4. Those who live in heaven (holy angels, all saints)

That this beast would blaspheme God is of no surprise, it shows his loyalty to his master, the dragon, who continuously speaks against God too. Satan’s rebellion against God was itself an act of blasphemy...

- in denying God His right to rule alone

Isaiah 45:6 so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting men may know there is none besides me. I am the Lord , and there is no other. (NIV)

Isaiah 45:18 For this is what the Lord says — he who created the heavens, he is God; he who fashioned and made the earth, he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited — he says: "I am the Lord , and there is no other. (NIV)

Isaiah 46:9-10 Remember the former things, those of long ago; 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. (NIV)

- in mocking God's omnipotence (believing limits to God's power, that He could not stop him)
- in mocking God's omniscience (thinking that God did not foresee the rebellion and account for it in every way)

To speak against God's name is to speak against Him. God's enemies misuse His name. When any self-declared believer coarsely or casually uses the name of God, I ask this one question: Why would you want to sound like an enemy of God?

Psalms 102:8 All day long my enemies taunt me; those who rail against me use my name as a curse. (NIV)

Psalms 139:20 They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. (NIV)

Speech coming from a person's mouth is an overflow of their heart:

Matthew 12:34b For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks. (NIV)

God's name is so closely identified with Him that it was for God's name that Israel formerly built a temple in Jerusalem.

Deuteronomy 16:5-6 You must not sacrifice the Passover in any town the Lord your God gives you except in the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name. (NIV)

Psalms 96:8-9 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts. 9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness; tremble before him, all the earth. (NIV)

Isaiah 42:8 "I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. (NIV)

1 Kings 8:43 then hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and do whatever the foreigner asks of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as

do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name.  
(NIV)

While the old Jerusalem temple was a home for God's name on earth, His true dwelling place is heaven, specifically the temple of God (and its associated courtyard) earlier revealed by John. God cast the dragon down from his presence and banned him from ever returning. God reigns from this heavenly place:

1 Kings 8:30 Hear the supplication of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place [the temple, the dwelling place of God's name]. Hear from heaven, your dwelling place, and when you hear, forgive. (NIV)

2 Chronicles 30:27 The priests and the Levites stood to bless the people, and God heard them, for their prayer reached heaven, his holy dwelling place. (NIV)

Psalms 33:13-14 From heaven the Lord looks down and sees all mankind; 14 from his dwelling place he watches all who live on earth — (NIV)

While heaven is God's primary dwelling place, God also lives in His people in the new covenant.

John 14:23 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. (NIV, add in John 14:26 for the Holy Spirit too!)

God living with His people is foreseen in part by the Old Testament prophets. John reveals the full fulfillment in the Book of Revelation. While God lives with us spiritually right now, the day is coming when He will physically dwell with His people forever.

Ezekiel 37:27-28 My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. 28 Then the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever.'" (NIV, compare with Revelation 21:3)

The Beast and Dragon hate God's dwelling place, whether it is heaven itself, or God's spiritual dwelling place in the hearts of redeemed mankind.

The fourth and final focus of the beast's blasphemes includes everyone present with God in heaven. This includes all saints, already encompassed in this place, because we are already spiritually seated with Christ in heaven (Ephesians 2:6). This statement expands the overall

point to show the beast not only blasphemes saints but also holy angels who remain faithful to their Creator and Lord (Matthew 18:10; Mark 12:25).

Philippians 3:20a But our citizenship is in heaven. (NIV)

Never forget that all beasts hold blasphemy in common. This Revelation beast's prominence in blasphemy aside, every beast employs it in their search for power and dominance over some widespread scope of humanity. To exalt themselves they mock God and everything close to Him. They target His name, His home (heaven) and all how live with Him (which includes believers and God's holy angels).

The Roman Papacy is one of histories' lesser beasts, a part of Revelation's great beast (a part of the fragmented Roman Empire). Not merely a religious organization it owns land, demands temporal obedience, and is an official governmental state. We can witness this beast's blasphemy by a few words of its spokesmen throughout history. No later pope has ever withdrawn these blasphemies (at best, some Roman Catholic theologians have claimed all the underlying published sources misrepresent what the Pope *really* said or meant):

"To be subject to the Roman Pontiff is to every human creature altogether necessary for salvation....I have the authority of the King of kings. I am all in all and above all, so that God himself and I, the vicar of God, have but one consistory, and I am able to do all that God can do. What, therefore, can you make of me but God?" (Pope Boniface VIII, November 18, 1302)

"The pope and God are the same, so he has all power in Heaven and earth." (Pope Pius V, pope from 1566-1572)

"We hold upon this earth the place of Almighty God." (Pope Leo XIII, June 20, 1894)

"The Pope... is Jesus Christ himself, hidden under the veil of flesh" (Pope Pius X, published October 3, 1895, quoting Cardinal Sarto before he became pope, pope from 1903-1914)

"You know that I am the Holy Father, the representative of God on earth, the Vicar of Christ, which means that I am God on the earth" (Pope Pius XI, April 30, 1922)

All of heaven rejoices as God's plan unfolds (Luke 15:7; compare Revelation 5:11-14). In contrast, the beast (as does the Dragon) hates everything that God is doing. This cosmic battle continues even now.

It's worth taking a moment, before continuing with the next verse in Revelation, to clarify who the beast isn't. In the days of the final beast, a "lawless one" will come on the scene. This

lawless individual associates with the beast, having common goal, both serving the dragon, but the two aren't the same. The beasts represent kingdoms or empires. The lawless one specifies a particular individual. Paul notes the coming lawless one will be a worker of signs and false miracles:

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 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. (NIV)

The apostle John calls this lawless one "the antichrist." The entire period of the beasts includes many antichrists, but one late antichrist stands out above all earlier. He visibly triumphs over God's earthly church (fulfilling the goal and plan of the beasts and the dragon which they all serve). He may be a late public face for the second beast that also performs "great and miraculous signs. (Compare Revelation 13:13 with 2 Thessalonians 2:9)."

1 John 2:18 Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. (NIV)

Both beasts and the antichrist will take credit for defeating the saints. Most defeat of the saints takes place in the time of the second beast. Since the final beast works with the first both can legitimately claim the result. Returning to our text in Revelation:

Revelation 13:7 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. (NIV)

Assigned power and authority are in view here. First, for a limited time, God gave restricted power and authority to Satan. Jesus didn't dispute this authority when the devil offered to give it to Him for a price.

Luke 4:5-7 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." (NIV)

Second, following the time frame of Luke 4, it is the beast who now wields this power. Again, Jesus did not dispute that Satan had the authority to assign his authority to another, if he so wished. And the text shows Satan later gave this authority to the beast (Revelation 13:2), somehow believing that this will give him tactical advantage in his battle against God. I believe that Satan's fall from heaven showed him how limited he was, as a created and non-omnipresent being. The devil uses the beast trying to overcome his limits of time and distance. It's likely he believes the widespread presence of the beast, spanning a vast geographic area and extended time period, able to harm more of God's creation (especially believers) than his own single point attacks. Remember, his appearances directly before God in heaven, before his permanent banishment, showed the worst the devil could do at one time and place. In effect, his actions were useless. Satan saw the need to change his tactics and strategy.

As already said, in the days of this beast, God allows these wicked forces to conquer His saints. God ordained and allows this for His purposes and glory. The people and nations of the earth (excluding believers) are willing participants in the beast's evil plans.

Revelation 13:8 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. (NIV)

#### **Definition**

Proskuneo (NT:4352) – One of several Greek words used to represent worship (or aspects of worship). Other words, by their Strong's numbering, include: (e.g. NT:2356, 2357, 2317, 2150, 2151, 2124, or 4576, 4573, 2323 or even 3000, 1401, 1398, 5256, and 3008). Some lexicons describe this term with words or phrases such as "to kiss, to adore, to worship, to do obeisance, to show respect, to fall before, or to prostrate oneself in homage." The Complete Word Study Dictionary (NT) states the word literally means "to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage." This latter definition misses the attached idea of prostrating oneself in reverence or adoration. See more in the section on Revelation 11:1b.

Most of the world would protest that they don't worship the beast. Yet, consider the Greek word used here, "proskuneo," this word encompasses many ideas. Chief is bowing down, prostration in an act of homage and submission. Physical bowing isn't necessary; the focus is mental submission and reverence to the beast's ideas. Nonbelievers readily succumb to the latest ideas and worldly trends, embracing the popular powers and reigning kingdoms. Majority makes right. Don't make trouble, or go against the flow, is the mantra of the present power of this world. It wants everyone to accept the latest trends, dictates, and social norms,

as though their mere existence, as supported by this ruling authority, somehow makes them right.

God's church, all believers having their names written in the Lamb's book of Life, is the few that oppose the beast's unlawful dictates. Believers oppose the unlawful dictates of every beast. The church recognizes and embraces truth while the beast sells lies and deception, opposing forgeries of God's truth. Isaiah's words aptly describe the perverted ideas in the beast's kingdom:

Isaiah 5:20-21 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. 21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight. (NIV)

Returning to the last half of our Revelation verse:

Revelation 13:8b ... 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. (NIV, arrangement followed by KJV, CJB, God's Word, TNIV, Geneva 1599, NIV 2011)

Translators may word this passage in an alternate way...

... written from the creation of the world in the book of life belonging to the lamb that was slain. (Footnoted alternate rendering in the NIV; arrangement also followed by NASU, ESV, HCSB, NET, CEV)

This alternate wording arrangement finds support in the universally accepted translation of a later passage in Revelation 17:8. The sparse textual support or evidence for the NIV and KJV wording is unconvincing. By standard rules of interpretation this ambiguity's resolution rests in using the clear to interpret the obscure. Revelation 17:8 is unquestionably clear.

One primary question arises from this verse's wording. Does the clause "from the creation of the world" belong to "slain" or "written"?

First wording:

The greatest argument for the KJV and NIV wording is a negative claim against the second choice. Some translators object over this clause appearing too far apart from the verb in question. It certainly is a distance apart. Yet, John has a fondness for long Greek sentences. In

these sentences such a distant qualifying clause isn't out of character for John when he's seeking to modify a noun in weightier detail.

Similarly, the closest verse possibly implying this first wording appears outside the Book of Revelation and John's writings:

1 Peter 1:20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (NIV)

Jesus' physical crucifixion wasn't before the world's creation. At best, any Revelation 13:8 interpreters then have to view John's use of this wording symbolically. It perhaps symbolically stresses guaranteed expectation of the Lamb's sacrifice from before the world's creation.

Second wording (two points):

#1. It supports the promise given in Revelation 3:5 that God will never erase any believer's name from the Lamb's book of life. These are the people that God has recorded from before creation, the ones He protects (John 10:28), calls (John 6:37), and delivers from the Dragon (John 6:39).

Revelation 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. (NIV)

#2. It supports Biblical doctrines of grace (a Calvinistic view), seen in a multitude of places in Scriptures, that God chose His people by name from before the world's creation. This understanding is in harmony with Revelation's overall theme. John shows the entirety of human history, with its ups and downs, was and is God's plan – actively guided by Him. With certainty we're assured that *every* believer in Jesus Christ is an overcomer. Their names are permanent in the Lamb's book of life; God will never blot out their names from His book.

1 John 5:4-5 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. 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. (NIV)

The book of life appears later in Revelation, as every person's final destiny hinges on whether their name appears in this crucial book (Revelation 20:12, 15; 21:27).



Revelation 13:9 He who has an ear, let him hear. (NIV)

John ends this section of his important message with wording that we have already heard. These words, about hearing, echo those Jesus used directly to the seven churches at the beginning of the Book of Revelation. (See Revelation 2:7 Ephesus [1<sup>st</sup> church]; 2:11 Smyrna [2<sup>nd</sup> church]; 2:17 Pergamum [3<sup>rd</sup> church]; 2:29 Thyatira [4<sup>th</sup> church]; Sardis [5<sup>th</sup> church]; Philadelphia [6<sup>th</sup> church]; Laodicea [7<sup>th</sup> church]). One final time, John echoes this same warning, the sevenfold warning to the seven literal churches, churches also representing the church spanning then to the end. In this repetition he's stressing that first beast coming on the scene following the time of Jesus spans all of history until the end. That major beast remains, but it isn't the only beast under consideration. A description of another beast will shortly follow.

The next two lines, following the repeated warning to hear, show what believers will face during the entirety of the time of this primary beast:

Revelation 13:10 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. (NIV)

Believers imprisoned and believers killed. A brief look at worldwide church history proves this true. Multitudes of saints have experienced these prophesied indignities and continue to suffer the same. We must remember that God is using all events, yes even these events, for our good (Romans 8:28)! We are to expect persecution of the saints during beast's rule. Notice that governments are often the ones committing or aiding these atrocities (perhaps through inaction). God calls governments to wield the sword for justice (Romans 13:4). Yet, because they share the beast's goals, they abuse this authority. The worst offenders are the fragmented nations that directly make up this beast or ideological empire.

These events will characterize the entire age. They're not just past happenings, but also today and continuing until the end. How is God's church supposed to react to this knowledge? The end of verse 10 gives the answer.

Revelation 13:10c This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. (NIV)

In the face of captivity or wrongful death God calls every saint to have patient endurance and to remain faithful. This endurance is a gift from God (Romans 15:5) and so is the faithfulness (Galatians 5:22). Every believer is continuously dependent on God.

I find it interesting that John draws wording into this passage from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 15:2 And if they ask you, 'Where shall we go?' tell them, 'This is what the Lord says: "Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.'" (NIV, also 43:11)

In the Old Testament, these words applied to rebellious Israel – those you would expect to see suffering severe punishment. Isn't it easier to expect this calamity to happen to sinful and rebellious people? Don't we think they deserved it? And yet, here in Revelation, God says His saints must expect this even though God has redeemed and forgiven them, and they're following the Lord. God's people sometimes struggle with why; the world doesn't understand at all. One of the things the world often uses to mock the church is this very thing. "If you're part of God's church and He's all powerful, why does God allow you to be treated in such a fashion?" The answer the church must always give is: "This was God's plan from the very beginning!" and "He will be glorified by it!"

By Revelation 13:10, during the time of this first beast, circumstances look bleak. A person might ask if there's any way events could get worse. In answer to our theoretical question, John now introduces another beast:

Revelation 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. (NIV)

This beast doesn't replace the first beast, it aids it. Can two major empires or kingdoms exist on the earth at the same time? Without question! Where Daniel's vision of kingdoms was linear, with one succeeding another, John's major end-times beast doesn't go away (even when one of its heads appears fatally wounded). It lives on, gathering strength and later a companion in service to the dragon.

John recorded the first beast as having the dragon's power, throne, and great authority (Revelation 13:2). Now he describes this second beast as, firstly, speaking like a dragon. This focus on the second beast's speech is a key statement. Its spoken words and communicated ideas are the emphasis of this second beast. Beasts typically flaunt their power and authority through physical compulsion and the misuse of the sword. This second beast misuses perhaps the greatest potential weapon ever created, the power of speech and persuasion. An earthly kingdom or dynasty might be speaking but its ideas unquestionably come from the dragon.

Ideas originating with the dragon don't have to be overtly demonic. The devil is an expert at using lies and deception. The one Scriptures calls "the Father of lies (John 8:44)" wields these as a weapon. In form they may be a small so-called "white" lie, a darkest untruth, or a misuse of the truth. This second beast shows who its father is by speaking his words.

In appearance the second beast has "two horns like a lamb," which confirms the maxims that you shouldn't judge a book by its cover and that beauty shouldn't only be skin deep. This beast tries to look like something harmless, exercising its authority looking like a lamb. The horns specifically are symbols of this authority. The reference to a lamb intends more than a beast appearing meek, harmless and lovable. It suggests trying to masquerade as a savior, a distorted copy of the true Lamb of God.

Matthew 7:15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (NIV)

This second beast comes out of the earth. The first beast came from the sea, representing peoples of the earth. Using parallel imagery, the second beast comes from the peoples of the earth, also representing peoples of the earth. This beast pictures John the Baptist's words as recorded by the apostle John:

John 3:31 "The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. (NIV)

This last beast belongs to the earth and comes from the earth and speaks only earthly words. Worse still, while there are earthly words that are true (i.e. John 3:12), this beast speaks the most earthly ideas of all, lies and deception inspired by the dragon.

1 John 4:5 They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. (NIV)

The two beasts work together:

Revelation 13:12 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. (NIV)

The first beast was about force and power, the second about words and propaganda. Together they become a seemingly unstoppable force. Another way to understand this pair of beasts: The first is a brutal and authoritarian world power, the second is false religion (or ideology) marketed through ideas and indoctrination (likely as “progressive” ideas too).

The second beast’s propaganda is with purpose; it builds up and exalts the first beast (and all the first beast stands for). Simply put, those worshipping at the altar of propaganda and lies, also worship at the altar of earthly power and force. This is why it is says the second beast causes people to worship the first beast. Indeed, those who worship either beast are worshippers of the dragon, something John directly communicated in Revelation 13:4. Remember, the dragon doesn’t care what you worship. He only seeks to keep your focus away from God, who alone is worthy of worship.

Revelation 13:12b whose fatal wound had been healed. (NIV)

The second beast parodies Christ, by looking like a male lamb. John finishes verse twelve by making clear the first beast is part of a similar mockery, portrayed as one that comes back from a seemingly fatal wound – presumably risen from the dead.

Revelation 13:13 And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. (NIV)

**Definition**

Megas semeion – Greek phrase meaning “big miraculous signs.”

Demonic power fills and frames the second beast’s words. It’s the spokesperson for the dragon on earth and it performs great signs (“megas semeion”), visible to all people. The example given, of fire coming down from heaven, intentionally invokes remembrances of many true prophets, such as Elijah (1 Kings 18:38; 2 Kings 1:10-12). By combining demonic miracles and dragon-inspired words this beast shows itself to be a false prophet. We may personify this empire as a false prophet, but this beast isn’t one single individual. Again, this false prophet is separate from the already mentioned man of lawlessness. That man of lawlessness, or antichrist, will unquestionably work in common goal with this beast. But the antichrist is a specific individual at a specific time, while this second beast is an empire spanning many peoples over a broad time period.

God used miracles to authenticate his prophets (for example 1 Kings 18) and apostles (see Romans 15:18-19; Acts 15:12; 19:11-12; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:4) throughout biblical history. Yet, the Bible makes clear that miracle working alone is inadequate proof that someone is right or someone to follow. Chief in any evaluation is examination of what they're teaching. If their instruction promotes a false god or a gospel different from scriptures, they are a false prophet. Believers must reject and refuse to listen to all false prophets.

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 It is the Lord your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. 5 That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you. (NIV)

Again, God's people must reject (and expose; see Ephesians 5:13) all miracle workers who teach a false gospel. This hasn't changed throughout history, whether magicians of Pharaoh's court (Exodus 7:22) or fake Christian miracle workers (Matthew 7:22). Christ followers must continue to oppose end times false Christ's and false prophets (Matthew 24:24), the eventual last days lawless one (2 Thessalonians 2:9), and this miracle working beast (empire or kingdom; Revelation 13:13).

Jesus, himself, made clear it's a mark of a wicked and adulterous generation to seek after signs...

Matthew 16:4 A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign... (NIV, also Matthew 12:39)

If, as Revelation shows and Jesus proclaimed, wickedness intensifies towards the end, it shouldn't surprise us that many people will increasingly seek after miraculous signs. And, similarly, it shouldn't surprise us when this second beast (false prophet) plays to this evil urge. It gives the people what they want; using a display of great and miraculous signs supposedly to confirm its power and dragon-inspired message.

In reality it doesn't matter what the miracle looks like. Maybe it'll be an illusion of earthly peace or widespread homogeneity, perhaps some astonishing cure or technological wonder. Regardless the beast uses it to say it deserves following and adoration. John uses the example of fire falling from heaven intentionally to invoke imagery of the greatest Old Testament prophets (1 Kings 18:30-39; 2 Kings 1:10-14). What he's saying is that people will view the second beast's miracles in equivalency, or the same light, as the greatest miracles ever wrought by biblical prophets. The beast's calling down fire from heaven unquestionably parodies or counterfeits the actions of God's twin witnesses, His church (Revelation 11:5).

Revelation 13:14 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. (NIV)

Remember, these two beasts are working together. The second provides the propaganda and signs to help deceive people and cause them to follow the first powerful beast (or the dragon-inspired goals of this first beast). The idea of setting up an image was common in Roman times, in John's day. Roman emperors wanted their images displayed throughout their empire, whether around subservient seats of power or in places of worship (even wanting display at the Jerusalem temple). The display reinforced their claim of authority and calls for people to accept this pervasive authority. If your image appears in every seat of government, every courtroom, all places of worship and on every citizen's wall, it provides constant witness that submission is the only valid course of action. This list omits another long-used common means of circulating an image, coins and currency in every person's pockets.

No specific location appears for this image in honor of the first beast. It's an order of the second beast given to all inhabitants of the earth. This makes it likely that it's not one isolated image, but rather an image set up or used by every inhabitant or local government. An easy way to do this would use something all empires control – trade and commerce. An earlier beast, Rome, minted coins for its entire empire bearing the image of their consecutive emperors. Though the image changed by ruler, it remained an image of the empire itself regardless of which specific emperor adorned the coin. In a different way, John shows ties to all trade and commerce with this final beast's image:

Revelation 13:15-17 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. (NIV)

The second beast gives breath to the image of the first beast so it could speak. This merely means there is a living authority attached to the enforced use of this image. Its voice comes from use or nonuse. Failure to use the beast's image (or item associated with the image) cries out to the empire so the beast can react. It condemns any refusing to use it, the mentioned sentence being death (verse 15).

Notice John doesn't say the beasts have to carry out this killing directly, only that those who refuse to use it will suffer death. It is possible these paired empires will cause their officials directly to enforce such a death penalty. It's just as probable the killing will be indirect, perhaps through starvation or exposure. These verses clearly show that no one will be able to do business (for example; buy food, pay rent) apart from embracing the economics of the empire.

The mentioned image is a mark of the beast, though not the specific beastly mark immediately following in the text. Remember, the empire's image needn't be of a specific person; it might identify an office. Remembering the beast is an empire reminds us the beast's name isn't the name of one person. The name of the beast isn't synonymous with the man of lawlessness' name.

#### **Definition**

Charagma (pronounced "khar-ag-mah") – A Greek word meaning "an etching" or "an engraving." Used of images or text carved into an article or making an impression on its surface. You could say "stamped on" only as it makes an impression on wet clay.

People receive this mark on their right hand or forehead. The word translated "mark" is the Greek word "charagma," meaning an etching or engraving. Excluding one instance, the word only appears in the book of Revelation and here always about this beast (see Revelation 13:16, 17; 14:9, 11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). The one use outside Revelation is Acts 17:29. Luke uses this term over idolatry (something carved) with a warning to not consider God in this fashion.

While possibly a literal mark, compulsorily worn on the forehead or hand, the figurative nature of the passage makes it more probable that this is also figurative language. If literal, it would require a carved mark and not a stamped (tattooed) mark as many Christian apocalyptic movies use. Again, the passage's context directs the reader to a figurative understanding. John's language intentionally shows a contrast. Earlier he showed every believer receiving a seal on their foreheads:

Revelation 7:3 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." (NIV)

### **Definition**

Sphragizo (pronounced "sfrag-id-zo") – A Greek word meaning to stamp or imprint with a private mark, or signet, for security or preservation or as a sign of authenticity. (Think of the word signet as a seal ring, or personal seal as worn on a cord. Royalty, governors, and officials commonly employed such items).

The Greek word used for "seal" here is "sphragizo." Unless we are willing to accept that every believer receives a literal seal on their head, there is no compelling reason to believe that nonbelievers receive literal engravings on their heads or hands. The imagery of both texts shows God's people are forever authentically and permanently ascribed to Him, even as the lost belong to the beast. Notice that John later describes this seal (in Revelation 14:1) as the name of the Lamb and the name of His Father written on believer's foreheads.

The beast's mark isn't a tattoo that you can get and regret, as some end-times movies have portrayed. Nor is it a mark forced on you, possibly later supernaturally removed (if you change your mind), rather it is a mark taken by choice by all God has not sealed.

John shows the difference between believers and nonbelievers by his word choices. Though the beast forces its mark, unbelievers are willing recipients. They take on themselves this mark (engraved), through personal human choice and actions. In contrast, God seals the believer, the latter imprinted by the actions of a higher authority, namely God himself. All God has sealed will never accept the mark of the beast.

Revelation 13:16a He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark...

Intentionally contrasting details immediately following clarify the Greek word translated "everyone (NIV)," meaning "all (NASU)." It is lowly people, great people, wealthy and poor, even free and slaves, who willingly receive the mark. Beast followers include people of all classes, all economic statures, whether influential or not.

It's easy to see why God's seal is on the forehead alone; the head representing our thoughts, our inward being. As believers God transforms use from the inside out; we are spiritually a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15) and God continues to renew our minds (Romans



12:2). While our actions don't always reflect this advancing reality (Romans 7:21-25), our failures don't change the unconditional fact that we are forever His.

Non-believers readily accept the mark of the beast, notably in two places. First, it's on their forehead, as was God's seal on believers, for similar reasons. It represents the inward man of the lost, personally willing to embrace the thoughts and ideas of this world and its powers.

Second, it's on the right hand. Three ideas biblically belong to imagery of the right hand:

- The right hand represents giving and taking (e.g. Matthew 6:3; Revelation 5:7)
- The right hand shows first place in order (e.g. Matthew 20:21, 23; Mark 10:37, 40).
- The right hand shows emphasis and favor (e.g. Revelation 1:16-17, 20; 2:1; 5:7; Galatians 2:9; even Acts 3:7 and 1 Kings 2:19).

Consider that Jesus, himself, sits at the right hand of the Father:

Romans 8:34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died — more than that, who was raised to life — is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (NIV, also Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 1 Peter 3:22)

Since the right hand shows what we put first, or what we do first, God warns us to pay attention to it:

Matthew 5:30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (NIV)

Unbelievers receive the beast's mark on their right hand to show their willingness to put the actions demanded of them by the beast into first place. This corrupt choice is in great contrast to believers who have God at their right hand.

Psalms 109:30-31 With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord; in the great throng I will praise him. 31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him. (NIV)

Acts 2:25 (quoting Psalms 16:8) David said about him: "I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (NIV)

Psalms 73:23-24 Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. 24 You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. (NIV)

Psalms 121:5-8 The Lord watches over you — the Lord is your shade at your right hand; 6 the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. 7 The Lord will keep you from all harm — he will watch over your life; 8 the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore. (NIV)

Isaiah 41:13 For I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. (NIV)

Placement of the beast's mark on the forehead and hand comes from the same representative idea expressed in the Old Testament Law:

Exodus 13:9 This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the Lord is to be on your lips. For the Lord brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. (NIV, also Exodus 13:16)

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (NIV)

I find it interesting that Orthodox Judaism has turned what should be a symbolic passage into something literal. From these verses came a series physical rituals and objects. Jews inscribe the law on miniature scrolls (each needing a rabbi's blessing). Completed scrolls they then wear (tefillin) or post on a doorpost (mezuzah), sealed in specially crafted containers. Tefillin (phylactery) users wear them bound to the head and hand (with prescribed procedures) by attached leather straps. Rituals were not the intent of God's words in Exodus or Leviticus. God never wanted the Law cooped up in a box unread, He wanted it studied and mediated on (head) and always given first place in actions (right hand). A person's openly living the Law would show the world this home belonged to followers of God (written on doorframes and gates).

Returning to the next part of our passage in Revelation, we learn why the beast wants this mark.

Revelation 13:17 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. (NIV)

All beasts of this world focus on power and wealth. This late beast is no different, using the economy and commerce to control people. Consider what people will give up to amass houses, lands, and possessions, or increase their wealth, or buy food and clothing. The beast counts on people being willing to love life and possessions more than God.

I believe this buying and selling context provides setting to those dying for not worshipping the beast's image. Believers will die because they cannot get the essentials of life this beast controls. Only a few verses earlier we heard this of God's people:

Revelation 12:11b ...they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (NIV)

God's people will follow Him even if it means their own physical death. Obedience to their Lord is first place and they know that eternal life waits even if they lose everything here. Some of those John specifically wrote to, at the beginning of this book, lived and died in earthly poverty and physical need solely because of their faithfulness to Jesus Christ (expressly Smyrna, see Revelation 2:9). Governments, empires, and beasts, sanctioning and allowing this on a small scale (as they have throughout history) should remind us that there's little to prevent it on a universal scale.

Revelation 13:18 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. (NIV)

Understanding this verse does not come from earthly methods, dubious associations, or extensive research. John specifically uses the phrase "this calls for wisdom" and he has already doubly stressed that wisdom belongs to our Lord and Savior (Revelation 5:12; 7:12). God will grant understanding of this subject to whom He wishes, when He wants, and for His purposes. His Holy Spirit inspired insight alone that is valuable in understanding this specific number. Interpreters must seek and find this wisdom from God.

1 Corinthians 1:30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. (NIV, also 1 Corinthians 2:6-14)

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him. (NIV)

Those studying eschatology often read too much into the statement that it's "man's number." A man's number doesn't say it's the number of a single person or individual (such as the antichrist, who's not the beast). It's a man's number because it's a statement of contrast. The Greek word translated here as "man" is "anthropos."

#### **Definition**

Anthropos – A Greek word translated "man." A generic name in distinction from gods and the animals. (NT 444. From the Complete Word Study Dictionary)

The specific tense of the word used in this verse, "anthropou," by the same dictionary, is merely expressing "an ordinary number" or something commonly used as a human measure. Similar use of the term occurs later in the book, in Revelation 21:17, about measuring.

John is stating the mark of this beast, or empire, is human or ordinary. Note the passage doesn't make clear the time frame for receiving this mark. The mark may span the beast's rule (many years) or be a singular event late in the beast's regime. Dispensationalists love to assert rampant speculation into this subject.

Whatever this mark is, it's something common, human, and directly tied to this beast. Again, the setting doesn't need a mark physically inscribed on the forehead or hand. This likely represents the mark's acceptance and use by those embracing the beast. This earthly mark contrasts the church that embraces, invokes, and wears the Name which is above all names (Philippians 2:9), a name that is not human or ordinary.

Others give too much emphasis to the statement "calculate the number." This verb, to calculate, also appears in Luke 14:28 (the only other place it's used in the New Testament)...

Luke 14:28-29 For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate ("estimate" in NIV, "compute" in NET) the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? (NASU)

While calculate can mean physically counting up values, it also invokes the idea of deciding or distinguishing.

Suppose the given number value of 666 is literal, something that cannot dogmatically asserted. Then something commonly associated with this beast, perhaps the empire's name, totals to this value. As we examined in the section on number symbolism, this assumption leaves far more questions than answers. First, what language was the name numbered with? Is it a language that commonly uses letter values for numbers, such as Greek or Hebrew or Arabic? Does it include vowels or exclude them? The what-if-list is seemingly unending. Uncertainly would make any definite identification subjective at best.

Because of the widespread symbolic use of numbers throughout the book of Revelation, it is just as probable that John is intentionally giving a number here that has no natural symbolic meaning. In this fashion he's saying that it's an ordinary human label whose value cannot decisively discover its identity. Historical study supports this. Many correctly note multitudes of names, in hosts of languages, add up to the value 666 (or 616, see the section on numbers). See the quotation from Irenaeus (who lived about 130-202 A.D.), given further below, which speaks of this issue from the earliest days of the church.

John isn't directly trying to identify the beast, rather to warn that it will seem normal or ordinary from a human perspective. This directs the reader to beware of the words of any beast who verbally opposes God's word (Revelation 13:11). The church shouldn't be so focused on trying to identify this last beast. It should focus on remaining true to God's word in the face of every beast who opposes God's truth (as did even the first beast, see Revelation 13:6). All who carefully pay attention to spoken words from beasts of their day, namely Spirit-led believers, will never take the mark of this (or any) beast.

The purpose of the revelation of the Lamb's unsealed scroll isn't preemptive identification of specifics. Mention or allusion to people, empires, and events, is chiefly to show, after the fact, that all are part of God's plan. Revelation's warnings are mostly general. God gives each warning to caution believers of all ages to be on guard. This need to be vigilant (or watchful, or alert) is constant regardless of what specific empire, kingdom, government, or leader is on the scene at the moment. (See 1 Peter 5:8; Revelation 3:2; 1 Corinthians 16:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:6; Matthew 24:42; Mark 13:33-37.) Teaching that people can somehow guess the beast's identity, using this number and extraordinary study, is dangerous. It lulls believers into thinking they can let down their guard until such a time that this last beast comes on the scene. Such thought makes it easier to fall prey to lesser beasts and false prophets.

It's fitting to end this section on the mark and number of the Beast with a portion of what Irenaeus wrote so long ago (about A.D. 180). Take note that this man, who lived shortly after the last apostles, was still looking for this as a future event. If we are to believe Preterists, all these events were past, finished around the temple's destruction, something they assure us was clear to people of that day. If true, those people failed to speak their understanding to the generation that followed. Irenaeus understood the man of lawlessness (or antichrist) and the beast of Revelation as both still future to his day. Note that Irenaeus had already mistakenly merged the antichrist and beast. He became perhaps the earliest to claim the beast's (empire's) mark is the mark of the antichrist (an individual). This early reference shows this distraction of trying to associate 666 with a specific individual has a long-standing history in the church, yet age does not make it a valid pursuit.

Although Certain as to the Number of the Name of Antichrist, Yet We Should Come to No Rash Conclusions as to the Name Itself, Because This Number is Capable of Being Fitted to Many Names. Reasons for This Point Being Reserved by the Holy Spirit. Antichrist's Reign and Death.

1. Such, then, being the state of the case, and this number being found in all the most approved and ancient copies [of the Apocalypse], and those men who saw John face to face bearing their testimony [to it]; while reason also leads us to conclude that the number of the name of the beast, [if reckoned] according to the Greek mode of calculation by the [value of] the letters contained in it, will amount to six hundred and sixty and six; that is, the number of tens shall be equal to that of the hundreds, and the number of hundreds equal to that of the units (for that number which [expresses] the digit six being adhered to throughout, indicates the recapitulations of that apostasy, taken in its full extent, which occurred at the beginning, during the intermediate periods, and which shall take place at the end),-I do not know how it is that some have erred following the ordinary mode of speech, and have vitiated the middle number in the name, deducting the amount of fifty from it, so that instead of six decades they will have it that there is but one. [I am inclined to think that this occurred through the fault of the copyists, as is wont to happen, since numbers also are expressed by letters; so that the Greek letter which expresses the number sixty was easily expanded into the letter Iota of the Greeks.] Others then received this reading without examination; some in their simplicity, and upon their own responsibility, making use of this number expressing one decad; while some, in their inexperience, have ventured to seek out a name which should contain the erroneous and spurious number. Now, as regards those who have done this in simplicity, and without evil intent, we are at liberty to assume that pardon will be granted them by God. But as for those who, for the sake of

vainglory, lay it down for certain that names containing the spurious number are to be accepted, and affirm that this name, hit upon by themselves, is that of him who is to come; such persons shall not come forth without loss, because they have led into error both themselves and those who confided in them. Now, in the first place, it is loss to wander from the truth, and to imagine that as being the case which is not; then again, as there shall be no light punishment [inflicted] upon him who either adds or subtracts anything from the Scripture, under that such a person must necessarily fall. Moreover, another danger, by no means trifling, shall overtake those who falsely presume that they know the name of Antichrist. For if these men assume one [number], when this [Antichrist] shall come having another, they will be easily led away by him, as supposing him not to be the expected one, who must be guarded against.

...

3. It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be found possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved. For if there are many names found possessing this number, it will be asked which among them shall the coming man bear. It is not through a want of names containing the number of that name that I say this, but on account of the fear of God, and zeal for the truth: for the name Euanthas (Euanqas) contains the required number, but I make no allegation regarding it. Then also Lateinos (Lateinos) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: I will not, however, make any boast over this [coincidence]. Teitan too, (Teitan, the first syllable being written with the two Greek vowels e and i, among all the names which are found among us, is rather worthy of credit. For it has in itself the predicted number, and is composed of six letters, each syllable containing three letters; and [the word itself] is ancient, and removed from ordinary use; for among our kings we find none bearing this name Titan, nor have any of the idols which are worshipped in public among the Greeks and barbarians this appellation. Among many persons, too, this name is accounted divine, so that even the sun is termed "Titan" by those who do now possess [the rule]. This word, too, contains a certain outward appearance of vengeance, and of one inflicting merited punishment because he (Antichrist) pretends that he vindicates the oppressed. And besides this, it is an ancient name, one worthy of credit, of royal dignity, and still further, a name belonging to a tyrant. Inasmuch, then, as this name "Titan" has so much to recommend it, there is a strong degree of probability, that from among the many [names suggested],

we infer, that perchance he who is to come shall be called "Titan." We will not, however, incur the risk of pronouncing positively as to the name of Antichrist; for if it were necessary that his name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign.

4. But he indicates the number of the name now, that when this man comes we may avoid him, being aware who he is: the name, however, is suppressed, because it is not worthy of being proclaimed by the Holy Spirit. (Irenaeus, Against Heresies, Book 5, Chapter 30; underlining mine for emphasis, square parenthesis by the translators for clarification)

My final thoughts on this beast's mark: John stressed the ordinariness of the number that would be representative of this last empire (beast). God obviously didn't want clear identification of this beast in advance or He would have provided a method without such ambiguity. (Consider that God identified, far in advance, others by name: Cyrus in Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-13, Josiah in 1 Kings 13:2). I believe God's vagueness is intentional so believers will remain on guard throughout all times. He knew many more beasts would come, all in opposition to Him, all wanting to subject our thoughts and actions into the dragon's service. Before this final beast, a host of rulers and empires have come and gone. Other smaller beasts will exist alongside this final one. Many have made, by various means, some association of these earlier beasts with the number 666. Regardless, this truth remains: the church is to stay faithful to God (who has sealed His people) and to reject every beast and false prophet. Perhaps God will make it specifically clear to his people when this final beast is on the scene, but even if He doesn't, it changes nothing. Believers are always to remain on guard and stay faithful to Christ. Until Jesus returns for His people, multitudes of 666's will continue to come and go.

Turning from the hordes that follow the beast and receive its mark, John's vision now returns to those who haven't.

Revelation 14:1 Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. (NIV)

Using the symbolism of the 144,000 (first introduced in Revelation 7:4), representing the completed church, John's gaze returns to this glorious gathering around the throne of God. This is a view of the heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:22-24), here called Mount Zion. Most importantly this verse reemphasizes that every believer has God's seal on their forehead, the



name of the Lamb and his Father. This returns us to a statement Jesus made to the church of Philadelphia:

Revelation 3:12 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. (NIV)

The named place, Mount Zion, appears in a key Messianic psalm...

Psalms 2:1-9 Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? 2 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One. 3 "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." 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 King on 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." (NIV)

Mount Zion represents God's throne room, where He rules from, whether heaven (now) or with the saints on earth (for eternity). John uses the term here to show a great contrast between the seemingly vast beastly empires and the kingdom of our Lord. The geographic scope of the beast's kingdoms is irrelevant; what matters is the Lamb's reign with His Father and in this unchangeable fact all believers have comfort, safety, security and stability. Those bearing the name of the Lamb and His Father are secure. God never loses a single one of His children to the beasts or the dragon.

John 10:28-30 [Jesus speaking:] I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one." (NIV)

John continues to describe this heavenly scene...

Revelation 14:2 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. (NIV)

In the first verse John uses “Mt Zion” to refer to God’s throne room. Now he uses a parallel term, “heaven,” to stress this gathering of all the saints is in God’s heavenly throne room. In the first verse he said he “looked,” in the second he “heard.” In other words his entire attention was no longer on the earthly and troubling beasts, but solely on the events surrounding God’s throne.

The sound was be “like the roar of rushing waters (NIV)” or the “sound of many waters (NASU).” The implication is a loud overpowering sound. Three times John equates sounds to “many waters” in the Book of Revelation; this is the second. For the record, the three instances:

- #1. The voice of Jesus himself (Revelation 1:15)
- #2. Seemingly a sound of instrumental music (Revelation 14:2), examined below
- #3. The voice of the redeemed (Revelation 19:6)

#### **Definition**

Phone – A Greek word pronounced “fo-nay.” Used of any sound or tone heard by another, whether produced by God, angels, man, or from inanimate objects (e.g. a trumpet) or other created source (e.g. wind or thunder). Rather than “a sound,” some translators interpret the word as “a voice,” yet only context shows if it’s a conscious being’s cry or voice.

The NIV, NET, CJB, and HCSB use the phrase “a sound from heaven” versus the NASU, KJV, and ESV’s “a voice from heaven.” Consider the immediate context of this second instance (#2). It doesn’t have a defined verbal message; the text implies only musical instruments. If true, proper wording would be “a sound.” When translators use the wording “a voice” it naturally makes English language readers think someone is speaking. We will consider shortly why some translators prefer “a voice” for this passage.

The provided parallel wording (“like”), referring to peals of thunder and the roar of water, stress the intensity of the heard sounds. These sounds-like statements provide no hint at whether a “voice” or “sound” is more accurate. Note John’s tenfold use of the Greek word for thunder (“brontai” NT:1027) in Revelation. Each thunder describes loud noises, or voices, or messages proclaimed (including of the seven thunders of Revelation 10:3-4 which God ordered him not to reveal). John’s broad word use provides no specific context for this present event.

Thankfully, the text provides more detail about the sound John heard...

Revelation 14:2b The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. (NIV)

John seemingly heard heavenly music. It's from this passage people find cause for the often caricatured image of saints in heaven all playing harps. If this heavenly sound comes from harps, then English wording "a sound" is more accurate than "a voice." But further context waits. Take note that John says the sound was "like that" of harpists. The wording does not say they were harps, merely that they had something in common with harpist playing their harps. The next verse continues John's thought...

Revelation 14:3 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. (NIV)

#### **Definition**

Ado – A Greek word pronounced "ad-oh," meaning a melodic utterance. As found in the New Testament, this Greek word only applies to verbal praise of God.

They "sang (Greek 'Ado')." John uses a sounds-like statement in verse 2 to suggest the harmony of the voices sounded like the tight harmony of harps, rather than saying he heard physical harps. His continued focus was on the voice which "sang." As found in the New Testament, writers only use this Greek word for verbal praise of God. Beyond Revelation uses, there are only two further verses, both from Paul:

Ephesians 5:19-20 Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing ('ado') 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. (NIV)

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing ('ado') psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (NIV)

In Revelation, apart from Revelation 14:3, John uses this term two further times (another threefold use of wording by John).

Revelation 5:9 And they [the 24 elders] sang ('ado') 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. (NIV)

Revelation 15:3-4 and sang ('ado') the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "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." (NIV, consider the wording regarding singing in Exodus 15:1, 21; Numbers 21:17, all associated with Moses)

Together, these passages form the greater context. "A voice" is proper wording in Revelation 14:2, as clearly the sound John heard contained voices of the saints offered up in praise to God.

Are there physical harps (or stringed instruments) in heaven? While this verse uses "sounds-like" wording, there are two further references to harps in Revelation, each surrounding the passages last examined (another threefold use of wording by John):

Revelation 5:8-9a 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: (NIV)

Revelation 15:2-3a 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. They held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: (NIV)

Superficially, both of these passages show physical harp-like instruments in heavenly use. But a reader can't be dogmatic about their literal appearance. Often when John uses a threefold example, one of his examples clarifies the others. We've already understand the second appearance of harp uses "sounds-like" wording focusing on the singing voices, not on an instrument's music. Even both other uses closely tie harps with singing. While an argument exists that they perhaps sang to music they played on the harps, the passages never say this. It says they "held" or "had" the harps – both using a Greek word meaning "to possess." The figurative nature of John's wording in Revelation makes it equally possible that he is suggesting that each person now has full musical ability, to sing melodically in perfect harmony (like a harp). In 15:2 the literal wording is "they possessed harps of God." This would be John's visual

way of stating that each had God-given musical ability. Such understand then heightens the following emphasis on singing verbal praise to God. While this word study might seem like a rabbit trail, it's also worth reconsidering an item that appears with the harp back in Revelation 5:8b...

Revelation 5:8b Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (NIV)

Literally "Each one possessing a harp and a golden bowl full of incense..." The text quickly shows the bowl is figurative or representative, using a clarifying statement, "which are the prayers of the saints. This again lends itself to understand the harp figuratively, representative of the ability to sing – the action which follows.

**Definition**

Phiale – A Greek word pronounced "fee-al-ee," meaning a bowl or basin, a container with a wide mouth.

Once again displaying the intricacy of number use in Revelation, John uses bowls exactly 12 times throughout the book. The word (Greek "phiale") never appears outside Revelation in the New Testament. Contrary to the King James wording "vial" the word is about a bowl or basin, something with a wide mouth. Using the word vial wrongly make the reader think of a container with a narrow mouth or opening. John consistently uses this word in association with, or to represent, something poured out.

Revelation 5:8	Prayers poured out (or offered)
Revelation 15:7	Wrath of God poured out [introduced]
Revelation 16:1	Wrath of God poured out [commanded]
Revelation 16:2	Sevenfold wrath of God poured out [1]
Revelation 16:3	Sevenfold wrath of God poured out [2]
Revelation 16:4	Sevenfold wrath of God poured out [3]
Revelation 16:8	Sevenfold wrath of God poured out [4]
Revelation 16:10	Sevenfold wrath of God poured out [5]
Revelation 16:12	Sevenfold wrath of God poured out [6]
Revelation 16:17	Sevenfold wrath of God poured out [7]
Revelation 17:1	Wrath of God [referenced or remembered]
Revelation 21:9	Wrath of God [referenced or remembered]

I will argue that all 12 instances concern God's Wrath or Judgment. Revelation 6:10 and 8:3-4 together show even the first seemingly singular instance, prayers of the saints (poured out on the altar), to be prayers asking "How long, oh Lord?" The following judgments and direct wrath of God are all in answer to these saints' prayers.

In summary, on Revelation 5:8, the harp and the bowl are twin illustrations representative of items used during communication with God. The harp represents the voice of praise melodically poured out to God; the bowl represents the voice of petition poured out seeking the justice of God.

Revelation 14:3b No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. (NIV)

This new song of praise to God will only ever come from His saints, God's redeemed, all spiritual Israel (Jew & Gentile grafted in), represented by 144,000. Remember John introduced the 144,000 as a three-part example, beginning in Revelation 7:4. The 144,000 is synonymous with the "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language (Revelation 7:9)" and all who "come out of the great tribulation (Revelation 7:14)". Beyond appearing in this three-part example, John not coincidentally uses the specific value, 144,000, three times in Revelation. This is the final instance (Revelation 7:4; 14:1; 14:3).

Our singing this new song is the crowning fulfillment of something currently commanded of God's people (on the present earth). In a host of places Scriptures command us to sing to God "a new song (Psalms 33:3; 96:1; 98:1; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10)." John references this singing of a "new song" only twice, here and back in Revelation 5:9-10. The earlier reference shows the saints praising the Lamb for being worthy to open the scroll, for His sacrifice, and for His redemption of a people of God. This final new song reference provides no specifics about its content. This omission may be because there's no perceptible need for any different themes than the earlier instance. Take note that this "new song" originates with God. It is He that gives us the understanding, ability, and willingness wholeheartedly to express His truth to Him (and others) in melodic praise.

Psalms 40:1-3 I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. 2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. (NIV)

Some (especially Dispensationalists) relegate the 144,000 to being a group of super-believers, rather than recognizing them as being representative of the entire church. In support of their superior qualities, they often cite the following verses:

Revelation 14:4-5 These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure (“chaste” NASU). 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. (NIV)

The KJV translates the first part of verse 4 as...

Revelation 14:4 These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. (KJV, so also ESV)

Citing Revelation 14:3-4, many think the 144,000 are only men. And these aren’t ordinary men, but men who have remained virgins with extraordinary character. In truth, John is using a four-part example here.

- #1. They are virgins
- #2. They follow the Lamb everywhere
- #3. God redeemed them from among men (i.e. world)
- #4. They never lie and are blameless

If you hold the virgins statement as strictly literal, for consistency, you also have to hold the added clauses as being 100% literal. These men have never lied and are fully blameless having followed the Lamb without wavering. Believing this of any person, beyond the God-man Jesus Christ (see Hebrews 7:26; 4:15), is to go against Scriptures.

1 John 1:10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives. (NIV)

Of course, most concede that everyone have sinned (though Roman Catholics may argue otherwise about Mary). Hosts of verses testify to the universality of sin (for example Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12). If, a person then tries to limit the statement to after salvation, perhaps taking a Wesleyan (holiness) view that a believer can become and remain sinless, this too raises problems. I would offer, first, that this view (of earthly perfection) opposes the verse cited above, 1 John 1:10. Second, if we interpret our passage in Revelation as “no longer” a liar, “now” blameless, “now” following the Lamb, then the virgin statement must also read as “now”

a virgin. This would then allow for men who had stayed virgins, divorced men who became believers but remained unmarried, married men who remained celibate after coming to faith, and widowers. Most anyone is “now” a virgin if a new start is allowed without a specific start time. Understanding the text in this manner makes this virgin statement functionally meaningless.

Once again, John continues to use figurative language to picture deeper truth. What looked like a fourfold example, are three clarifications explaining his primary point about these people all being virgins.

They are virgins, meaning:

- #1. They follow the Lamb everywhere
- #2. God redeemed them from among men (i.e. world)
- #3. They speak the truth and are blameless

Revelation 14:4-5 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. (NIV)

#### **Definition**

Gune – A Greek word, pronounced “goo-nay” that means woman or wife. Revelation uses it of Jezebel and the bride of the Lamb (see Revelation 2:20 and 19:7). John sometimes uses another specific word for the bride: “Numphe,” see Revelation 21:2, 9; 22:17. In Revelation 21:9 both words appear in parallel on the same subject.

These 144,000 (the entire church) are figuratively all virgins. They have not defiled themselves with women [“gune”] because they have not shared idolatrous sexual immorality with Jezebel...

Revelation 2:20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman [John’s first use of “gune” in Revelation] Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)



They haven't joined in idolatrous sexual immorality with the soon revealed Harlot of chapter 17:

Revelation 17:3-6 Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman ["gune"] sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. 4 The woman ["gune"] 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 ["gune"] was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. (NIV)

They are virgins, or have kept themselves pure (NIV), or chaste (NASU), because they aren't associated with these harlots, but have remained faithful to their promised, the Lamb! Every believer awaits their wedding day with the Lamb (Revelation 19:7, 9), where God presents them as a chaste bride dressed in white (Revelation 19:7-9; 21:2, 9).

Imagery of false worship appearing as fornication appears in the Old Testament (see Ezekiel 6:9; Jeremiah 3:6-9). In fact, Ezekiel's parable of Oholah and Oholibah has Israel and Judah portrayed as having sexual relations with an empire (the beast) of their day, the Assyrians (Ezekiel 23:1-13).

The portrayal of followers of Jesus as being virgins comes also from a parable that He taught in Matthew 25:1-13. That parable shows further specific division. It shows true followers as wise (and ready) versus those who are foolish (and not ready). Appearing as a virgin isn't enough, true virgins are ready and waiting.

Revelation 14:4b These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. (NASU)

John gives this statement in present tense, highlighting where the believers now are. They're in the eternal presence of the Lamb, now following Him everywhere for eternity. Our walk, as a believer, begins with following Christ. The Holy Spirit enables us to hear and recognize and follow His voice.

John 10:1-6 "I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. 2 The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. 3 The watchman opens the gate for him, and the

sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. 4 When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. 5 But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice." 6 Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. (NIV)

Matthew 10:37-40 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (NIV)

Following Him in every portion of our life becomes a continuing goal. Learning to recognize His voice in everything is part of our earthly sanctification:

1 Peter 2:21 To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (NIV)

John 12:26a Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. (NIV)

Present tense doesn't begin partway through Revelation 14:4. Verse 4 begins in present tense ("These are"). The NIV's continuing wording "those who did not defile," subtly draws the reader into past tense. I prefer the better wording of the HCSB, which consistently remains in present tense. This wording stresses the undefiled state of all believers (all 144,000).

Revelation 14:4a These are the ones not defiled... (HCSB)

In fact, the statement found in the next verse also appears in present tense.

Revelation 14:5b ...they are blameless. (NIV)

God has declared every believer surrounding the throne blameless, each made blameless by the grace of our Lord and Savior. Blameless and undefiled is every believer's destiny, without exception the entirety of the bride of Christ.

Ephesians 1:4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (NIV)

Ephesians 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, just as 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. (NIV)

The ESV does a better job of showing the present tense of verse 5:

Revelation 14:5 and in their mouth no lie was found, for they are blameless. (ESV, also ISV, CJB)

Other Bible translations use “was found in their mouths (NIV, NASU, HCSB),” making it seem like a past tense statement. The latter word order implies these people had been free from lying in their past. Yet, this statement’s first part is passive and tied to the present tense at the statement’s conclusion. In their heavenly setting, believers are *now* incapable of lying and blameless. Fully glorified, saints now live in holiness in God’s presence (see Hebrews 12:14b). Who does God allow to live with Him? David asked and provided God’s answer to this question:

Psalms 15:1-2 Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?  
2 He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart (NIV)

If satisfying God’s blameless standard rests with us we have a great problem. Every one of us fails to speak the truth continuously. In our fallen state, left to our abilities, the outlook is hopeless. Praise God that by His grace and because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ, every believer will meet this standard. John affirms that all God’s 144,000 have done so.

We must return to a statement we previously moved past in the verse just considered. The phrase appears in the middle of this present tense passage declaring our purity and blamelessness:

Revelation 14:4c They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. (NIV)

John’s passive wording could also read “They are purchased from.” Yet all translators present it past tense stressing our redemption as a past act of Jesus, finished on the cross. Even taken present tense, stating they “are purchased,” it still points backward to Jesus’ completed act on the Calvary’s cross (John 19:30).

### Definition

Aparche [ap-ar-khay] – A Greek word referencing the compulsory firstfruits offering (or sacrifice) of the Mosaic Law. Use of the word in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translation of Hebrew scriptures confirms this meaning. See Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:10 and Numbers 15:17-21.

John calls believers firstfruits (Greek “aparche”), an allusion to a portion of the Old Testament law.

Question: What were the firstfruits under Old Testament law? The Bible introduces firstfruits in Exodus:

Exodus 23:16-17, 19 "Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. "Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. 17 "Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign Lord. ... 19 "Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the Lord your God. (NIV)

Three ideas are in view about this offering:

- A. It is a small portion representative of the whole
- B. It is the first
- C. It is the best (see verse 19)

Beyond the literal feast, the word appears figuratively in the Old or New Testaments. When figurative the word doesn't have to express all three ideas. Some examples:

Representative of being first:

Psalms 105:36 Then he struck down all the firstborn in their land, the firstfruits of all their manhood. (NIV)

Jeremiah 2:3 Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of his harvest; (NIV)

Representative of being first and best:

1 Corinthians 15:20-23 But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. 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. (NIV)

A question remains over this word's single appearance in Revelation: What's John trying to represent with his use of the term? Is John saying the 144,000 are firstfruits of...

- #1. The Redeemed?
- #2. The Martyrs?
- #3. All mankind?
- #4. Creation?

#1. If we accept the 144,000 as firstfruits of the Redeemed, they would be a small subset of God's entire church. All that we have seen earlier in Revelation opposes this. When John introduces the 144,000 in Revelation chapter 7, he uses them as one part of a threefold example. This three-part example shows the 144,000 are representative of every Israeli tribe (into whom God grafts the Gentiles, see Revelation 7:4-8). Second, they are the "great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9). Third, these 144,000 are also "they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Revelation 7:14). The text shows the people of this third example spans the time of Jesus until the end. Finally, the Bible already calls Israel the firstfruits in Jeremiah 2:3, making a later subset unable to be firstfruits of the Redeemed.

#2. The Bible never calls the 144,000 martyrs, so making such an assumption goes beyond the Biblical text.

#3. Suggesting the 144,000 as firstfruits of *all* people calls for holding to universalism. This is the unbiblical idea that God will eventually save all people.

#4. The correct answer is that we are a kind of firstfruits of God's creation. God chose all believers before He created the world (Ephesians 1:4), the first of His new creation. We are subject to Him before everything is finally subject to him (Hebrews 2:8). John reveals these truths all through the Book of Revelation. Scriptures elsewhere call Christ the firstfruits, so too, in Him, we are a type of firstfruits. We are part of this progression leading to everything being

subject to God (1 Corinthians 15:23-28). I use the wording “a kind of firstfruits” in explaining this subject because James clearly says the same.

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. (NIV)

James 1:18 In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures. (NASU, using two words for firstfruits rather than the one of the Greek)

James 1:18 Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. (ESV)

By God’s will, we (the 144,000, representing all believers) are the first and best of the earth, taken from God’s creation as an offering to Him.

Revelation 14:6-7 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. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." (NIV)

A cluster of three angels (verses 6, 8, 9) now receive instruction from God. The three angels aren’t the angels associated with the trumpets (shown so by the wording “another”).

Proclaiming God’s gospel doesn’t always have the purpose of conversion. This good news (what the Greek word “gospel” means) is only good news for God’s redeemed. For the remaining lost, awaiting judgment, this gospel proclamation is a reminder of God’s justice God against those who have rejected this eternal message.

The word “gospel” only appears this one time in the Book of Revelation, fittingly paired with the word “eternal.” God’s gospel is. The gospel has never changed and never will. If person ignores or rejects this gospel, they do so to their own harm.

### **Definition**

Euaggelion [yoo-ang-ghel'-ee-on] -- A Greek word meaning “bringing good news” or glad tidings. Specifically it references the message of the coming, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and God’s entire plan of salvation and promises in Christ.

This word “gospel (euaggelion)” appears many times in the gospels of Matthew and Mark (and in 75 verses in the New Testament). Consider Jesus’ words in Matthew:

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (NIV, also Mark 13:10)

Here in Revelation, John shows that immediately before the end (judgment) God supernaturally makes sure the whole world hears His gospel one final time. Some have taught that it’s the church’s responsibility to make sure people in all nations hear the gospel to enable the end to come. It’s our privilege (Romans 10:14-15) and obedience to a command (Mark 16:15) that we proclaim the gospel. God may enable the church to take the gospel to all lands. Yet, God isn’t dependent on our efforts. The end doesn’t wait for us finally to perform this before He can finally bring about Judgment Day. No, the Day of Judgment comes when God planned it from the beginning.

The verse describes the angel flying in midair (or above the earth), stressing the message surrounds the earth. The whole earth hears. It’s a message proclaimed to all the wicked and unbelieving people remaining on the planet.

Revelation 14:6b “to every nation, tribe, language and people.”

While this wording seemingly highlights “everyone,” context provides an implied limit. In Revelation 5:9 and Revelation 7:9, the first two places where this wording appears, we hear that God purchases believers (His church) “from” this group. The third and fourth instances, Revelation 11:9 and 13:7 then use this wording solely to represent those who are in opposition to God, for followers of the beast. This fifth case in 14:6 continues this latter meaning. This final gospel proclamation is to the entire rebellious world, and for them it is a message of impending judgment.

### **Definition**

Phobos (fob-os) – A Greek word meaning “fear,” “terror” or “anxiety,” or “reverence,” “honor” or “respect.”

Phobeo (fob-eh-o) – A Greek word directly taken from “Phobos” meaning “to frighten or terrify” or “to become fearful.” Further, Phobeo sometimes expresses “to reverence or honor” or “to stand in awe of.”

When this flying angel opens his mouth to proclaim this eternal gospel, these are the words John records:

Revelation 14:7 He said in a loud voice, "Fear [phobeo] 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." (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

These two points are at the heart of God’s eternal gospel:

- #1. Fear God and give Him glory. (Judgment)
- #2. Worship Him. (Creator and Lord)

Details:

- #1. Fear God – The word “fear (‘phobeo’)” can mean “to frighten or terrify” but it may also mean “to reverence or honor.”

Believers fear God in that they reverence and honor Him. Like all unbelievers we began by coming to fear God, in that we understood the depravity of our sin and the wrath that was due us from God. God’s impending judgment frightened or terrified us. For the believer this led us to cast ourselves before the throne of God’s mercy. Then, as forgiven and justified children of God we grow in love, knowing that “perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18b).” What fear does love drive out? All fear of God’s judgment and wrath. It succeeds “Because fear has to do with punishment (1 John 4:18c).” All that remains for the believer for eternity is to fear God (meaning unending reverence and honor)! For the nonbeliever, they too will fear God (terrified of Him) for eternity. The gospel call to fear God remains for the believer or nonbeliever...

Psalms 33:6-8 By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. 7 He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into



storehouses. 8 Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. (NIV)

Psalms 34:8-9 Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. 9 Fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him lack nothing. (NIV)

Psalms 111:10 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. (NIV)

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. (NIV)

Proverbs 8:13a To fear the Lord is to hate evil; (NIV)

Proverbs 19:23a The fear of the Lord leads to life: (NIV)

Luke 12:4-5 "I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid [phobeo] of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear [phobeo] him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear [phobeo] him. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

Luke 23:40-42 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear [phobeo] God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

Scriptures sometimes describe unbelievers, as we naturally once were, as people with "no fear of God," this in contrast to believers who rightly fear (revere) God:

Romans 3:17-18 and the way of peace they do not know." 18 "There is no fear [phobos] of God before their eyes." (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

Why do believers evangelize?

2 Corinthians 5:11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear [phobos] the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

By context of Scriptures, this fear isn't fear of punishment rather it's fear out of reverence and honor. We serve out of love, wanting to please our Lord, our Father. Consider the scriptural order of our response to others, including God:

1 Peter 2:17 Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear [phobeo] God, honor the king. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

1 Peter 2:17 Honor all people, love the brotherhood, fear [phobeo] God, honor the king. (NASU, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

### **Definition**

Timao – A Greek word meaning “to esteem” or “honor” or “to show reverence” or “to value.”

We love our Christian brothers and sisters with a selfless love (agape). We show reverence and honor (phobeo) to God (the highest authority), we honor (timao) our ruler (or king), even as we honor all people meaning that “we value” them. For a study on Biblical uses and meanings of the word “love” see [www.bibleistrue.com/gna/gna92.htm](http://www.bibleistrue.com/gna/gna92.htm).

Returning to Revelation 14:7; remember this angel's message to the earth is calling the remaining unbelieving world to recognize the terror of God, to fear Him. They have a certain expectation of judgment; the text reminds readers of this fact by John's continuing wording “the hour of judgment has come.”

### **Definition**

Proskuneo (NT:4352) – One of several Greek words representing worship (or aspects of worship). Other words, by their Strong's numbering, include: (e.g. NT:2356, 2357, 2317, 2150, 2151, 2124, or 4576, 4573, 2323 or even 3000, 1401, 1398, 5256, and 3008). Some lexicons describe this term with words or phrases such as “to kiss, to adore, to worship, to do obeisance, to show respect, to fall before, or to prostrate oneself in homage.” The Complete Word Study Dictionary (NT) states the word literally means “to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage.” This definition misses the attached idea of prostrating oneself in reverence or adoration. These actions are inseparable from how a first century reader would understand this word.

## #2 Worship Him

Revelation 14:7b Worship (Greek “proskuneo”) him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." (NIV)

God’s right of worship rests in an unchangeable truth; He alone is creator of all that exists. Believers willingly bow in worship, yet the demand of the gospel extends to the whole earth; worship Him who created you.

John 4:24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (NIV)

Scriptures repeatedly identifies God as one worthy of worship, as Creator.

Psalms 95:6-7 Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. (NIV)

Jonah 1:9 He (Jonah) answered, "I am a Hebrew and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." (NIV)

Acts 17:23-24 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. 24 "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. (NIV)

Words of worship appear throughout Revelation, perhaps most significantly those of the elders around the throne:

Revelation 4:11 "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." (NIV)

Worship’s prominence in Scriptures warrants a longer study. Because of space constraints, I’ve provided only a few notes on how and why we worship.

There’s only one remaining sacrifice for the church and it’s an act of worship:

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. (NIV, also expressed in example in Hebrews 13:15-16)

Worship belongs to God alone:

Exodus 34:14 Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. (NIV, also Jeremiah 25:6; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; 22:8-9)

All must worship God in the manner He has prescribed:

Deuteronomy 12:4 You must not worship the Lord your God in their way. (NIV, also see Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Colossians 2:21-23; Hebrews 12:28)

How are we supposed to worship? Are we allowed to worship in any way we please or in any manner we find acceptable? Answering these questions led to drafting principles of worship:

### **The Regulative Principle of Worship**

Why worship should include some practices and exclude other practices.

How should we worship God?

#### Introduction

Most people know what their own church does for worship. Some Christians are aware of differences in other church's worship. Unfortunately, many believers have no idea why almost anything can't become part of their corporate worship. They know with certainty the likes and dislikes of their local gathering, or perhaps their leadership, become the final arbiter on what happens at their local church. Sometimes tradition alone is the loudest voice. The subjective nature of these competing influences leaves open the possibility that everything could change. Why not stop that time-honored practice? Perhaps it's time to add in these new ideas? Churches holding to the authority and sufficiency of God's Word have always looked to the Bible to provide Divine wisdom on this subject <sup>Regulative Note 1</sup>. They call on a biblically based Regulative Principle of Worship to evaluate any proposed changes or additions.

#### The Regulative Principle - Defined

The regulative principle of worship states that corporate worship of God must rest on specific directions of Scripture. This means that our corporate worship should include Biblical prescribed features. The list includes; reading Scriptures (1 Timothy 4:13); preaching Scriptures (2 Timothy 4:2); and singing Scriptures and Scriptural themes (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Further, there are prayers (Ephesians 6:18; 1 Timothy 2:1); the two ordinances of the church, baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matthew 28:19; Acts 2:38-39; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Colossians 2:11-12). Finally, on occasion, churches may hold solemn fasts (Matthew 9:15; Mark 2:20; Acts 13:3), thanksgivings (1 Timothy 2:1; 4:3-4), and celebratory feasts (Jude 12).

### The Regulative Principle - In Weekly Practice

Limiting the church's corporate worship to these features assures worship is orderly (1 Corinthians 14:40) and that all done knowingly pleases God (Romans 12:2). Personal acts of worship before the Lord, outside corporate worship, may include further but Scriptures show these to be proper for the church together. Within these features there is still much freedom and variation (such as length, amount of singing, number of people speaking, etc.). Yet, these limits save churches from adding in foolishness (such the congregation patting a sacred rock each Sunday as a reminder that Jesus is our Rock) <sup>Regulative Note 2</sup>.

### The Regulative Principle - In the Practice of Holidays

The regulative principle does not reject special days of remembrance as a corporate body, especially remembering which God has done. There is no violation of this principle if the church, beyond regular celebration of the Lord's Supper, adopts a day for special remembrance of the same (think Easter). Similarly, the church has God-given freedom to select a day for Thanksgiving (and perhaps feasting), or choosing a day to remember the Incarnation (often called Christmas). However, this in no way provides the church mandate, or right, to bind individuals to celebrate such festivals as personal or family mandates or as necessary acts of private worship (Colossians 2:16).

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### Regulative Section Notes

1. Scriptures settle that worship belongs to God alone. (See Exodus 34:14 also Jeremiah 25:6; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Colossians 2:18; Revelation 19:10; 22-8-9). Second, scriptures show that God requires worship in the manner He has prescribed. (Deuteronomy 12:4 also see Isaiah 29:13; Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7; Colossians 2:21-23; Hebrews 12:28).

2. This scenario is a variation of ancient Israel's actions during the Exodus. It's no different that substituting a golden cow for Yahweh. (Exodus 32:2-6). Even small changes to what God dictated were great offense to Him (Leviticus 10:1-3).

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Following the call to fear and worship God, John now introduces another angel:

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." (NIV)

God provides much more detail about Babylon the Great in chapter 17, so we'll delay considering that topic until then. For now it's enough to say it's synonymous with "the Great City," the fallen world, and the object of God's wrath.

This second angel is middle to a cluster of three angels.

- The first (Revelation 14:6) proclaimed the gospel and impending judgment. [What]
- The second (Revelation 14:8) names the specific object of God's judgment; the fallen world. [Who]
- The third (Revelation 14:9) makes clear what the personal destiny is for all under this judgment. [How]

The next few verses provide detail on the third angel's proclamation:

Revelation 14:9-11 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." (NIV)

Notice the contrast between consumed drinks referenced by the second angel and final angel.

Revelation 14:8b all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries. (NIV)

Revelation 14:10b will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. (NIV)

What the nations willingly drink, the intoxicating “pleasures of sin for a season (Hebrews 11:25 KJV wording),” becomes “the wine of God’s fury.” This latter phrase, of course, belong with God’s actions during His harvest and trampling in a winepress (as we will see shortly in Revelation 14:19).

**Definition**

Thumos (thoo-mos) – A Greek word meaning “fury, anger, wrath or indignation” with passion or passionately.

This harvest imagery goes against the warm-fuzzy view many people have of God, especially those who hold the “New Testament God” to be different or in opposition to the “Old Testament God.” These people often portray God as being only love, ignoring His equal qualities of holiness and justice. John anticipates some trying to minimize the “fury (‘thumos’)” of God, a word also translated as wrath, or anger, or indignation. The next words make clear what it means personally to be under God’s fury...

Revelation 14:10b-11 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." (NIV)

**Definition**

Basanizo – A Greek word, from the related word “basanos,” meaning to torture or torment, specifically to question by using torture.

They will be “tormented.” The Word Study dictionary describes the underlying Greek word in this fashion:

A touchstone, a black siliceous stone used to test the purity of gold, silver and other metals, hence any test or criterion by which the qualities of a thing are tried. Metaphorically meaning instrument of torture by which one is forced to divulge the truth, examination, trial by torture. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary)

In case some think this torturous examination is only for a time, verse 11 answers all unwarranted expectation of such a hope:

Revelation 14:11 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." (NIV)

The key phrases here are "for ever and ever" and "no rest day or night." This dual wording intentionally stresses the unending nature of God's judgment and wrath.

#### **Definition**

Aion – A Greek word representing "an age" or "a time." Writers often use this indefinite long period of time to represent "forever" or "eternity."

Some claim that God's punishment is a limited period. They cite the word "aion" used in the phrase "for ever (aion) and ever (aion)," and note the word means "an age" or "a time." They err in then claiming this word must represent a temporary and fixed duration. This Greek word has broad use. It may find use in the manner they suggest but it also represents an indefinite long period, namely eternity. The examples which follow will clearly show this latter use. John repeatedly uses the phrase "for ever and ever" throughout the Book of Revelation to represent eternity. For example, Revelation passages before our current text:

For the life, extent of reign, power, and glory of Jesus and God: Revelation 1:6; 1:18; 4:9; 4:10; 5:13; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15 (not coincidentally the first seven uses of the phrase in this book).

Revelation 14:11 is the eighth instance, now about judgment and torment. Nothing in the immediate context shows John intends anything other than the same unending eternity implied in his first seven uses. For the record, John has three uses of this term tied to God's judgment (including this one): Revelation 14:11; 19:3; 20:10. And, to round out all further uses in the entire book, add these two: Revelation 15:7 (on the everlasting existence of God). Perhaps the most telling is John's final use: Revelation 22:5 (on how long believers will live and reign with God in the New Heavens and Earth).

Without a doubt, John intends this phrase to only mean eternity in the entirety of this book. This text provides no grounds for Advent Christians (among others) who claim there is no



everlasting punishment, only punishment for a time followed by annihilation. This book, which highlights God's eternal plan, shows that it includes everlasting punishment for sin and rebellion against Him.

John is not announcing a new idea here; both the Old and New Testament elsewhere mention the everlasting nature of God's fiery final judgment on the lost. For example, Isaiah begins and ends his book with these statements:

Isaiah 1:31 The mighty man will become tinder and his work a spark; both will burn together, with no one to quench the fire." (NIV)

Isaiah 66:22-24 "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. 23 From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord. 24 "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." (NIV)

In the first gospel, God clearly applies terms such as unquenchable and eternal to His judgment:

Matthew 3:11-12 "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (NIV)

Matthew 18:8 If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. (NIV)

Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal ["Aionios"] fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

### **Definition**

Aionios – A Greek word, from the related word “Aion.” Speaking of the future it means “eternal,” or “everlasting” or “endless duration.” Used of the past, it means a vast period in ancient times or a period before time in the eternal past.

John uses this closely related Greek word “aionios” on the subject of eternal life (John 3:16, 36; 17:2-3; 1 John 1:2; 2:25; 5:11, 13, 20), and about Jesus’ unending resurrected life (Revelation 1:18). Other New Testament authors use it similarly. Simultaneously writers apply this descriptive term to judgment of the lost seven times, in books ranging from Matthew and Hebrews to 2 Thessalonians and Jude.

Eternal, or everlasting, or “for ever and ever,” is clearly something applicable to both believers and nonbelievers alike. The time period is equal. How believers and nonbelievers spend this unending time remains awaits an answer, something soon shown to be very different. In John’s continuing thought, he stresses something that is certain for all unbelievers:

Revelation 14:11b 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." (NIV)

“No rest” is both a present statement and eternal statement (the specific context of this verse). Scriptures clearly state the following about the lost:

Isaiah 57:20-21 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." (NIV)

Because the lost have no rest, today and eternally, the Bible shows a great contrast for those who trust in God and come to Jesus.

Jeremiah 6:16 This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. ... (NIV)

Matthew 11:28-29 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (NIV)

God's promised rest is only for believers (Hebrews 4:1). A great part of eternal punishment for the wicked is no rest for ever and ever (not excluding other horrible specifics which would assure no rest).

Revelation 14:12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. (NIV)

These words sound familiar as John repeats the call for "patient endurance" from a passage considered only a few verses earlier:

Revelation 13:9-10 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. (NIV)

The phrase "patient endurance" appears three times through the Book of Revelation, this passage in Revelation 14:12 being the third and final time. John applied the first instance to himself at the book's start:

Revelation 1:9 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. (NIV)

What circumstances call for patient endurance (or NASU "perseverance")? John's three examples provide a clear picture:

#1. (from 1:9) Persecution and exile caused by the word of God and testimony of Jesus.

#2. (from 13:9-10) Life events even if it means captivity or death.

#3. (from 14:12) All that takes place as saints await God's judgment of the wicked.

God calls every believer to patient endurance through all events of our life as we await the end – no matter what comes or how bad circumstances are. This statement encompasses every believer:

Revelation 14:12b ...saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. (NIV)

Saints aren't a man-selected few, decreed somehow unique and better than other believers by a pope. Rather, every believer is unique and different from the world, decreed, called, and made saints solely by the will of God. It is God who enables us to remain faithful to Jesus and to follow God's commands. All believers endure, overcome, and persevere! (All three are terms John uses in the Book of Revelation).

Colossians 1:10-14 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 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. (NIV)

Returning to Revelation 14:12, some translations are a bit different:

Revelation 14:12 This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. (NIV)

Revelation 14:12 Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. (ESV)

Revelation 14:12 This requires the steadfast endurance of the saints - those who obey God's commandments and hold to their faith in Jesus. (NET Bible®)

Revelation 14:12 Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. (NASU)

Revelation 14:12 Here is the endurance of the saints, who keep the commandments of God and the faith in Jesus." (HCSB)

While many English translations express a call for patient endurance (or perseverance), the last two make it already finished; "Here is." There is no need to dress up the wording; as written the text is an encouragement showing completed endurance. The Greek wording bluntly confirms completion; "Here it is (shown by NASU & HCSB)." John confidently asserts this result amid all he has shown to be a part of this fallen world. Multitudes drink the wine of the

adulteries of Babylon the Great, yet here it is: saints in patient endurance, staying true to the commands of God and remaining true to their faith in Jesus.

Revelation 14:13 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." (NIV)

Though John doesn't directly identify the source of the commanding voice, he intends his qualifier, "from heaven," to show it's a God-given command. His Sovereign is the one authority who has right to order him to record these words. This too is a reminder that all Scripture comes from God (2 Timothy 3:16). In this book, God safeguards the recorded results of personal observation, assuring John clearly expresses His intended meaning. Sometimes, as here, God provides exact words needing precise recording, expressly dictated so no error is possible.

For the record, in the Book of Revelation, God commands John to write 12 times, this being the 10<sup>th</sup> instance (see Revelation 1:11,19; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5). In this repetition, God makes clear that He has John under divine mandate for carefully recording what he saw and heard.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

Christians commonly call statements starting with the word "blessed" beatitudes. The best known of these, of course, are those Jesus spoke in His "sermon on the mount," as recorded in Matthew 5:3-12. Many others exist throughout Scriptures, including several in the Psalms. (See Psalms 1:1; 32:1,2 [this quoted by Paul in Romans 4:7-8]; 33:12; 34:8; 40:4; 41:1; 65:4; 84:4,5; 89:15; 94:12; 106:3; 112:1; 118:26; 119:1,2; 127:5; 128:1; 144:15; 146:5).

One beautiful Old Testament beatitude is part of Moses' blessing Israel in Deuteronomy 33.

Deuteronomy 33:29a Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? (NIV)

Isaiah recorded two beatitudes dictated by God (Isaiah 30:15 and 56:1 show these come from God):

Isaiah 30:18 Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! (NIV. The second is in Isaiah 56:2)

The beatitude of Revelation 14:13 is the second of seven found in the Book of Revelation (see Revelation 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14).

The first, Revelation 1:3, promises blessing to all who hear and take to heart the message of this book. God scatters the remaining Revelation beatitudes from here to almost the final words of the book. Each similarly blesses those who obey God's word and are part of God's family. This is a reminder the beatitudes belong to specific people, God's elect. God blesses His people; He has in the past and will always bless them!

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from this time and hereafter." (BJM)

God reminds all His people that He has blessed everyone who dies in Him. The world's perspective on people that die, especially those with an untimely death, is "poor soul." In contrast, saints must think differently. For every person dead "in the Lord," we must remember God has immeasurably blessed them and they are now with their Lord for eternity (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23).

Dispensationalists, who relegate the events of these seals to some later time, hold this statement of blessing something special only for those who die in their expected future seven year tribulation. Some speculative futurists also limit this statement to martyrs only, an unwarranted leap in logic unjustified by the text. Nowhere does God limit this statement to those killed because of their faith. The simple provided qualification is "in the Lord." A believer executed for his faith is equally "in the Lord" as is a saint dead of natural causes or disease. This statement, "who die in the Lord," clearly shows their connection with Jesus. These believers have persevered, they have overcome, they have endured, and they have died "in the Lord."

These seals have repeatedly shown events spanning the time from Jesus' first coming until the end, a vast Great Tribulation. "From this time" is this great tribulation beginning in John's day. "Hereafter" is now, until God completes His church. The God-given comforting and encouraging words of Revelation 14:13 belong to all Christians, Christ followers, without exception "in the Lord." That great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, peoples, and languages, shown standing around the throne (Revelation 7:9-14) are all blessed. This reminder echoes what Paul earlier proclaimed:

1 Corinthians 15:54-57 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. (NIV)

Romans 14:8 If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. (NIV)

In this time of Great Tribulation, Isaiah's words help us understand God's blessing on His people even in death:

Isaiah 57:1-2 The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. 2 Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death. (NIV)

We unquestionably hold there is great blessing to be present with the Lord when we die, but often forget there's added blessing in God sparing us from more evil!

"From now on" or "from this time and hereafter" takes us from when John's writing (hearing God's message) until the last believer dies. This time period reminds of the opening words in this book:

Revelation 1:3 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. (NIV)

The time was near for the original readers because the Great Tribulation began in John's day. The nearness of this time continues because the Great Tribulation lasts to the end. God blesses everyone who reads and follows this message until His church is complete. Similarly, He blesses these same individuals when they die in the Lord, from then until the end.

Revelation 14:13c "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." (NIV)

The Spirit gives affirmation to the preceding words with a reminder. He reminds believers that it's not lands, wealth, or any other possessions that follow us into eternity; only our deeds. The

Apostle Paul makes clear that it's only our works done in the power of Christ that survive (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). We can understand the Spirit's words here only mean our God-enabled good deeds follow us into eternity. When believers die, they rest from the labor God prepared and appointed for them to do. These deeds are all we take with us, to the praise and glory of God alone.

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)

We should stand in awe that God rewards His people for doing that which He ordained and enabled! (And, undoubtedly, we will stand in awe of this around His throne. Or, perhaps better wording, we will *bow* in awe. See Revelation 4:10).

Matthew 10:41-42 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." (NIV, also Mark 9:41)

Remembering this we should be continuously reminding all believers (the church) to share and to do good. In fact, this encouragement appears repeatedly throughout the New Testament.

Matthew 25:34-41 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (NIV)

2 Corinthians 9:8-11 And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." 10 Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply



and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 11 You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. (NIV)

Matthew 5:16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (NIV)

Colossians 1:10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, (NIV)

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. (NIV)

1 Timothy 6:18-19 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. (NIV, also consider 1 Timothy 5:25)

Titus 2:6-7a Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. 7 In everything set them an example by doing what is good. (NIV)

Titus 3:1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, (NIV)

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (NIV)

The reward from our God-designed and God-enabled deeds lasts forever:

1 Corinthians 9:24-25 Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. 25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (NIV, also 2 Timothy 4:8)

Towards Revelation's end Jesus reminds of this reward for our deeds. While Scriptures are clear that deeds don't (and can never) save us (Ephesians 2:8-9), any Christian message that ignores the importance of good deeds to follow is a deficient and unbiblical message.

Revelation 22:12 "Behold, I [Jesus] am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

John *listened* to a voice from heaven in verse 13, now he looks:

Revelation 14:14-16 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. (NIV)

John sees One coming on a cloud out of heaven. Jesus prophesied this when He was on trial before Caiaphas and during his departure to heaven:

Matthew 26:64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (NIV)

Acts 1:9-11 After he [Jesus] said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. 10 They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 11 "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven." (NIV)

Revelation 14 is a fulfillment of Jesus words about the end times and His gathering of His elect:

Matthew 24:30-31 "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. (NIV, these words being in view when Jesus spoke Matthew 26:64)

John has finally arrived at the specific event he referenced near the start of Revelation:

Revelation 1:7 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. (NIV)

Most significantly this Revelation 14 passage is a reference to Daniel 7:13-14. John intentionally combines this prophetic title “son of man (also used earlier in Revelation 1:13)” with a reference to clouds:

Daniel 7:13-14 "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. (NIV)

In Revelation, John describes them as “white” clouds. To Daniel, they are clouds “of heaven.” Unquestionably, they are synonymous. Yet John’s chosen wording reveals even more. Nowhere else, in all of Scriptures, is the phrase “white cloud” used. In fact, with appearances of God, the earlier texts often go out of their way to show clouds masking God’s glory as being “dense” or “thick” or “dark” (see Exodus 19:9; 1 Kings 8:12). Now, here at the end of time, John intentionally uses “white” in direct contrast to this previous darkness. White symbolizes holiness, purity and judgment, but all these qualities were the reason God shielded His glory from men by dark clouds. The contrast here, this white, shows the coming of Jesus Christ in judgment is a public revelation of God in all of His glory. There is no shielding or need to hide God’s glory – this is a full revelation of Jesus.

[In Matthew 17:5 a “bright” cloud appears associated with God. This is a fitting symbol, in similar manner to the white cloud, because it’s God the Father saying look to my Son, listen to Him. This event is an earlier public revelation of Jesus, though not a full revelation. This early revelation announces the presence of God in the flesh, a suffering servant, coming in a manner that all humanity could see.]

Daniel spoke of the “son of man” having “authority” and “sovereign power;” John references “a crown of gold on his head.” The latter visually picturing the same as Daniel. But John doesn’t stop there, he adds: “and a sharp sickle in his hand.” The sickle is a symbol of the harvest (first used about harvesting in Deuteronomy 16:9; 23:25). It’s imagery later applied to judgment, specifically by the prophet Joel:

Joel 3:12-16 'Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, 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!' 14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. 15 The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 16 The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. (NIV)

Jesus, too, joined the imagery of a sickle to a coming day of harvest.

Mark 4:26-29 He also said, "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. 27 Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. 28 All by itself the soil produces grain — first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. 29 As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it, because the harvest has come." (NIV)

As we have seen in the Book of Revelation, when God’s church is complete, the final outpouring of God’s wrath begins. This event is a twofold harvest. In it, God harvests His people from the earth and He separates weeds to await burning. Though there is a specific end to the harvest – a clear and visual end – the harvest spans history.

Part 1 of the harvest is continuing (spanning from the time of Jesus until the end):

Matthew 9:37-38 Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. 38 Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." (NIV, also Luke 10:2)

John 4:34-38 "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. 35 Do you not say, 'Four months more and then the harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. 36 Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and

the reaper may be glad together. 37 Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. 38 I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor." (NIV)

Part 2 of the harvest is simultaneously continuing (weeds progressively bound awaiting burning), but with a grand conclusion at the end:

Matthew 13:24-30 Jesus told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. 25 But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. 26 When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. 27 "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' 28 "'An enemy did this,' he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 29 "'No,' he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. 30 Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" (NIV)

Jesus provided interpretation of this parable:

Matthew 13:36-43 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 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. 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (NIV)

The harvest's completion leaves only the true grain gathered into the Master's barn. Now in Revelation chapter 14, John stresses the sickle because the final harvest is here. He says it's a "sharp" sickle because, by analogy, sharp also represents "rapid," or "swift." It also implies "eagerness" (as used in Romans 3:15, compared to Isaiah 59:7). With God's wheat gathered, it's time for burning the weeds. Seven times the word "sickle" appears in the Book of Revelation;

all seven times are part of immediate passage in this seventh and final seal (verses 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 18, 19).

Revelation 14:15-16 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. (NIV)

John says it's "another" angel. This comparison doesn't reference the one seated on the cloud. Rather he makes clear this angel isn't one of the angels previously spoken of. It's another in continuing sequence with the three earlier (of Revelation 14:6, 8, 9).

Why would an angel give command to Jesus? John is showing something previously revealed by Christ himself. The Father set the end's timing. This holy angel (God's messenger) comes from the temple and proclaims to the Son that now is the Father's set time. These verses remind the church to ignore all claiming advance knowledge of this timing:

Matthew 24:36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (NIV)

Mark 13:32 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. (NIV)

Acts 1:7 He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. (NIV)

To say that Jesus swings His sickle to harvest the earth is not a contradiction when also saying that "the harvesters are angels (Matthew 13:39)." Even as Jesus has believers as workers in His harvest (Matthew 9:37-38), so too His angels are workers under His authority and direction.

Matthew 24:31 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. (NIV)

The voice of the angel exiting God's temple and calling out in a loud voice to Jesus reminds us that Paul also mentions a voice of an archangel in association with the return of Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 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. (NIV)

These aren't necessarily the same angel and voice, but it is certain that loud and authoritative angelic proclamations mark events surrounding the harvest.

"The earth was harvested, (NASU 'The earth was reaped')" or so verse 16 ends. If already harvested, why does God need another sickle-bearing harvester, an angel? Read on:

Revelation 14:17-19 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.

The first one wielding a sickle and harvester of the earth was clearly Jesus (Revelation 14:16). Who did He come to harvest? He came for His own! Only after Jesus gathers His people to Him does another angel go out to finish the harvest and deal with the weeds (the lost). This is why Revelation's imagery shifts to ripe grapes thrown into the winepress of God's wrath, ready for trampling. The first people harvested go to be with their Lord, these second are recipients of God's just wrath. This symbolism comes from the Old Testament:

Joel 3:12-13 'Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, 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!' (NIV)

John unquestionably draws his imagery from the book of Joel. In it, Joel uses a Hebrew word for "harvest" commonly associated with harvesting grain and then switches to speaking about trampling grapes. John does the same in Revelation 14:15 versus 14:18, using distinct Greek words first for grain and second for harvesting grapes. One commentator makes a further comparison (that I find interesting, since John used the Septuagint translation):

It is interesting that the Septuagint text of Joel 3:13 features the plural "sickles," implying the sequence of two harvests. (New Testament Commentary by William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, on Revelation 14:17)

Trampling in a winepress, as an illustration of God's judgment, appear beyond the book of Joel:

Lamentations 1:15 "The Lord has rejected all the warriors in my midst; he has summoned an army against me to crush my young men. In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah. (NIV)

Isaiah 63:2-3 Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? 3 "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. (NIV; a messianic passage)

Chapter 19 of Revelation stresses that it's the living Word of God (Revelation 19:13), the One called Faithful and True (Revelation 19:11), Jesus himself, that's responsible for treading the winepress of God's wrath.

Revelation 19:15 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. (NIV)

Paul, appearing before pagans in Athens, stated the same in this fashion:

Acts 17:31 For he [God] has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him [Jesus] from the dead." (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Revelation chapter 14's winepress isn't literal. The language is figurative. With symbolism in mind, consider the final verse of this chapter:

Revelation 14:20 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. (NIV)

This symbolic winepress is representative of God's wrath and His crushing of the nations (the unsaved world).

The winepress is trodden outside what city? The answer must come from one of two primary (and figurative) cities in view throughout Revelation:



- (1) The City of God, the New Jerusalem, the Holy City (Revelation 3:12; 11:2)
- (2) The great city, Babylon the Great, figurative Sodom & Egypt, where Jesus “was crucified,” the city of power, the city that rules over the kings of the earth. (Revelation 11:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10)

In Revelation, we consistently find unbelievers outside the Holy City (Revelation 11:2; 20:9; 21:27; 22:14-15). Judgment comes for the lost outside the City of God.

Revelation 14:20b ... and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia. (NIV)

Literal blood? Literal horses' bridles? Literal 1,600 stadia? The passage's context thus far has been figurative. Without proven change in the text, these added clauses remain symbolic. The blood continues imagery of crushing in a winepress, even as this mirrors the imagery used in Isaiah's Messianic passage of Isaiah 63:2-3. The blood symbolizes death because life is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11, 14; Deuteronomy 12:23).

The horses' bridles represent imagery of war. We are in the final battle. John returns to this imagery later, in detail, in Revelation 19:11-21. In that later passage, Jesus appears riding a horse commanding God's armies and splattered by blood. Notice the great contrast here. The transforming blood of Jesus sprinkles the redeemed (Hebrews 12:24; 1 Peter 1:2). Yet, the blood of the (lost) world sprinkles unchangeable Jesus as He tramples them in judgment.

“1600 stadia.” One Roman stadium is equal to about 185 meters (607 feet). 1600 stadia become 296 kilometers (184 miles) if taken literally.

Some Dispensationalists, trying to find a literal location, speculate this is the length (north to south) of the land of Israel. (In fact, modern Israel is 290 miles/470 km top to bottom and 85 miles/135 km across at its widest point. Source: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Such unchecked speculation merely grasps at a meaning for this passage.

Without question, number symbolism is in view in the Book of Revelation. Forty is a number used of judgment, testing and punishment. (Consider 40 days and nights during the flood, Genesis 7:4, 12; 40 years in the desert, Numbers 13:33; 14:34; 32:13; and forty lashes for the guilty, Deuteronomy 35:3).



40 x 40 (judgment and punishment times judgment and punishment) = 1600. In other words, John speaks of judgment and punishment with emphasis!

Others see this slightly different: 40 x 40 (judgment and punishment times a generation). This is unnecessarily restrictive as this final punishment applies to many generations; God's judgment on all the lost. Another idea uses 4 x 4 x 10 x 10 (4 representing the earth x 4 again for emphasis x 10 representing fullness or decimal perfection x 10 again for emphasis). While possible and arriving at the same conclusion, I hold the first 40 x 40 solution is the most direct explanation. This judgment will complete and final.

Revelation 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. (NIV)

In this final seal and final trumpet we arrive at seven final plagues. Verse 1 and many other verses call them "plagues," yet later in 16:1 a heavenly voice calls them "seven bowls of God's wrath." In this final act (or series of actions) God's judgment is complete. Earlier seals and trumpets featured partial judgments, sometimes in thirds (Revelation 8:7) or in quarters (Revelation 6:8). This was a build up to the end bringing us to total judgment — where no one can hide and He spares no one. The saints are gone, forever with their Lord; now God is ready to pour out His wrath without mercy. There are seven final judgments (seven representing totality, perfection, completion): God's winepress of judgment is to be trodden.

Revelation 15:1b "with them God's wrath is complete."

When this judgment ends there will be no remaining objects of God's wrath. Satan, the beasts and false prophets of the world, and all who reject Jesus Christ will be gone forever. Imagine, for believers, being forever in the presence of God never to again witness His wrath!

Take note that he now introduces seven more angels out of the multitudes that serve God. I will reference them by number starting in chapter 16.

This final sign of the seven angels and seven plagues is both great and marvelous (similar to the "great" appearance of the woman clothed with the sun back in Revelation 12:1). It's easy to see how the word "great" applies, but the word marvelous tends to make us think "wonderful" (one of the English synonyms for this word). Rather, the Greek's suggested sense is "wondrous," this is something people should wonder about. In other words, John says that this great event is worth pondering over, or worthy of contemplation.

Most translations start this verse and chapter with wording separating the continuing account from the previous thoughts. The KJV reasonably started verse 1 with “And (“kai”),” because John is midsentence here. These last plagues are part of how God is harvesting the earth and treading them in the “winepress of God’s wrath (Revelation 14:9).” The ESV, NET, and HCSB start the passage with “Then.” This latter term provides too much ability to separate events in chapter 14 from what is now providing more detail (“then” implying chronological succession rather than clarification). Verse two continues this same long sentence with “and (“kai”),” something many translations do use (though not the NET which continues by using “then”).

Revelation 15:2 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. (NIV)

When John first introduced the sea of glass in Revelation 4:6, during some of his first views of heaven, he says it’s “clear as crystal.” Now the glass sea is “mixed with fire.” In the earlier passage, the time for God’s final judgment hadn’t arrived; now, it is judgment time. Fire is a symbol of God’s wrath on the wicked, simultaneously a symbol of purification for saints and even a symbol of deliverance for God’s people.

About wrath:

The pillar of fire, during the Exodus, as viewed by the following Egyptians (Exodus 13:20-14:31)

2 Peter 3:7 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. (NIV)

Hebrews 10:27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (NIV)

About purification:

Malachi 3:2-4 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, 4 and the offerings of

Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years. (NIV)

1 Peter 1:7 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. (NIV)

About deliverance:

The pillar of fire, during the Exodus, as viewed by the Israelites (Exodus 13:20-14:31)

2 Thessalonians 1:6-7 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 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. (NIV)

Returning to Revelation; the fire's focus here is unquestionably judgment in the seven last plagues.

**Definition**

Nikao – A Greek word meaning to be victorious, gain victory, or to prevail (overcome, conquer, subdue).

Take note the text calls believers “victorious (Greek ‘nikao’)” over the beast and everything associated with it. Synonyms for this word include “prevail” and “overcome.” In other words, as does every believer, they have overcome, persevered, and endured – all eventually victorious regardless of what they suffered and how they died. This passage affirms that written in the letters to the churches beginning Revelation. We are overcomers (as the word ‘nikao’ there appears, see Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21). It also upholds the words announced from heaven in Revelation 12:10-11:

Revelation 12:10-11 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 (“nikao”) 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. (NIV)

This reminder of victory appears in the 1939 song, *Victory in Jesus*, by prolific hymn writer Eugene Monroe Bartlett (lived 1885-1941). This is the last hymn he ever wrote:

I heard an old, old story,  
How a Savior came from glory,  
How He gave His life on Calvary  
To save a wretch like me;  
I heard about His groaning,  
Of His precious blood's atoning,  
Then I repented of my sins  
And won the victory.

Chorus:

O victory in Jesus,  
My Savior, forever.  
He sought me and bought me  
With His redeeming blood;  
He loved me ere I knew Him  
And all my love is due Him,  
He plunged me to victory,  
Beneath the cleansing flood.

I heard about His healing,  
Of His cleansing pow'r revealing.  
How He made the lame to walk again  
And caused the blind to see;  
And then I cried, "Dear Jesus,  
Come and heal my broken spirit,"  
And somehow Jesus came and bro't  
To me the victory.

Chorus

I heard about a mansion  
He has built for me in glory.  
And I heard about the streets of gold  
Beyond the crystal sea;  
About the angels singing,

And the old redemption story,  
And some sweet day I'll sing up there  
The song of victory.

Chorus

All these victorious believers are in view as verse two finishes out and verse three highlights something that seems commonplace in heaven: singing!

Revelation 15:2c-3 They held harps given them by God 3 and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: (NIV)

Having considered use of harps more fully back in Revelation 5:8 and 14:1; we will stay focused on the song itself, verbal praise in melodic form. John calls it "the song of Moses" and "the song of the Lamb."

Revelation 15:3-4 "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." (NIV)

Nowhere in the Old Testament does the text show Moses singing or reciting this song. So (following the logic many employ), it possibly means:

- (1) John erred.
- (2) There's a missing book of the Bible that has Moses quoting this.
- (3) God supernaturally gave John the words to a song that Moses had written over a thousand years earlier that had remained unrecorded.
- (4) The Jews verbally passed on this song of Moses in the traditions of Israel, which John now records.
- (5) Moses is in heaven composing new songs.

Before providing a better answer, we must consider that which Scriptures has already revealed (versus these previous arguments out of silence). Scriptures do associate several songs with Moses in the Old Testament. The first recorded song of Moses is:

Exodus 15:1-18 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: "I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. 2

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. 3 The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name. 4 Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea. 5 The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone. 6 "Your right hand, O Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. 7 In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble. 8 By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. 9 "The enemy boasted, 'I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.' 10 But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. 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. 13 "In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling. 14 The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia. 15 The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away; 16 terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of your arm they will be as still as a stone — until your people pass by, O Lord, until the people you bought pass by. 17 You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance — the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established. 18 The Lord will reign for ever and ever." (NIV)

A later song of Moses (Deuteronomy 31:30-32:47), though holding many features of this earlier, has many more specifics for Israel as they conquered and remained in the Promised Land. John better alludes to Moses' earlier song in Exodus, something that bears detailed comparison...

In both Moses' Revelation and early Exodus songs:

- (1) He exalts God
- (2) He praises God for his mighty deeds
- (3) He magnifies the fear and glory of the Lord
- (4) He proclaims the holiness of God
- (5) God's people worship Him (The "all nations" of Revelation stresses that God's church is from all peoples. The Exodus passage refers to "the people you bought." The balance of the song, with emphasis on "the mountain of your [God's] inheritance" and the eternal

reign of God, show an expanded outlook. Moses shows it's the spiritual people of God in view, beyond national Israel. Both songs speak of the same spiritual people.)

John's two-part song name, the Song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, highlights unity between God's Old and New Covenants. Moses was a faithful servant in God's house; Jesus is the son over God's entire house (Exodus 14:31; Hebrews 3:5-6). Every believer sings of the same subjects sung by Moses! The themes of Moses' divinely inspired song are themes forever sung in praise to the Lamb. God has only one church and one song of the redeemed.

Before moving on from this song, don't miss these words:

Revelation 15:4b All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." (NIV)

As mentioned previously; the scope of God's church is again in view here, matching up with many earlier statements about every tribe, language, people, and nation (for example Revelation 5:9; 7:9). The continuing words, noting revelation of God's righteous acts, are praise for what this entire book is all about. Jesus, the only one worthy, opened the seals and revealed God's plan for history; Revelation has been and continues to be a revelation of all His righteous acts!

Revelation 15:5 After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. (NIV)

John's view now moves from the heavenly gathering of saints around the sea of glass (mingled with fire). Specifically he focuses on the heavenly temple, from where God is about to pour out His wrath (continuing details of the seven plagues introduced in Revelation 15:1).

The emphasis on the tabernacle of the Testimony, for the heavenly temple, uses Old Testament imagery to narrow the focus even further. In the Old temple this would be the Holy of Holies, location of the ark containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments. We learned of the ark of His covenant's location, in God's heavenly temple, back in Revelation 11:19. Nowhere does John show anything separating God and His people in the heavenly temple. No barrier, or curtain, separates the place God sits, with the ark of His covenant before Him, from His people.

Why would God now open the tabernacle of the Testimony, right before final judgment? Even as the Ten Commandments bore witness against the Jews that they failed to keep God's laws and deserved His wrath (see Exodus 25:16; 31:18; 40:20), this Testimony in heaven serves



identical purpose. God's wrath is just, His penalty for sins committed, small or great. Those about to experience this wrath have no excuse; no forgiveness or mercy remains as they have continued in rebellion against God and have rejected Jesus Christ. They get what they deserve under God's law.

Revelation 15:6 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. (NIV)

With just purpose, God's holy angels now come from His presence to pour out wrath on the earth. These angels don't look like the caricature angels of death that society portrays as dark and foreboding. They appear arrayed in bright shining linen with golden sashes, symbolizing not only holiness and purity but royal purpose and authority.

Revelation 15:7 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. (NIV)

One of the unique angels (living creatures, see Revelation 4:6-8) always in the immediate presence of God assigns specific tasks to the seven angels. This displays order and planning in God's kingdom. God's servants do his bidding and complete His purposes. Each angel has uniquely assigned duties, different in action but with common purpose. The same goes for believers, who all serve God doing the tasks He has assigned (Ephesians 2:10). We are all different yet working together as one (1 Corinthians 12:14-27).

God response to all offense against His eternal Testimony and Law, this sevenfold wrath, calls to mind the sevenfold affliction He promised the Israelites if they became hostile to Him and refused to listen:

Leviticus 26:21-28 "If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. ... 23 "If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, 24 I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. 25 And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. ... 27 "If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, 28 then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. (NIV)

The scene unfolding before John continues in the heavenly temple:

Revelation 15:8 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. (NIV)

Continuing the imagery of Revelation 15:2, featuring the sea of glass now mingled with fire, a cloud of smoke stresses the power of God in this time of judgment. This is imagery familiar to Old Testament readers:

Exodus 40:34-35 Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. (NIV)

1 Kings 8:10-11 [At the dedication of the temple] When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. 11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. (NIV, also 2 Chronicles 5:13-14, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

Ezekiel 10:3-4 [With God's glory departing from the temple] Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. 4 Then the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

Isaiah 6:1-5 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." 4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." (NIV)

In this time of final judgment, God's wrath is so intense, so fierce, and so absolute, that no one may enter the heavenly temple until He finishes. Time for God's mercy is over...

Hebrews 10:27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. (NIV)

Chapter 16 begins with a familiar word “and (Greek ‘kai’)” as John continues his description of the wrath of God. Most translators use “then,” or omit it as does the CJB, CEV, WEB & GW. Older versions such as the KJV, Geneva, and ASV, plus the 1965 BBE, use the clear joiner “and.”

Revelation 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." (NIV)

God now commands the assigned angels, each specifically directed about their task, to begin. The object of God’s wrath is “the earth.” This means all nonbelievers as God has now gathered all His church around His throne.

There is no need to understand what comes next in chronological order. Though labeled as seven bowls of God’s wrath, they describe only one event. While possible that they’re in immediate succession it’s more probable they are a sevenfold representation of what is happening simultaneously (even as the overall context is sevenfold seals and a sevenfold trumpet).

All through this account John continues to tie the seven angel’s bowls together as a continuous thought. In chapter 16, John begins verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 with “and (kai).” He even uses a few added mid-verse uses of this joiner.

These final judgments repeat John’s order of those used earlier in the trumpets. To show this, I’ve proved the parallels from earlier chapters:

Angel	Parallel	Target	Effect
1 (16:2)	(8:7)	Land (people of the beast)	ugly painful sores
2 (16:3)	(8:8)	Sea (turned to blood)	everything died
3 (16:4)	(8:10)	Fresh Water (turned to blood)	people drink it
4 (16:8-9)	(8:12)	Sun (on people)	scorched/heat
5 (16:10)	(9:1)	Throne/kingdom of the beast	darkness
6 (16:12-14)	(9:13)	Rulers of the world	spiritual deception
7 (16:17-21)	(11:15)	Whole earth/Great city	split/collapse (the end)

The scope is clearly “all,” no longer a portion (or “a third”) as mentioned during the judgments spanning history (for example Revelation 8:7-12; 9:15, 18). While God judges at times and in limited scope throughout history, at the end, with believers removed, there’s no reason to limit or restrain God’s complete and just wrath.

Some specifics need further examination:

Revelation 16:5-7 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." (NIV)

Beyond rebellion against God and rejection of the Lamb, the greatest heavenly charge against fallen humanity is this: "they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets (16:6a)." God lays against these people the charge of persecuting and killing believers, even uniquely authenticated believers speaking for God, namely His prophets. Jesus brought a similar charge against the Pharisees...

Matthew 23:29-32 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. 30 And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' 31 So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32 Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers! (NIV)

This passage in Matthew is a reminder that nonbelievers can be religious looking people.

In verse seven, John hears the altar respond to the angel's proclamation. The response comes from the altar because we learned earlier of a growing and constant prayer and appeal from this location:

Revelation 6:10-11 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. (NIV)

From the altar comes acknowledgment that God's plan and judgment is a fitting response to their earlier prayer. This is God's time to avenge, His time to repay (see Romans 12:19). The wicked have shed blood, now God gives it to them to drink.

Blood to drink doesn't have to be literal, though Revelation's text allows for it. With water turning to blood, it brings reminder of what happened before the Pharaoh of the Exodus (Exodus 7:21, also Psalms 78:44). Metaphorically, the idea of drinking blood is an enduring symbol of slaughter, one that appears throughout the Old Testament (for example Numbers 23:24; Isaiah 49:26; even Ezekiel 39:19). When John continues his description of the Great City, in chapter 18, he restates the charge of her slaughtering saints and prophets in this fashion:

Revelation 18:24 In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth." (NIV)

A chapter later, John highlights again what we heard from the altar (Revelation 16:7). All saints praise God for avenging them:

Revelation 19:1-2 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." (NIV)

In this final judgment there is reference to the Euphrates (Revelation 16:12). Some details:

We first heard use of the term Euphrates back in Revelation 9:13-14. There it represents a dividing line (or boundary) between God's people and the world (based on the literal Euphrates once being an eastern boundary for the Promised Land. See Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7; 11:24; Joshua 1:4). Similar figurative use is in view here too. In this day of final judgment, God dries up the Euphrates, meaning that He has removed any barrier between the world and His people (who are with God). How else would earthly nations believe it possible to wage war against God?

God seemingly removes any barrier, opening a road for the world to carry out what they have set their hearts on doing. Capitalizing on this removed barrier, the dragon (devil) sends demons to rally everyone to this demonic cause (aided by his two beasts, or beast and false prophet, both empires).

John uses the phrase "kings of the east" in parallel with the clarifying clause in his two-part example "the kings of the whole world." As there is nothing else in the text to further give reason for the term "east" this dual use best explains the meaning – the whole world. In harmony with this understanding, if the beast is the Roman Empire's fragmented remains, the

west is already onboard for the dragon's plans. Filling out the "whole world" only needs enticing the east to join with the west.

Dispensationalists commonly take this verse to reference a literal drying up of the current river Euphrates, making a way for a literal army coming from one specific area in the east. The entire context and logic works against this understanding. John's emphasis is on kings and nations of the earth (namely all the remaining fallen world). Further, with water, the Euphrates is an easily crossable river and no barrier to modern warfare. The river is easily bridgeable, planes can fly over it. Workable routes exist to bypass the Euphrates. Plus, if its drying up was to remove any physical geographic barrier, the Tigris would equally have to go (as it loosely makes an identical barrier), to which this text remains silent.

Send in the frogs.

No they aren't literal frogs, nor are they a symbol for the French (France) as the term is sometimes derogatorily used. The text itself defines this "looks like" statement. They are three evil spirits (or, in the Greek, "three unclean spirits"). These froglike creatures are a triad of demons with a purpose:

Revelation 16:14 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. (NIV)

It's possible there are exactly three demons but it's just as easy for the number to be symbolic (even as the passage it's found in is symbolic). Three would represent completion and perfection – in other words the final and best attack the dragon and beast could put forth regardless of specific numbers.

Why might John represent these demons, coming from the beast and false prophet, as frogs? Frogs are an amphibious creature equally at home in water and on land. This figurative shape represents that they are equally at home with either beast. The first beast came out of the water (Revelation 13:1) and the second, the false prophet, came out of the earth (Revelation 13:11).

These frog-demons qualify as "signs" which the second beast (false prophet) can do for the first beast, both serving the dragon. Their purpose is to "deceive the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 13:14)."

Notice the three entities mentioned here: the dragon, the beast, the false prophet (beast #2). This demonic triad is a spiritual mockery of the true triune God. The dragon replaces God the Father; the Beast (a savior by might) replaces the Son; and in place of the Holy Spirit, the False Prophet (or beast who manipulates by ideas).

### **Details on Jesus' coming like a thief (Revelation 16:15)**

Divinely inserted into John's account of this final judgment are direct words from Jesus. These words appear as a break in the primary story. They continue a trend seen throughout Revelation, presenting a reminder to readers to not worry about these events and personally to stay ready:

"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." (NIV)

Christians often read too much into Jesus' statement that He is coming "like a thief." For the secret-rapture Dispensationalists, they see these words as proof that people won't see Jesus at His second return (... what they call "the rapture," holding there is a third and final triumphant return).

Thief imagery is not new; consider first the gospels:

Matthew 24:36-44 "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 [in judgment]. 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 [in judgment] and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken [in judgment] 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. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Luke 12:35-41 "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, 36 like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and

knocks they can immediately open the door for him. 37 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. 38 It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. 39 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. 40 You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." (NIV)

Both gospel passages highlight the issue of timing. They use reference to a thief for picturing unknown or unexpected timing. The apostle Paul does the same:

1 Thessalonians 5:1-9 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. 4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. 5 You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. 6 So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. 9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. (NIV)

Paul again uses this imagery to show unexpected and sudden timing. The timing only surprises the world because saints are waiting for these events (though we don't know specifically when it will happen). Peter uses similar imagery in 2 Peter 3:8-10. An earlier instance in Revelation is also worth remembering:

Revelation 3:3 [Jesus To the church at Sardis] 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. (NIV)

Each event we examined focused on the issue of timing. The present instance (16:15) is no different; Jesus reminds His people that Revelation is not for figuring out when. Its entire message is for saints to be ready, watching, and waiting regardless of all that takes place.



In this time of final judgment, God clothes His blessed in the righteous of Christ, all with Him forever. In contrast, He shamefully exposes the lost, showing their nakedness, for they were not ready for His unexpected (like a thief) return and this Day of Judgment.

### **Details on Armageddon**

Revelation 16:16 Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. (NIV)

The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) nowhere has the term Armageddon. Armageddon appears only once in all Scriptures, in the New Testament book of Revelation. For such a rare word, people have consumed volumes writing and speculating about the Battle of Armageddon. While the text says the world's kings prepare themselves for this battle, nowhere does the passage shown a true battle. There are no advances, pullbacks, and selective thrusts. The only idea in view, about this so-called battle, is utter defeat. Useless preparations fail before Him who has right to judge. Armageddon is a slaughter; the treading out of the grapes of wrath (Revelation 14:19).

#### **Definition**

Har – A Hebrew word for “mountain” or range of mountainous hills.

With John referring to Armageddon as being a Hebrew term, even though writing in Greek, it intentionally takes the reader (or researcher) to root words. Transliterated from Hebrew into the Greek: Har + Megiddo (commonly translated: Mountain [of] Megiddo). Hosts of alternate possible interpretations and translations abound for “Har” and “Meggido.” Examining many Bible reference works, you will find “Har” sometimes said to be:

Mountain

Hill

City (using “Ar” rather than the better transliterated “Har”)

Moving to the word “Megiddo,” this is a typical reference:

Megiddo – the literal ancient Canaanite or Israeli city found on the southern rim of the Plain of Esdraelon (6 miles/10 km from Mount Carmel, 11 miles/18 km from Nazareth).

Many important battles were fought in the Jezreel Valley surrounding this city, which controlled the main road that linked Egypt and Syria.

Interpreters sometimes give the name one of the following meanings:

- “place of crowds” (Thayer's Greek Lexicon and Brown Driver & Briggs Hebrew Lexicon)
- “place of troops” (Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Easton's Bible Dictionary, The Bible Exposition Commentary)
- “place of crowns” (Smith's Bible Dictionary; I can't help wonder if this was a typographic error for “place of crowds”)
- “place of slaughter” (The Bible Exposition Commentary)

The primary question here: Is John speaking of literal Megiddo or might his word figuratively represent something else? The pros and cons...

Pro – literal Megiddo is in view.

The greatest evidence offered over Armageddon referencing literal Megiddo is the place is a “biblical city.” It unquestionably is a well-known Bible city. Its first mention in the Old Testament is in a list of the kings conquered by Joshua (Joshua 12:9-24, especially verse 21). It became part of the territory awarded to the tribe of Manasseh (Joshua 17:11; 1 Chronicles 7:29) but this tribe could not take the city (Judges 1:27). The events of the judge Deborah defeating Sisera and army (Judges 4:4-22) took place near Megiddo (Judges 5:19). During the time of Solomon, the city came under Israeli control and became one of Solomon's fortress and administrative cities (1 Kings 4:7-19, especially verse 12; also 1 Kings 9:15-19). Josiah confronted Egyptian Pharaoh Neco on the plain of Megiddo when Neco came up from Egypt to fight against the king of Assyria, an ally of Josiah (2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:22-24).



The plain of Megiddo as viewed from the Tell of Megiddo

Others claim support for Armageddon being literal Megiddo because the latter appears in one Old Testament end-times prophecy:

Zechariah 12:10-14 "And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced [applied to Jesus in John 19:37], and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. 11 On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, 13 the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, 14 and all the rest of the clans and their wives. (NIV; the entire chapter of Zechariah 12 appears to look to the end times, a final battle against Israel).

Any claimed association with Megiddo is weak as nothing in this Old Testament prophecy associates it to Revelation's Megiddo.

Dispensationalists often also like to point out that more recent battles, such as Israel's Six-Day War of 1967, also took place in the area around Megiddo. How this supports a literal Megiddo being in view in Revelation rests in pure speculation.

Con – not likely literal Megiddo in view.

Remember John has often used place-names figuratively in preceding passages (and continues this trend in later passages). For example, Babylon and Jerusalem have a representative or spiritual meaning. Figurative use is the greater context surrounding our present passage. If John now intentionally switches to a literal specific location the text should provide sign of this change in the immediate context.

There is no reference to the ancient city of Megiddo in the New Testament (assuming the present reference in Revelation does not apply as literal). In fact, its continuous presence as a major settlement, spanning thousands of years, *ended* in the Persian period (between 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C.). There was no Megiddo in the time of Jesus and the apostles. Israeli's stopped using the name itself for the city or the area. When this change happened is unclear. Later writers, Eusebius (lived 263-339 AD) and Jerome (lived 347-420 AD), merely reflect what became common. They call the area of Megiddo "Legio" or "the Plain of Legio."

#### **Definition**

Hebraisti – The Jewish language, whether Hebrew or Aramaic.

While Megiddo finds mention in the Old Testament, there is no reference at all to the specific "Harmegiddo" used by John. No "Mountain of Megiddo" is in view elsewhere in the Bible. When John references a known place or name in Hebrew, now known by another name, or translatable, or having a translatable meaning, his norm is to say so. For example:

John 5:2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic [Hebraisti] is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification. Note the NIV uses the word Aramaic; it is the same word elsewhere translated "Hebrew," as it is in Revelation.)

John 6:1 Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias) (NIV)

John 19:13 When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic [Hebraisti] is Gabbatha). (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

John 19:16-17 So the soldiers took charge of Jesus. 17 Carrying his own cross, he went out to the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic [Hebraisti] is called Golgotha). (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification.)

John 19:19-20 Pilate had a notice prepared and fastened to the cross. It read: JESUS OF NAZARETH, THE KING OF THE JEWS. 20 Many of the Jews read this sign, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and the sign was written in Aramaic [Hebraisti], Latin and Greek. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification.)

John 20:16 Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic [Hebraisti], "Rabboni!" (which means Teacher). (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification.)

Revelation 9:11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew [Hebraisti] is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification.)

I must stress that John's way of referencing language differences is unique to all New Testament writers. He always made sure that readers would understand the meaning of his word choice. This returns us to this sole instance in Revelation 16:16, where John did not follow his usual pattern and give a new place-name or meaning. He cryptically says, in paraphrase; check out the Hebrew (or Jewish) language on this. Because John didn't clarify the name, as he commonly did with literal places, it lends credence to this not being a literal location. Further, no early church father connects the former place Megiddo and Revelation 16:16. It appears the early church had no understanding of any significance to the place Megiddo or its surrounding area.



The Tell of Megiddo

There's never been a Mountain of Megiddo; historically no one has ever understood Megiddo as a mountain. Modern interpreters have tried to claim the small hill, or the Tell of Megiddo, to be this mountain. ("Tell" being the covered, or buried, ruins of an ancient city.) Writers use the Hebrew word "Har" for mountains, such as Sinai or Tabor, and sometimes of mountainous ranges of hills, but never little mounds such as the Tell of Megiddo. And Megiddo's tell is larger in modern times than the first century due to slow buildup of sediment. (Hebrew has a different word for little hills: "gib'ah." For example; Psalms 148:9 has both words in use to say mountains and hills). Lack of a Mountain of Megiddo led speculators to suggest John meant Mount Carmel, well west of Megiddo. Such an understanding has no ancient support, let alone Biblical likelihood.

Dispensationalists regularly refer to the "battle of Armageddon," yet commonly make its location merely a stopping point, or gathering place. The final battle is in the Valley of Jehoshaphat (trying to merge and resolve this Revelation passage with Joel 3:1-2). They identify the Valley of Jehoshaphat with an area near the temple mount in Jerusalem (Kidron Valley), though some researchers dispute such identification. Eusebius identifies it with the Jerusalem Valley of [Ben] Hinnom; perhaps trying to merge Jeremiah's referenced Valley of Slaughter (Jeremiah 19:6, also 7:31). We will consider more about the Valley of Jehoshaphat shortly.

To find true understanding of what John had in view about Armageddon, consider the following: Two ancient commentators show some early evidence of how believers interpreted the name Armageddon (or Har-Magedon); they are: Oecumenius and Andreas (Andrew) of Caesarea. Significantly, Oecumenius wrote the oldest known Greek commentary on the Book of Revelation, a twelve part work, only rediscovered early in the twentieth century. A later commentary on Revelation by Andreas of Caesarea, written sometime between 563 and 614, refers to Oecumenius' work repeatedly. Oecumenius was a native Greek speaker and writer, where most western commentators worked in Latin.

Their view, the oldest we have, views the name Armageddon (or Har-Magedon) as taking its meaning from the Aramaic or Hebrew root of this word. The Aramaic root (gedad) means "to cut down, to hew down." In Hebrew (gadad) it means "to cut, to break in upon, to penetrate." (For more on this, see "Research note," The Etymology of Har-Magedon, by Hans K. LaRondelle, Andrews University). From this root, these early writers understand the term literally means "the Mountain of Slaughter." Significantly, these commentators made no effort to connect it with a long abandoned place such as Megiddo.

Researcher Hans LaRondelle notes that these early commentators had good reason to view the root words in such a manner. The Septuagint (the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible common used in the first century by the apostle John, and even these early commentators) uniquely presents Zechariah 12:11. Our typical English translations word it as:

Zechariah 12:11 On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. (NIV)

Yet the Greek LXX provides “the plain of Megiddo” as “the plain of the cut down (Greek: ‘en pediq ekkoptomenou’).” This wording shows the Jewish LXX translators, before the time of Christ, saw specific meaning in the term Megiddo. It wasn’t the Hebrew stem “to assemble,” as many current commentators claim, but rather the previously mentioned Aramaic and Hebrew roots, meaning “to cut down.” John is referencing a place of slaughter.

Joel and Revelation are looking towards the same prophetic event, but why two names: Armageddon and Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2)? Jehoshaphat means “the Lord judges” or “Yahweh shall judge.” This prophetic location is the Valley of the Lord’s judgment. Later Joel also calls it “the valley of decision (Joel 3:14).” [Consider Zephaniah 3:8-9, without a location name, on the same subject]. Though an ancient Israelite (Judah) king had the name Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:2), that literal person is not in view, nor any place associated with him.

Simply put, John’s Armageddon (the Mountain of Slaughter) is also the Valley of the Lord’s judgment and the Valley of Decision. Here’s where the earth’s people choose to rebel against God (i.e. they decide). These are prophetic names with meaning, word plays to picture a specific idea.

Revelation 16:16 Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. (NIV)

The unified world gathers in their opposition to God. And yet, this event doesn’t focus on them, this is God’s time. It is the outpouring of His wrath on rebellious humanity. And this brings us to the seventh and final bowl...

Revelation 16:17-21 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. (NIV)

With this bowl the outpouring of God's bowls of wrath is complete. Verse seventeen's "into the air" is literally "on the air" in Greek. John's perspective throughout this portion Revelation is from heaven. God pours wrath downward "on the air." This matches heavenly voices coming "out of the temple" and "from the throne." The earth's and beast's kingdoms and the great city all fall because of God's action:

"It is done." This wording doesn't use the Greek verb "to do," rather it is "to become." The angels have now fulfilled God's command to pour out the seven bowls. Consider the contrast between this ending proclamation and one seemingly similar pronounced by Christ on the cross: "It is finished! (John 19:30)." In fact they're not so similar; two different Greek words with two different results. With Christ's words, saints find completed salvation; with this late heavenly proclamation the lost experience realized promise of God's wrath on sinful humanity in final judgment.

God's response to the unified rebellion of the earth:

- (1) He shakes the whole earth. This implies not only the world's physical items but also the entire worldly order and system. Consider the Bible says Satan is the "ruler of the kingdom of the air (Ephesians 2:2)," it is his kingdom onto which God directly pours this bowl. He and his followers are the objects of God's wrath.
- (2) The figurative great city, introduced in Revelation 11:8 (where enemies of God live), who portrayed itself as unified against God (gathered for battle), now appears divided. [And every house divided will fall: Luke 11:17]. Threefold division is also a symbol of perfect destruction.
- (3) The cities of the earth, which comprise the great city, individually fall.
- (4) God pours out His fury on the great city, also called Babylon the Great.
- (5) Islands sink, mountains fall; everything mankind normally trusts in offers no refuge. Unbelievable, extraordinary, hail falls... these events show nature itself belongs to God who created it (and He can and does use it as a means of judgment. See Ezekiel 14:21). Consider the punishment for blasphemy, under the Law, is to be stoning – here God is stoning these blasphemers (Leviticus 24:14-16). Also, under the Law, punishment for adultery is also to be stoning (Deuteronomy 22:20-24) – here God stones these adulterous (figuratively and literally) people.



Preterists, who must find fulfillment of these prophecies in events surrounding the temple's destruction (AD 70), offer a creative solution to the meaning of the hail. They point to a passage in Josephus' Wars of the Jews:

270 Now, the stones that were cast were of the weight of a talent, and were carried two furlongs and farther. The blow they gave was no way to be sustained, not only by those that stood first in the way, but by those that were beyond them for a great space. 271 As for the Jews, they at first watched the coming of the stone, for it was of a white color, and could therefore not only be perceived by the great noise it made, but could be seen also before it came by its brightness; 272 accordingly the watchmen that sat upon the towers gave them notice when the engine was let go, and the stone came from it, and cried out aloud in their own country language, "THE SON COMETH:"<sup>1</sup> so those that were in its way stood off, and threw themselves down upon the ground; by which means, and by their thus guarding themselves, the stone fell down and did them no harm. 273 But the Romans contrived how to prevent that by blacking the stone, who then could aim at them with success, when the stone was not discerned beforehand, as it had been till then; and so they destroyed many of them at one blow. (Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 5.270-273 or 5.6.3)

Preterists claim the hundred pound (talent sized) hail stones meant white limestone catapult stones fired at the walls by the Romans during Jerusalem's siege. They find the curious cry of the sentries, "the son cometh" as confirmation this was Jesus' judgment on Israel. While true that God was judging Israel, the Jerusalem Jews didn't recognize this, so their meaning (whatever it is) held other significance. It's possible they referred to Titus, son of Emperor Vespasian, who commanded the forces attacking Jerusalem. Also, it's a stretch they would liken white stones, afterward colored black, to hailstones. Hail falls in large quantities, catapult stones are individual (allowing advance detection of them). Other than speculations based on presuppositions, it's easier to accept a direct understanding of the Bible's text.

We can also describe the extent of the events in this final outpouring of God's wrath using words from Daniel:

Daniel 12:1 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. (NIV)

While hosts of people go to their deaths in these cataclysmic events, survivors show where their hearts are. Their rebellion continues with hardened hearts and fixed opposition to His truth. They curse their Creator to their dying breath.

Revelation 16:21b And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible. (NIV)

On a smaller scale, when God brought judgment on Egypt and Pharaoh, He used hail as well. There too, Pharaoh hardened his heart and continued to defy God (Exodus 9:27-28, 33-35). Though reminiscent of that ancient event, this is far worse:

“the plague was so terrible” (NIV)

“its plague was extremely severe” (NASU)

“it was so horrendous” (NET)

#### **Definition**

Sphodra – A Greek word meaning “vehemently, greatly, violently, exceedingly,” and “very much so.”

John uses a specific Greek word, “sphodra,” that he only uses this one time in all of Revelation (and nowhere else in all the books he authored). He does so to stress the intensity of this event.

Before we see the result, the Day of Judgment’s conclusion, John receives a greater picture of what happens to the Great City, Babylon the Great, the Great Prostitute.

Revelation 17:1 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. (NIV)

One of the angels involved in pouring out the bowls of God’s wrath now specifically comes to John to show him greater detail on the great prostitute’s punishment. Implicit in the bowls is punishment on the great prostitute. Now one of the directly involved angels makes clear what the text formerly implied.

#### **Chapter 17 – Details of the Great City and its destruction.**

Revelation 17:1-6 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." 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 I saw her, I was greatly astonished. (NIV)

Who: The great prostitute

What: A prostitute: "the mother of prostitutes"

Where: A desert

With: Sitting on a scarlet beast, sitting on many waters

Condition: Drunk with blood of the saints

### **The great prostitute**

#### **Definition**

Pornes – A Greek word meaning a harlot or prostitute. It applies to any woman selling her body for sexual uses to anyone not allowed to have her (for example, a husband). Selling herself includes unlawful sexual acts for gain, whether for money or goods or for lust. (NT:4204; feminine noun, from a root word "pernao", meaning "to sell").

Writers metaphorically use the term for an idolatress (someone who has sold themselves to idols or false gods). As a figure of speech, the word doesn't literally apply, rather it suggests a likeness.

### **Definition**

Zanah – A Hebrew word (OT: 2181) functionally equivalent to the Greek word “Pornes,” also meaning “to fornicate” or “to prostitute.” The Septuagint translators consistently used the Greek word “pornes” as a substitute for this Hebrew word. The Hebrew term, similar to “Pornes,” can appear literally or metaphorically. In metaphorical use, Old Testament writers commonly use it about Israel having improper relations with pagan nations or other gods. They portray Israel as the spouse (or the promised spouse) of Yahweh, who then is unfaithful to Him, selling herself to someone else. It is a good metaphor because it shows Israel breaking a covenant relationship, as is marriage, to go to someone else for felt gain.

A few Biblical references to prostitutes and prostitution in the Old Testament:

Exodus 34:14-16 Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. 15 "Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute [zanah] themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. 16 And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute [zanah] themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Deuteronomy 31:16 And the Lord said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. (NIV)

Isaiah 1:21-26 See how the faithful city has become a harlot! She once was full of justice; righteousness used to dwell in her — but now murderers! 22 Your silver has become dross, your choice wine is diluted with water. 23 Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the widow's case does not come before them. 24 Therefore the Lord, the Lord Almighty, the Mighty One of Israel, declares: "Ah, I will get relief from my foes and avenge myself on my enemies. 25 I will turn my hand against you; I will thoroughly purge away your dross and remove all your impurities. 26 I will restore your judges as in days of old, your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you will be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City." (NIV)

Ezekiel 23:1-44 [The parable of Oholah and Oholibah.]

Ezekiel 6:8-11 "But I will spare some, for some of you will escape the sword when you are scattered among the lands and nations. 9 Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me — how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. They will loathe themselves for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices. 10 And they will know that I am the Lord; I did not threaten in vain to bring this calamity on them. (NIV)

Hosea 9:1 Do not rejoice, O Israel; do not be jubilant like the other nations. For you have been unfaithful to your God; you love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor. (NIV)

This term is also used of a nation that once followed God, but later abandoned Him: Nineveh.

Nahum 3:1-7 Woe to the city of blood, full of lies, full of plunder, never without victims!  
2 The crack of whips, the clatter of wheels, galloping horses and jolting chariots!  
3 Charging cavalry, flashing swords and glittering spears! Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses—  
4 all because of the wanton lust of a harlot, alluring, the mistress of sorceries, who enslaved nations by her prostitution and peoples by her witchcraft.  
5 "I am against you," declares the Lord Almighty. "I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness and the kingdoms your shame.  
6 I will pelt you with filth, I will treat you with contempt and make you a spectacle.  
7 All who see you will flee from you and say, 'Nineveh is in ruins — who will mourn for her?' Where can I find anyone to comfort you?" (NIV)

### **The Mother of Prostitutes**

Why would God call someone the mother of prostitutes? Beyond answering “why;” we must know “who.” Clearly John uses this phrase as a synonym to “great prostitute.” The goal is to suggest the worst prostitute in history.

The world knew ancient Babylon for its prostitution. Greek Historian Herodotus (lived 484-425 BC) wrote of the widespread mandated prostitution in Babylon. He uses the Greek name Aphrodite for the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, both goddesses of love. Don't miss that Babylonian law forced every woman to prostitute herself:

199. Now the most shameful of the customs of the Babylonians is as follows: every woman of the country must sit down in the precincts of Aphrodite once in her life and

have commerce with a man who is a stranger: and many women who do not deign to mingle with the rest, because they are made arrogant by wealth, drive to the temple with pairs of horses in covered carriages, and so take their place, and a large number of attendants follow after them; but the greater number do thus,—in the sacred enclosure of Aphrodite sit great numbers of women with a wreath of cord about their heads; some come and others go; and there are passages in straight lines going between the women in every direction, through which the strangers pass by and make their choice. Here when a woman takes her seat she does not depart again to her house until one of the strangers has thrown a silver coin into her lap and has had commerce with her outside the temple, and after throwing it he must say these words only: “I demand thee in the name of the goddess Mylitta”: now Mylitta is the name given by the Assyrians to Aphrodite: and the silver coin may be of any value; whatever it is she will not refuse it, for that is not lawful for her, seeing that this coin is made sacred by the act: and she follows the man who has first thrown and does not reject any: and after that she departs to her house, having acquitted herself of her duty to the goddess, nor will you be able thenceforth to give any gift so great as to win her. So then as many as have attained to beauty and stature are speedily released, but those of them who are unshapely remain there much time, not being able to fulfil the law; for some of them remain even as much as three or four years... (Herodotus, Histories – Book I)

When the law mandates every woman sell herself for silver, you don't get a better earthly image for the mother of all prostitutes. With this association in mind, answer this question: Of the following three choices, spiritual speaking which is the greater prostitute?

- A. A pagan nation
- B. A nation like Nineveh (who converted then abandoned)
- C. A nation like Israel (who repeatedly abandoned God)

Clearly choice C is the worst (Israel). For the record, pagan nations barely qualify as a prostitute for they never were in a covenant relationship with God. Some might argue, though, that all people broke God's original covenant demanding obedience to Him.

Some commentators on Revelation, especially Preterists (such as Hank Hanegraff), stop right here and identify the great prostitute as being Israel (and the city of Babylon as being Jerusalem). Yet, consider another covenant people, having a better (and greater covenant), namely the church.

- D. God's set apart people, the church (the ekklesia)

Even as all Israel isn't true Israel (Romans 9:6), a staggering amount of what claims to be God's church is not. This apostate church has a form of godliness (2 Timothy 3:5) but has turned away from their claimed partner. The greatest eternal covenant ever made belongs to the church. Rejecting or turning away from God's covenant is the greatest prostitution ever committed.

Now, looking again at our possible choices labeled A to D; the Great Prostitute is the apostate church. In this regards the answer isn't Jew or Gentile, it's both Jew and Gentile. Many Preterists' view of Israel as the Great Prostitute leaves them sounding almost (or fully) anti-Semitic. In truth, the Great Prostitute is more universal. Without question, the apostate church's sin is far greater than that of merely the nation of Israel.

No matter how good this last selection is, there's another choice...

E. All of choices A to D

Pagan nations, people and nations that followed God then abandoned Him (Nineveh), Israel who rejected, and the apostate church. Together they're the greatest of prostitutes. Fallen humanity is the Great Prostitute. It sells itself continuously for felt gain, even as Adam and Eve did with the serpent in Eden.

God clearly reveals the woman represents "the great city" in John's provided explanation in the book itself.

Revelation 17:18 The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth." (NIV)

This is Revelation's great contrast; there are two cities and two only:

#1. The Great City

#2. The New Jerusalem

Consider this contrast:

#1. Satan (the Dragon) controls the great city. He manipulates it using the world's empires (Beasts). This figurative powerful earthly city (the Woman or Prostitute) rules over the world's nations. In this city live all who are in rebellion against God, including people and fallen angels. (See Revelation 11:8; 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10).

#2. The Bible calls the New Jerusalem the city of God in Revelation 3:12. It's the city where God lives with His people forever and all living in it are worshippers and servants of God, the latter including holy angels (see Revelation 3:12; 21:2, 10; 22:2-3).

The ending for the citizens of these two cities is eternally different. In stark contrast, Revelation shows one a city of light, the other a city of darkness. God's city isn't of this world; the other city spans the globe. Righteousness (given by God) identifies one, wickedness the other. God's name appears on the citizens of His city, residents of the other willingly agree to the beast's mark.

A second great contrast exists in the Book of Revelation; there are only two women in view.

#1. The Great Prostitute (Revelation 17:1)

#2. The Woman clothed with the Sun, moon under her feet, and a crown of 12 stars. (Revelation 12:1)

Details on the two women of Revelation:

#1. The Great Prostitute, the woman also known as Jezebel, is adulterous. She uses enticement to mislead, embraces idolatry, and promotes immorality (Revelation 2:20-21). She is over many peoples (and kings of the earth), and she uses the beasts (who hate her and will destroy her). Take note:

- Her children will die (Revelation 2:23)
- She is the great city (Revelation 17:18)

#2. The woman clothed with the sun is the true church of God, she represents God's "called out" ones (see section on chapter 12).

- God loves and protects her (Revelation 12:6); she is the Holy City, the bride (Revelation 21:2)
- Her offspring (though hunted and hated by the Dragon) will live and thrive (Revelation 12:17, context of book)

Stressed ideas and details about the great prostitutes' punishment (17:1):

(17:1) She sits on many waters. The text directly says the waters are figurative for "peoples, multitudes, nations and languages (Revelation 17:15)."



(17:2) In association with this great prostitute, the kings (or rulers) of the earth commit adultery (figurative for idolatry and unfaithfulness to God)

(17:2b) The wine of her adulteries intoxicate the earth's inhabitants (meaning nonbelievers). Like a drunkard they seek pleasure in misuse of items God created for good, but they choose to misuse these to their own harm.

(17:3) For a time, the woman clothed with the sun once lived in the "desert" cared for by God (12:6; 12:14); this second woman (the great prostitute) also lives in this same desert (the world).

(17:3b) The great prostitute uses the beast ("sits on"). This beast or empire (first introduced in 13:1) is merely a tool or means to an end as used by this woman.

(17:3b) John describes the beast with the color "scarlet." This was a well-known color in his day, as some Roman soldiers wore it (see also Matthew 27:28). John uses the term four times in the Book of Revelation, four as a symbol of earthly matters, all in association with this woman (the Great Prostitute: Revelation 17:3, 4), which is also the Great City (Babylon: Revelation 18:12, 16). The Greek word for scarlet ("kokkinos") is a synonym for fiery red ("purros"), which John uses to describe the dragon himself (Revelation 12:3). In summary, it's a color of death ("blood"), war (implying high military rank), and worldly wealth. Beyond these public views of the color scarlet, I would also add Biblical imagery from the Old Testament. Scarlet is a color of sin:

Isaiah 1:18 "Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. (NIV)

Scarlet is a fitting color for a prostitute drunk with the "blood of the saints (Revelation 17:6)."

(17:4) The prostitute appears dressed in scarlet (see imagery in 17:3b) and purple (a color of royalty). She holds herself as having a right to rule everything. She believes all wealth (everything) belongs to her, this shown by her gold, precious stones, and pearl ornaments.

(17:4b) The golden cup in her hand is the cup of a ruler. From it she drinks of her wickedness and relishes in her wicked deeds. Consider John's imagery here in contrast to earlier by Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 51:6-9 "Flee from Babylon! Run for your lives! Do not be destroyed because of her sins. It is time for the Lord's vengeance; he will pay her what she deserves. 7 Babylon was a gold cup in the Lord's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad. 8 Babylon will suddenly fall and be broken. Wail over her! Get balm for her pain; perhaps she can be healed. 9 "'We would have healed Babylon, but she cannot be healed; let us leave her and each go to his own land, for her judgment reaches to the skies, it rises as high as the clouds.'" (NIV)

(17:5) Saints have God's seal on their foreheads (7:3; 14:1); the world willingly takes the mark of the beast on their foreheads (13:17; 14:9-11). The prostitute glories in herself, having her title on her own forehead:

Revelation 17:5 MYSTERY

BABYLON THE GREAT

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES

AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. (NIV, following the pattern of the KJV)

Or NASU...

Revelation 17:5-6 and on her forehead a name was written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH." (NASU, in common with the pattern of the ESV, NET, HCSB)

The NASU wording removes Mystery as part of the title, using it as a descriptor of the title. This makes sense as John explains the "mystery" in verse 7. It is no longer a mystery. In her titles, Revelation clearly ties this woman, "the Mother of Harlots," to the figurative title "Babylon the Great." The great city is the great prostitute. The mother of prostitutes is a legitimate title for both as she teaches her offspring to follow her ways.

(17:6) In the tale of two women throughout this book, note that one, the Great Prostitute, seeks the Dragon's goal: destruction of the other woman's offspring (the church. Revelation 12:7). Here we see her drunk on the blood of these saints. She has done the worst she can do, she has seen hosts of them killed, and yet God has lost none to her or the dragon (John 6:37-39).

(17:6b) Why did this astonish John? John knew the prophecy of Jeremiah 51 (referenced in 17:4b). He expected to see Babylon defeated and destroyed; instead in this rewind he sees something unexpected. [I call it a rewind, as the angel backs up to show what Babylon the Great looked like before God punished her. Her appearance is present and future for John's day, yet history to the events of 16:19].

He sees this beautifully arrayed woman of wealth and power in appearance thriving and victorious. He sees no earthly victory for the saints, rather a bloodthirsty woman with a voracious appetite for the blood of God's people. Translators properly use many English words and phrases to express John's thinking about this: astonished, utterly astounded, great wonder, marveled greatly, great amazement, surprised. The one phrase I wouldn't use is one the KJV translators chose: "great admiration." This isn't the picture John expected, even as he saw some of it in earlier visions. Now it's clear to him and it's not a nice-looking picture. It's an earthly horror story for God's church. Any yet, as John sees, this horrible looking story has an incredibly good ending for these saints!

(17:7) In response to John's astonishment, God's angel again reveals and explains the mystery: The woman (prostitute) uses (rides) on the beast (empire) – specifically the first beast referenced earlier (see Revelation 12:9; 13:2-3, 12, 14).

(17:8a) The heavenly messenger announces the permanent destruction of the beast, who mocks Christ. He points to the beast's specific identity using a brief phrase; "once was, now is not, and will come." This beast will "rise out of the Abyss and go to its destruction (see Revelation 20:10)." He's telling John to stop worrying about this beast; it's temporary and God will destroy it.

(17:8b) It's the earth's inhabitants (the lost) who will, and should, find astonishment in the beast. Believers, including John, have no reason to marvel.

(17:9-11) Again, this takes wisdom from God to find understanding (not human wisdom). The prostitute holds power over many lands (seven hills), she has ruled over many kings in the past, plus the coming beast (empire). Again, John's stressing this rule is temporary ("he must remain for a little while") and that final beast's destruction is coming ("going to his destruction").

(17:12) Many kings (rulers) will be part of the beast's empire ("will receive authority as kings with the beast").

(17:13) All these rulers “have one purpose,” namely service to the Dragon; each willingly “give their power and authority to the beast” helping him carry out his tasks.

(17:14a) As the Dragon (devil) does, so do the beast (empire) and all rulers (nations) supporting this beast: They “make war against the Lamb.” Their entire existence opposes the Lamb and priorities of God.

(17:14b) The Lamb will overcome them. This is the Revelation’s great emphasis, in keeping with the angel’s previous assertions about the coming destruction of the beast. Its end doesn’t come by natural events; it’s through the Lamb’s actions. Why is He successful? “Because He is Lord of lords and King of kings.” He alone has true right to rule.

(17:14c) Even as the Lamb overcomes the beast (and all earthly powers with it), so too all God’s “called, chosen and faithful followers” overcome. The entire church overcomes with the Lamb! The text stresses we’ll be with Him. Revelation shows physical presence in its fullness, yet even now all His saints are with Him. He assures His presence with us forever:

Hebrews 13:5-6 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." 6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (NIV)

(17:15) The angel makes all interpretation 100% clear for the “waters” that John saw the prostitute sitting on. The text explains they’re not literal. These referenced waters have no association with nearness to oceans or seas (as some have speculated). They represent “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.” The waters are the myriad people of the earth; the multitudes from which God calls a people of his own (His “ekklesia”). This wicked woman (spiritual prostitute) is over the lost peoples of the earth.

NOTE: The Prostitute sits on many waters (17:1), in parallel the text also calls them “seven hills” on which she sits (17:9). The text directly tells us the waters figuratively represent “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages (17:15).” Therefore the seven hills also represent these nations and peoples as well.

(17:16) “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.” The beast (empire) and the rulers of the nations that comprise it “hate” the great prostitute, the lost peoples of the earth. We expect the beast to hate the Lamb and the Lamb’s followers, but even those equally

serving the Devil? Yes. This evil empire and its rulers are self-serving. Their hatred extends to everyone impeding or opposing their self-serving purpose. They want all power without any restraint. Lost people's personal want for similar power gets in their way. This beast's quest for power means controlling all wealth and remaining the center of all attention. Therefore these rulers and beast will turn on the prostitute, "bring her to ruin and leave her naked." They will consume the peoples that comprise them ("they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.")

(17:17) "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."

God sovereignty and ability to act isn't only for external events, it extends to the hearts of man. While these lost do wickedness out of their own thoughts and inclination, God directs what they purpose for His purposes. This next verse contrasts the changeable hearts of men to the heart of God:

Psalms 33:11 But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations. (NIV)

Returning to Revelation 17:17, these are further examples of God directing the hearts of the wicked (compare Psalms 33:15):

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12 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. (NIV)

Exodus 10:1-2 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them 2 that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the Lord." (NIV, also Exodus 9:12; 10:20; 10:27; 11:10; 14:8)

Joshua 11:20 For it was the Lord himself who hardened their hearts [the kings of the Canaanites] to wage war against Israel, so that he might destroy them totally, exterminating them without mercy, as the Lord had commanded Moses. (NIV)

God directing wicked humanities' hearts is similar to God directing evil spirits for His purposes as well (2 Chronicles 18:20-21; 1 Kings 22:21-22). Don't miss this point, God is sovereign over everything that takes place, He's working it out for His purposes and to carry out this plan He fixed from the beginning (the seven sealed scroll).

Isaiah 42:8-9 "I am the Lord; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols. 9 See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you." (NIV)

God's is fulfilling His word and He will fulfill every detail. Period.

(17:18) The Great Prostitute, The Mother of Prostitutes, also called Babylon the Great (see Revelation 17:5) is clearly the Great City who rules over the kings of the earth. While many previous passages imply this association, the angel makes it 100% clear in the final verse of chapter 17. As I have stated previously, the overall context of the book of Revelation is a contrast between two cities; the great city (of the world) and the holy city (belonging to God). This shows worldwide perspective for the book's events and significance for every single person who has lived. Knowingly or unknowingly, throughout history, every living soul belongs to one of these cities.

Revelation 18:1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. (NIV)

Chapter 18 doesn't begin with "and (kai)"; the word John uses here is "after (meta)." After these events John sees more. We now see yet another angel (beyond all previously introduced), this one descending from heaven to earth to make clear the contrasting destinies of the two cities. Readers must take chapter 18 and 19 together. In Chapter 18, the angel proclaims the Great City's conclusion, in Chapter 19 (mostly) the saints rejoice over what God has done to the Great City, while gathered to God.

Chapters 18 and 19 start with events already considered, overlapping in time with Armageddon's buildup. The text reemphasizes these messages:

- Babylon the Great is fallen (18:2)
- God's saints are to come out of her (18:4),
- God will judge her (18:8),
- Those who trust in her will mourn (18:9, 11, 18-19),
- Her judgment is complete and final (18:21-24).

In chapter 19, the scene shows the gathered church, all the saints, rejoicing over this:

- God and His justice and judgment (19:1-2),
- The finality of the great prostitute's judgment (19:3),
- Praising God for whom He is (19:4-5),
- The wedding day has come when the church is forever with the Bridegroom (19:6-8),

Chapter 19 then returns to the scene where chapter 17 left off; the time of final judgment and the final battle, earlier called Armageddon. Revelation 19:11-16 highlights the One with right to rule and the right to judge: The King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Revelation 19:17-21 stresses God's destruction of all who fight against Him.

Also note the capture of both beasts, the first and second (the false prophet), then cast alive into the lake of fire (19:20). Remembering the beasts represent empires personified, this says they will go to their destruction never to rise again. Equally, the text later personifies death, also cast into the lake of fire never to rise again (20:14). More specifics:

Revelation 18:1 After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. (NIV)

God gives some of His angels more authority than others. Similarly God grants more authority to some believers than others. As always, God does so for His purposes and His glory (c.f. Matthew 25:14-29).

1 Corinthians 4:2 Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. (NIV)

Consider God's majesty and power that one of His angels can illuminate the earth by his splendor. God's messengers should always shine God's light on the earth.

Matthew 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (NIV)

Ephesians 5:8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (NIV)

Again, believers, and even this angel of great authority, are not the source of light; we reflect God's light to the degree He wishes and enables.

Revelation 18:2a He cried in a mighty voice: It has fallen, Babylon the Great has fallen! She has become a dwelling for demons... (HCSB)

Revelation 18:2 And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons... (NASU)

Preterists see Babylon as only first century Israel. Their evidence is the quantity of demonic attacks and confrontations recorded in the New Testament gospels versus the quiet state in the Old Testament. They believe that this extraordinary amassing of demons proves demons besieged Jerusalem and Israel. Their artificially limited view misses the greater symbolism.

The Greek is literally "Babylon the Great fell, fell." The repeat word is, of course, for emphasis; Babylon fell. That statement remains true from Jesus' time until now and remains true until God judges Babylon.

Revelation 18:2-3 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." (NIV)

Old Testament prophets spoke of the fall of Babylon, an event fulfilled hundreds of years before Christ (Isaiah 13:1-14:23; 21:1-10; 47:1-15; Jeremiah 25:12-38; 50:1-51:64). Revelation's imagery draws on these Old Testament prophecies. John now applies similar wording to a worldwide entity, Babylon the Great, the spiritual successor to that ancient kingdom. Since Babylon the Great means more than a physical Babylon, encompassing the kingdoms of the world, Revelation's imagery applied to her doesn't stop with Old Testament passages on Babylon. John further uses wording belonging to God's judgment of wicked Tyre and Sidon (Isaiah 23:1-18; Ezekiel 26:1-28:26)

This widespread nature of Babylon the Great, spanning the world, is why the text stresses it's a home for demons. Satan cast all his demonic followers to the earth (Revelation 12:4). Because spiritual Babylon is fallen it's a home for all these spiritually wicked forces as well as a place for immorality and a place for the rulers of the world to amass riches (Revelation 18:3). It's a place for everything unclean, graphically pictured by the phrase "unclean and detestable bird." This



imagery calls to mind scavengers that prey on and thrive among the dead (think vultures). Reminder of her wicked state builds to a continuing call for God's people to come out of her...

Revelation 18:4 I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; (NASU)

This present call, to come out of her, echoes a similar Old Testament call. It's not necessary to read the Old Testament wording; the apostle Paul incorporated it in his message to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 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." 17 "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." 18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." (NIV, see Isaiah 52:11)

Babylon the Great's endless sins are the reason God will judge and destroy her:

Revelation 18:5-8 for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. 6 Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her. 7 To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, 'I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.' 8 For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong. (NASU)

John here proclaims a prophesied fulfillment to words recorded by Isaiah about Babylon. He shows this Old Testament passage looked beyond a humbling of the ancient nation of Babylon (fulfilled in 539 B.C.) but also towards a far future fulfillment on spiritual Babylon (a near and far, dual, fulfillment).

Isaiah 47:4-15 Our Redeemer — the Lord Almighty is his name — is the Holy One of Israel. 5 "Sit in silence, go into darkness, Daughter of the Babylonians; no more will you

be called queen of kingdoms. 6 I was angry with my people and desecrated my inheritance; I gave them into your hand, and you showed them no mercy. Even on the aged you laid a very heavy yoke. 7 You said, 'I will continue forever — the eternal queen!' But you did not consider these things or reflect on what might happen. 8 "Now then, listen, you wanton creature, lounging in your security and saying to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me. I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children.' 9 Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells. 10 You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'No one sees me.' Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.' 11 Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you.

12 "Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. 13 All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. 14 Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. 15 That is all they can do for you — these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you. (NIV)

At the Great City's destruction (Revelation 18:9-20), those who supported and gave power to her show where their hearts are by their reaction to God's judgment on her. John's threefold example follows:

#1. Kings of the Earth – The rulers of the earth (Revelation 6:15), who committed adultery with her (Revelation 17:2), those she ruled over (Revelation 17:18); they...

- Weep and mourn over her judgment (Revelation 18:9).
- Her fall terrifies them (Revelation 18:10)

#2. Merchants of the earth – The businesspeople and wealthy (Revelation 6:15), who did business with her to their own benefit (Revelation 18:11-13), even trading in people (body and soul; Revelation 18:13); they...

- Lament the loss of wealth (Revelation 18:14)
- Her fall terrifies them (Revelation 18:15)
- Weep and mourn over her judgment (Revelation 18:15-17)

#3. Traders – Those who made their livings moving goods to and from the Kings and Merchants (Revelation 18:17b)...

Try to distance themselves from her (Revelation 18:17c; “stand far off”)

- Lament the loss of wealth (Revelation 18:18)
- Weep and mourn over her judgment (Revelation 18:19)

They don't rejoice in God's judgment, notice that all three mourn. They're hearts belong to the fruit of her wickedness. They're no different from Lot's wife when God judged Sodom & Gomorrah by fire:

Genesis 19:15-17, 24-26 With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away when the city is punished." 16 When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the Lord was merciful to them. 17 As soon as they had brought them out, one of them said, "Flee for your lives! Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!" ... 24 Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah — from the Lord out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities — and also the vegetation in the land. 26 But Lot's wife looked back, and she became a pillar of salt. (NIV)

Notice the subjects of John's three examples are all terrified at what is happening. They have just reason to fear God and His wrath.

Various translators treat verse 20 differently – not so much the wording, rather how they arrange the text with punctuation, slightly impacting understanding of the wording.

Revelation 18:19-20 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." (NIV & NIV2011, similar in ESV, ISV, HCSB)

Revelation 18:19-20 And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!' 20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her." (NASU, similar in CJB, NKJV)

Revelation 18:19-20 And they threw dust on their heads and were shouting with weeping and mourning, "Woe, Woe, O great city - in which all those who had ships on the sea got rich from her wealth - because in a single hour she has been destroyed!" 20 (Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has pronounced judgment against her on your behalf!) (The NET Bible®)

I prefer the NET Bible's punctuation, which makes the rejoicing clearly a separate statement or parenthesis. The Holy City and all within celebrate the Great City's judgment. As we have seen in earlier passages (such as Revelation 16:15), God provides John messages of comfort to insert among woes to encourage the church reading this book.

Revelation 18:21 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. (NIV)

This mighty angel's visual illustration immediately calls to mind words of Jesus:

Matthew 18:2-7 He called a little child and had him stand among them. 3 And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. 5 "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me. 6 But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. 7 "Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to sin! Such things must come, but woe to the man through whom they come! (NIV)

Woe to the Great City Babylon because of everything that causes people to sin! The items of joy and beauty that were part of this fallen city, whether music (18:22), workmanship (18:22), providing food (18:22), light (18:23), marriage (18:23) will all stop forever. God now takes away

even these items of common good and beauty, for they belong to the Master (see Matthew 25:14-30, especially 25:28). Everything good now belongs only to His servants.

Revelation 18:23c-24 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." (NIV)

The charge against Babylon, The Great City, The Great Prostitute, is that she led the nations astray and persecuted and killed the prophets and all of God's church. Indeed God holds her responsible for all bloodshed on the earth. This is a formal legal charge against her, God has found her guilty of these sins, and cause for what she is now experiencing in judgment. On hearing this charge against the Great City, in Revelation 19 the Holy City now responds.

As we continue through chapter 19, don't miss John's fourfold use of the word Hallelujah (verses 1, 3, 4, & 6). The imagery of four, meaning creation, combines with a word coming from Hebrew, meaning Praise Yahweh! It's fitting all God's creation praises their Creator. This Hebrew loanword only appears in the New Testament these four times. In the Old Testament two Hebrew words form the same, appearing in English translations as "Praise the Lord" twenty-six times in Psalms (see Psalms 146 for an example).

Revelation 19:1-2 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." (NIV)

The threefold response of God's holy people is this:

- (1) Praise (to God): "Hallelujah!"
- (2) Praise (of God): "Salvation and glory and power"
- (3) Praise (of God's judgment): "true and just"

All God's people recognize that He has fulfilled His promise to avenge His people and to repay their tormentors (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30). The Holy City (in its entirety) praises God that His destruction of the Great City (The Great Prostitute) is permanent and lasting forever. She is never to rise again. There's an enthusiastic response ("they shouted"):

Revelation 19:3 And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." (NIV)

Revelation 19:3 reminds of words spoken by the prophet Isaiah. The prophet stressing both the eternalness (permanent) and visibility of God's judgment:

Isaiah 66:22-24 "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. 23 From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord. 24 "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." (NIV)

The entire church, represented by the 24 elders, echoes this Hallelujah (of 19:3), as do even angels surrounding God's throne:

Revelation 19:4 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!" (NIV)

Next is a command from God with a suitable response. He directs His command to all His people (and, following the context of 19:4, all His angels too). The recorded response is one that all God's followers (man and angel) would willingly and joyously offer.

#### **The command:**

Revelation 19:5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" (NIV)

Praise of God fills pages of the Bible. God focused praise should be a continuing part of believer's lives both now and for eternity. David said it well:

Psalms 41:13 Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen. (NIV, also Psalms 106:48)

1 Chronicles 29:10-13 David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying, "Praise be to you, O Lord, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. 11 Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the

majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. 12 Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. 13 Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name. (NIV)

The Apostle Paul continues such a call for praise:

Ephesians 1:3-6 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. (NIV)

The Apostle Peter's appeal is similar:

1 Peter 1:3-5 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (NIV)

All these praises brings us to the recorded response of the church in heaven...

### **The response:**

Revelation 19:6-8 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.) (NIV)

This heavenly enthusiastic shout, in response to God, includes:

- (1) Acknowledgment that God reigns. Despite all pretenders to God's throne, whether dragon, beasts, the Great Prostitute and City, and all unbelievers, there is an unchanging

fact: God reigns. This should always, as they continued to say, give us reason to “rejoice and be glad and give Him (the) glory!”

- (2) Acknowledgment that God’s plan to redeem a bride for the Lamb has come to pass. Not only was it God’s plan, He gave her what she needed to wear for she could not clothe herself.

John uses a contrast here. The Great City and its merchants and inhabitants were all caught up in gaining earthly “fine linen (Revelation 18:12, 16),” but real “fine linen” is spiritual. This perfect fine linen is something that every citizen of the Holy City holds; it represents the “righteous acts of the saints. (19:8)”

In Revelation 19:7, the phrase “Let us rejoice (‘Chairo [khah-ee-ro]’) and be glad (‘Agalliao’ [ag-al-lee-ah-o])” is a fulfillment of 1 Peter 4:13. Chairo is most commonly translated as “rejoice,” or joy in action. Agalliao suggests exceeding joy or overjoyed. Now contrast these two verses:

1 Peter 4:13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. (NIV)

Revelation 19:7 Let us rejoice and be overjoyed and give him glory! For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. (Translation mine)

This passage in Revelation shows a final fulfillment of the joy we have now. With God’s glory revealed, we have joy in excess! (Consider also Matthew 5:11-12 which uses similar wording in verse 12).

Revelation 19:9 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." (NIV)

This brief parenthesis, or inserted message in the primary account, is another reminder to the reader that they don’t need to worry about this; the angel confirms their status of present blessing. This is similar to what John recorded earlier (see Revelation 16:15 and Revelation 14:13).

Take note there is only one wedding supper of the Lamb and God has invited every believer (the entirety of His church), the entire Holy City. (This opposes Dispensationalists who often claim a marriage supper many, with others coming to faith afterward. Some see only the Gentile church present at this supper, excluding Israel. Nothing in Revelation, or elsewhere in



Scriptures, lends credibility to such a notion). This event includes God's entire church. He has one bride and one wedding (see Ephesians 5:29-32).

Revelation 19:10 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." (NIV)

There is no surprise over John's amazement at what he has seen and heard. I am surprised at how he showed this, falling down to worship an angel. The power of the messenger and the majesty of the message aside, John's actions are uncharacteristic. And yet, in recording his response, God shows us...

- (1) John, an apostle, was human and fallible. He could make mistakes (sin) if not guided and corrected by God (whether corrected directly or indirectly by one of God's faithful messengers).
- (2) No true messenger of God should ever accept worship that is due God alone. I'm sure this incident weighed on John's mind in following years. People likely tried to put this aged apostle on pedestal – the great apostle who's been in the presence of God and a specially authenticated messenger of God.

### **Definition**

Proskuneo (NT:4352) – One of several Greek words used to represent worship (or features of worship). Other words, by their Strong's numbering, include: (e.g. NT:2356, 2357, 2317, 2150, 2151, 2124, or 4576, 4573, 2323 or even 3000, 1401, 1398, 5256, and 3008). Some lexicons describe this term with words or phrases such as "to kiss, to adore, to worship, to do obeisance, to show respect, to fall before, or to prostrate oneself in homage." The Complete Word Study Dictionary (NT) states, the word literally means "to kiss toward someone, to throw a kiss in token of respect or homage." This latter definition misses the attached idea of prostrating oneself in reverence or adoration. See more in the section on Revelation 11:1b.

The Greek word used for worship, here in Revelation 19:10, is again "proskuneo," meaning to prostrate oneself in reverence or adoration. Every elder (pastor) or felt or recognized leader and teacher of the church needs to take warning from this incident. It's not proper to accept such reverence or adoration for carrying out the duties and tasks that God has set before you. If people see faithfulness in your actions, you must direct all praise and adoration to the only one deserving it – God himself. In fact, He enabled your actions. People can only put someone on a pedestal if they allow it. Further, promoting oneself above others has effect of leaving

others below you, essentially humbled and paying homage before a superior, the heart of the word “proskuneo.” This adoration isn’t only harmful to God’s church but it’s also sin; “Do not do it! ... Worship God”

“For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

All Scriptures are about God, from beginning to end, meaning they’re also about Jesus. Revelation’s contents spans scriptures and history because it reveals God’s plan for time and salvation found in the Lamb, all planned and carried out through the ages. Consider again John’s introduction to this book:

Revelation 1:1-2 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. (NIV, see also Revelation 1:9)

Revelation 12:17 portrays God’s entire church as “those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” We are a people that embrace God’s word from beginning to end, Old Testament and New. The message of this book, from Genesis to Revelation has one primary message “Worship God.”

Revelation 19:11 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. (NIV)

John returns to what he is seeing about God’s final judgment. This judgment has many names from John’s portrayals:

the winepress of God’s wrath (Revelation 14:19-20),  
Armageddon (Revelation 16:16),  
the Great Prostitute’s judgment (Revelation 17:1),  
Babylon the Great’s punishment (Revelation 17:5),  
the Great City’s destruction (Revelation 18:18).

Heaven stands open because this is an event the entire world can see; the spiritual realm, the eternal, now seen by a lost and rebellious world. And what specifically do they see? John describes Him as a rider on a white horse, using imagery of a conquering King. He gives the Rider’s name as Faithful and True. This returns us to earlier words:

Revelation 17:14 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." (NIV)

This conquering King, the Lord of lords and King of kings, is rightfully also called "Faithful and True." He's the one who called Himself "truth" in Revelation and John's gospel...

John 14:6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (NIV)

Revelation 3:7a "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. (NIV, also 6:10)

He's also clearly portrayed as the faithful son over God's house:

Hebrews 2:17-3:6a For this reason he [Jesus] 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. 3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. 3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5 Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. 6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house... (NIV)

Revelation 3:14 "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. (NIV, also 1:5)

This final battle is the ultimate just war with a guaranteed result ("With justice He judges and makes war"). John's description of the rider continues:

Revelation 19:12 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. (NIV)

With imagery of purifying fire associated with His eyes, no one is outside His gaze. This is the living “Word of God,” a name John now directly applies to Him. Jesus physically embodies what’s written in the Book of Hebrews:

Hebrews 4:12-13 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. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (NIV)

Revelation 19:12’s imagery of “many crowns” shows that He is the rightful ruler, victorious, King of kings, supreme in all areas.

That He has a name written on Him that no one knows but Himself sounds strange as John has previously provided two names. John declared his name to be Faithful and True (19:11) and the Word of God (19:13). So what is he getting at? Further, we know that His earthly name is Jesus and his titles include Christ (Messiah, the Anointed One) and Lord. All these names and titles John has used throughout Revelation. But now we’re called to think beyond the multitude of recognizable names and titles that Jesus legitimately wears:

Philippians 2:9-11 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. (NIV)

His is the name above every name that we can’t even begin to understand, let alone know. Mercifully, He has given use a name by which to call on Him, Jesus!

Jesus’ robe appears dipped in blood, again invoking imagery from Isaiah in association with treading a winepress:

Isaiah 63:2-3 Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress? 3 "I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. (NIV, consider also the prophecy concerning Judah, fulfilled in Jesus, Genesis 49:10-11).

Some have felt this reference to blood, in Revelation 19:13, is about Jesus shedding His blood. But context here is no longer the slain Lamb (to redeem a people) but that of a conquering King and Judge (delivering judgment).

“His name is the Word of God”

Writing these words, John would have thought of some of the opening words of his earlier gospel:

John 1:1, 14 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ... 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (NIV)

Jesus is the living word of God. This is the reason Jesus is the focus all of God’s written word, Genesis to Revelation. This final book, Revelation, makes clear it’s all about Jesus – His Revelation.

Revelation 19:14 The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. (NIV)

Continuing the imagery John began, with Jesus coming as a conquering king to do battle against the forces of the fallen world, like any commander He has His armies arrayed with Him. John uses majestic language for God’s army, the entirety of His church, the Holy City, riding on white horses. [Following His example, riding on white horses, we are imitators of God, even as He command us be now: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Ephesians 5:1-2.”] John describes all these saints as wearing fine linen, white and clean, the righteousness of God clothing them (Revelation 19:8).

As mentioned on the subject of Armageddon, take note this isn’t a typical army or a typical battle. Even as the text nowhere shows the forces of the earth actually fighting against God, merely preparing for it; here it shows saints ready for battle but never actually fighting. The world’s battle is a one-sided slaughter by God. There’s no need for saints to fight any longer; their Commander has this battle under control. He, alone, fights for the saints as they have entered His rest (see Hebrews 4:1-11; Zechariah 14:3), their battle is over.

Revelation 19:15 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. (NIV)

This final battle ends before it begins. The word of God, that sharp sword (Hebrews 4:12), alone is necessary to strike down the nations. The One with absolute right to rule shows He's now ruling. These events are direct fulfillment of a prophecy of David:

Psalms 2:7-12 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." 10 Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. 11 Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. 12 Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him. (NIV, see also Revelation 12:5)

We've already seen that Jesus has many names and titles, yet John here provides another:

Revelation 19:16 On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (NIV)

This isn't a new title; Paul earlier applied it to God, now John uses it for Jesus, clearly portraying that He is God.

1 Timothy 6:15b-16 God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. (NIV)

Because John repeated this title in the Book of Revelation it draws us back to his earlier words:

Revelation 17:14 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." (NIV)

The reason we know the battle's result is because Jesus is the Lord of lords and King of kings. There's no doubt the Lamb will overcome all who make war against Him. In Greek, "King of Kings" looks almost like "King king" except the second word uses a different form (meaning the

ending characters of the word are different), so too “Lord of Lords.” These repeated words give emphasis, similar to saying “the highest or greatest King” and “the highest or greatest Lord.” The Psalmist employed similar wording, speaking of God, in Psalms 136:

Psalms 136:2-3 Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever. 3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever. (NIV)

This two part title, in our passage of Revelation, appears written on His thigh, symbolic of power or strength; also on His robe, a symbol of regal majesty. These titles describe who He is and what He does. The beasts can wear all the blasphemous names they want (Revelation 13:1; 17:1), but Jesus bears the highest name. Period.

Revelation 19:17-18 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." (NIV)

As we are again looking at the buildup to battle, the wicked forces of the earth against God, the angel makes clear that God has decreed the result. In advance he lets the scavenging birds know there will only be dead bodies. Everyone in rebellion against God will die in their uprising against Him, whether rulers, generals, powerful, weak, free or slave. Even items used in support of the rebellious (their “horses”) will perish.

In these verses John takes the reader to a prophecy of Ezekiel, specifically Ezekiel 39:4, 17-20. Before looking at those particular verses, the context within Ezekiel is worth considering. Ezekiel chapter 37 begins with a vision of the valley of dry bones. God uses spectacular imagery showing His people, once dead, made alive at His command and by His will (Ezekiel 37:1-10). They then become God’s army (Ezekiel 37:10). [As an aside; end-times views often affect interpretation of this passage. Applied to future events, Dispensationalists need to interpret chapter 37 as focusing only on the physical nation of Israel. Just this week, I heard one expounding on the dry bones account, assuring everyone that this was merely a picture of the national Israel. In his view, Ezekiel speaks of Israel’s becoming a nation again in 1948 after not existing for centuries. This view ignores the greater picture and emphasis Ezekiel had on spiritual matters].

God, through Ezekiel, calls this army the “whole house of Israel (Ezekiel 37:11)” and “My people (Ezekiel 37:12).” [And unquestionably, contrary to the Dispensationalist, the “whole house of Israel,” includes both Jew and Gentile, the latter grafted in.] God’s spirit is with them (Ezekiel

37:14). He says they have come out of their graves, continuing the figurative illustration of bringing them spiritually to life, as shown in 37:1-10 (Ezekiel 37:12-13). God brings them into “the land of Israel (Ezekiel 37:12),” also called “your own land (Ezekiel 37:14).” This is the land Abraham longed for even while present in the physical land of Israel (see Hebrews 11:8-10).

The next verses proclaim that God has only one undivided people (Ezekiel 37:15-23). God will remove them from the nations (Ezekiel 37:21); they are all God’s people and He alone is their God (Ezekiel 37:23). The Messiah (“my servant David”) is king over all of them (Ezekiel 37:24) and they all have one Shepherd (Ezekiel 37:24). God gives the land to them forever, even as “David My servant” is their ruler forever. This is an everlasting or eternal covenant (Ezekiel 37:26). God’s sanctuary or dwelling place will be eternally among them forever (Ezekiel 37:26-28). Don’t miss that God’s fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:27 extends beyond the land of national Israel. Revelation 21:3 makes it clear that this prophecy includes greater Israel (Jew & Gentile) in God’s new heaven’s and earth. Revelation clarifies the former prophecy.

Giving more details of the end times, in Ezekiel 38 onward, he gives a prophecy against Gog of Magog and nations allied with them. He clearly stresses widespread people, saying “many peoples are with you (Ezekiel 38:6).” Ezekiel then references a great earthquake in Ezekiel 38:19 (consider Revelation 16:18 – the seventh bowl). Though the prophet’s wording sometimes appears specific to Israel, which some might construe as being only geographic Israel, many clues point to far larger scope. For example:

- the earthquake’s impact is not just a small geographic area: “all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence (Ezekiel 38:20)”
- God’s battle against Gog is “against Gog on all my mountains (Ezekiel 38:21, underlining mine for emphasis)”
- He stresses the battle of Gog has “many nations with him. (Ezekiel 38:22, compare Ezekiel 38:6)”
- God makes himself “known in the sight of many nations. (Ezekiel 38:23)”

While the land of Israel will experience these events, Revelation makes clear what Ezekiel hints at. The scope is the entire earth. God uses this final revelation to clarify allusions in Ezekiel. Interpreters must use later New Testament revelation to clarify the Old rather than forcing shadows, or limited Old Testament revelation, to constrain the greater understanding God later gives!

Understanding Gog, a name associated with the final battle, as a symbol of the ends of the earth, or the distant earthly nations, is important. Many have spent great time stressing that



Gog comes from the north (38:6, 15; 39:2), with much speculation over a specific entity (past and present, especially Dispensationalists for the latter). Take note that Israel has had no specific northern enemy in the past, nor can historians decisively identify as Gog, from historic records, any definite nation or region. This isn't a problem as specific identification wasn't Ezekiel's intent or that of the Book of Revelation. This entity's "north" identification is intriguing because of this passage:

Isaiah 14:12-14 "How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations! 13 "But you said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north. 14 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.' (NASU)

Isaiah's passage, which alludes to the great deceiver, identifies Satan's rebellious kingdom (which tries to rival God's) as located in "the recesses of the north." Revelation and Ezekiel showing the final battle against God comes from the north picture what John has already gone into detail to show elsewhere in this book. This is a Dragon inspired and Dragon energized battle. And yet, consider this is God ordained battle which will happen at His appointed time.

We now arrives at Ezekiel chapter 39, where God shows that He will bring Gog and all the nations from the north against Him and His people:

Ezekiel 39:2 I [God] will turn you [Gog] around and drag you along. I will bring you from the far north and send you against the mountains of Israel. (NIV)

The "great supper of God (Revelation 19:17-18)" is in view at the slaughter of these rebellious nations:

Ezekiel 39:4-5 On the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals. 5 You will fall in the open field [i.e. the place of battle], for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign Lord. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

Ezekiel 39:17-21 "Son of man, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: 'Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. 18 You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the

blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls — all of them fattened animals from Bashan. 19 At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat till you are gluttoned and drink blood till you are drunk. 20 At my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind,' declares the Sovereign Lord. 21 "I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations will see the punishment I inflict and the hand I lay upon them. (NIV)

Notice Gog isn't alone. Again all nations supporting Gog are in view at this Divine battle and slaughter. The text goes on to stress destruction of the land of Magog (the north) by "fire" plus "those who live in safety in the coastlands (Ezekiel 39:6)," meaning this destruction reaches everyone everywhere. Take note again of Ezekiel 39:21 stressing that God will display His glory through this "among the nations" and that "all the nations" will see this punishment "upon them."

Ezekiel 39 finishes by highlighting Jacob's return from captivity, a way of saying that God has gathered His people. He's taken them from many lands, where they once lived, into "their own land (Ezekiel 39:28)" with none left behind. This is the promised new heavens and earth, a land for all God's people forever.

Returning to Revelation 19, we can see what John has made clear through his allusion to Ezekiel and especially Gog.

Revelation 19:17-21 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." 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. (NIV, compare with Ezekiel 39:4, 17-20)

John is writing of the battle of Gog (and Magog). Before anyone protests and says there is no mention of Gog anywhere here – not until Revelation 20:7 – John's specific allusion to Ezekiel's passage on Gog shows that he is referencing the same event. This event is the "great supper of

God” and the battle of Gog and Magog, which he will specifically call it in a later (repeated) example. John provides a threefold illustration of God’s judgment on the Great City. These three examples provide detail on God’s trampling of the great winepress of His wrath that finished out the seventh trumpet of the seventh seal (Revelation 14:20):

#1. Chapter 15:1-16:21. The sevenfold bowls of wrath are the first illustration, mostly focused on the physical realm and those currently alive in the Great City (during God’s final judgment). This brings the reader to the so-called battle of Armageddon and the fall of the Great City (as directly mentioned in bowls six [16:16] and seven [16:19]).

#2. Chapter 17:1 through 19:21 restates this judgment and destruction of the Great City. Here a more spiritual view is the focus, now recapping the actions and inhabitants of the Great City through time leading to her judgment. It again brings the reader to the final battle (slaughter), the Lamb and His people versus the world’s rulers and their people.

#3. Chapter 20:1 through 22:5 is John’s final restating of this judgment and destruction of the Great City. He stresses how God delayed Satan from bringing his rebellion to a head, that final rebellious gathering against God which he brings about at the end. It again brings us to the final battle (slaughter) but goes further. Now he provides details on the spiritual judgment that will finish out this Day of Wrath – the final judgment on the Great City of all-time, including all her citizens and those who aided her.

In summary, the winepress of God’s wrath ends in one final battle, which is no battle at all. Rather this event is a slaughter, destruction by God (physically and spiritually) poured out on the Great City of old. There’s only one final event in view, this one battle; the battle of Armageddon (16:16), the war against the rider on the horse and his army (19:19), the battle of Gog and Magog (20:7). All this is an exact fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy against Gog of Magog (Ezekiel 38-39), made clear on its global scope by this final revelation given to John.

Before starting Revelation chapter 20, one verse warrants extra consideration:

Revelation 19:20 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. (NIV)

Notice this verse appears in a greater passage, John’s second example, mostly showing God’s physical destruction of the rebellious. While spiritual punishment remains in view for all who

are in rebellion against God, John mostly leaves those details for his final example (of 3) – coming up in Revelation 20. And yet, here in example two, he clearly points out the lake of fire is a destination for people (and demons), plus a place where evil ideas will go, forgotten forever.

The first beast and the second beast, also called the false prophet, are both worldly empires. Now God permanently ends these last two great and rebellious empires. They will have no replacements as God has forever destroyed all worldly empires. Coming up we see that God also forever does away with death and Hades (and all that encompasses) in the same way (Revelation 20:14).

Revelation 20:1-3 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. (NIV)

Understanding this passage's context as being John's third example, each ending with Armageddon, the final battle, the Battle of Gog and Magog, defines the thousand years. It compels us to interpret the thousand years (or Millennium) as being a time period before that final battle. Specifically, it's a time period synonymous with all or most of the Great Tribulation.

During this figurative thousand year period God has the Devil bound in the Abyss unable directly to lead and mislead. This is consistent with all John revealed earlier; the Dragon uses the Beasts to perform tasks during this time frame. These beasts serve the physically absent Dragon, exercising authority on his behalf (see Revelation 13:2, 11-12).

Why does Revelation represent the Devil as bound? John provides a visual picture of a subject Jesus earlier revealed to His disciples:

Matthew 12:25-29 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or again, how can

anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. (NIV, also Mark 3:24-27)

During the time God has Satan bound Jesus plunders his house, taking a people out of the Great City ruled by the Devil (and under forcibly restraint, Satan cannot stop Him).

God has other fallen angels imprisoned in the Abyss during this time, for various reasons (see Luke 8:31; Jude 6), some of whom He releases for a period for God's purposes (see Revelation 9). Further, He releases the one called the king of the Abyss (Revelation 9:11) at the end – again solely for God's purposes in this time of final judgment. Notice the Devil is literally the Angel of the Abyss as king over the worst demons. Even as the demons released from the Abyss during the first woe (5<sup>th</sup> trumpet) go forth to do Satan's bidding, so too the Devil resumes his primary goal as soon as God has him released. All these fallen creatures act by nature and have learned nothing during their imprisonment. As for Satan, he goes forth to mislead and leads the misled in his hell-bound rebellion against God. Satan's directly led rebellion is the final battle.

Revelation provides reason for why Satan has never taken his rebellion to its greatest extent. Of course, he failed miserably in his attack on Jesus during Jesus' first coming (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:8). Following that great loss, he's seemingly had centuries to build or execute his rebellion and yet this hasn't happened. Here we find out why; God has restrained Satan until the end.

Why is the number 1000 used? Because it represents a perfect multitude (represented 10 x 10 x 10). God has bound the devil a perfect multitude of years as determined solely by Him.

Consider the severity of wickedness during the beast's era (past, present and future). Revelation shows there is worse. At the end, God releases Satan himself personally to wage war. This final event is evil at its worst. This battle features the Great City's commander leading all the earth's nations and world's rulers in open rebellion against God. But we know the result; these wicked plans and actions are for nothing. At the power of Jesus' coming they all fall. The first beast and the second beast (false prophet), plus the man of lawlessness who arises in the end (2 Thessalonians 2:8), and the angel of the Abyss are all destroyed (Revelation 19:20; 20:10).

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## **The Devil is Bound?**

The name Satan, meaning “Adversary” in Hebrew, appears in New Testament Greek thirty-four times. Only one other name appears more often, the devil (“diabolos”) a further thirty-six times (its root meaning is “to accuse”). Other New Testament names and titles for Satan include:

- Beelzebul (Matthew 12:24, meaning “lord of the flies”),
- "tempter" (Matthew 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 3:5),
- "the enemy" (Matthew 13:39),
- Belial (2 Corinthians 6:15, meaning “worthlessness”),
- "power of darkness" (Luke 22:53),
- "prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2),
- "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4; cf. John 12:31),
- "adversary" (1 Peter 5:8),
- "deceiver" (Revelation 12:9),
- "dragon" (Revelation 12:9),
- "the ancient serpent" (Revelation 20:2; Isaiah 27:1),
- "father of lies" (John 8:44),
- "the accuser" (Revelation 12:10),
- Apollyon and Abaddon (Revelation 9:11, both meaning “destroyer”),
- “the thief” (John 10:10),
- "The evil one" (1 John 2:13-14; Matthew 13:38).

[None of these Biblical designators is a proper name, a personal name. This false god is unlike the one true God who reveals Himself personally. God uses His personal name, Yahweh, over 6500 times across over 5500 verses in the Old Testament. This far exceeds the roughly 4300 uses of the title God spanning about 3800 verses in the entire Bible! Beyond the title God in the New Testament (Theos, 1235 times), God highlights the name above every name (Philippians 2:9; Ephesians 1:20-23), Jesus, which appears 910 times. (He also uses the personal title Father a further 248 times in the New Testament, a title which highlights both Jesus’ affiliation and our adopted status). God’s people will call on his name forever. The Adversary’s name remains irrelevant and forever forgotten as he perishes in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:10)].

The question arises, based on Revelation 20; is the devil currently bound? In general, all Christendom accepts this passage teaches the then future binding of the devil. Disputes arise over when this binding happens and its length. Some possible views include:

- At Christ’s death and resurrection (Amillennial)
- At the temple’s destruction in A.D. 70 (Preterist)
- At a yet far future time, during a utopian literal 1000-year period (Dispensationalist)

- At an imprecise time briefly future to the Apostle John, at or before the Roman Empire's fragmentation (I hold the text best fits this position)

The primary passage under consideration is:

Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10 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. ... 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. (NIV)

This excerpt's overall context is important. It's the third illustrative example of an earlier passage – all three examples ending with Armageddon, the final battle, or the Battle of Gog and Magog. This context assures we interpret the thousand years (or Millennium) as a long period of time before that final battle. Specifically, this time period with Satan bound is synonymous with much of the Great Tribulation. For the record, a brief outline of John's placement of this passage in the Book of Revelation confirms this context:

### **The Big Picture (as part of the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet)**

Revelation 12:1 - 14:20. Here is a picture of history spanning from the great and wondrous sign to God's gathering of His church and the outpouring of His wrath in the great winepress.

### **3 Following Illustrations of the outpouring of God's Wrath (Each a recap with extra details)**

#1. Revelation 15:1-16:21. This first recap covers the bowls of wrath to Armageddon, the final battle; including the result for the saints.

#2. Revelation 17:1-19:21. This account backs up a bit further than the first example, giving perspective of the Prostitute in need of judgment. It includes the result for the saints and continues to the Great Supper of God, the final battle.

#3. Revelation 20:1-22:5. This final illustration backs up further than both earlier examples. It views the spiritual events leading to Battle of Gog and Magog, the final battle. It includes the final judgment and result for the Saints.

Notice the three synonymous names for the final battle in these three examples: Armageddon, the Great Supper of God, and the Battle of Gog and Magog.

During the period under consideration, in the third example, the text shows the Devil bound in the Abyss prevented from directly leading and misleading. The protest against this representing a present state for the devil is usually twofold:

- (1) Look how bad conditions are today; Satan must be loose and causing this.
- (2) Conditions will be far better when God has Satan bound.

Many then appeal to statements of Satan's actions in the New Testament to claim "it's impossible that Satan is currently bound." I propose that detailed examination of all passages about Satan's actions in the New Testament is fully in keeping with what John has here revealed. All such passages are fully compatible with understanding the Dragon's present bound state and yet have others exercising authority on his behalf. Specifically, Revelation makes clear the Dragon has assigned his authority to the final Beasts (empires), who serve him, to carry out his tasks and goals throughout this extended time frame (see Revelation 13:2, 11-12).

Again, all the Book of Revelation shows about the Devil consistently pictures or allows for God's binding of the Devil throughout most of history following Christ's time until just before the prophesied final battle. Indeed, all the New Testament similarly does so. (When interpreters fail to recognize John's third example as leading up to the final battle, here called Gog & Magog, as synonymous with Armageddon, they almost always have two "final" battles. This makes the term "final battle" irrelevant and obscures imagery of what this one final battle performs – the beast's and great prostitute's permanent destruction).

Satan's not the only demonic creature shown bound before the final judgment, or bound and later released. The Bible shows other fallen angels imprisoned in the Abyss during this time, for various reasons (see Luke 8:31; Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4). Of these, God later releases some, for a period, for His purposes (see Revelation 9). Further, the Devil's imprisonment provides a Biblical reason for why Satan has failed to take his long-ago-started rebellion to its greatest extent. Many centuries have passed since his miserable failure in Christ's day (Revelation 12:4-5; compare 1 Corinthians 2:8), with limited and mostly regional attacks following. John reveals



the reason: God has now restrained Satan from personal participation, during a broad period of time, until the end. Unquestionably, humanity's fallen hearts and minds (James 1:14-15) and the world's empires (beasts) and powers (Ephesians 6:12) are enough to continue his wickedness. Humanity's sin accounts for most of the rampant wickedness that continues during this time of the devil's imprisonment.

First, John associates the devil with the Abyss even during earlier trumpets, also spanning a broad view of history from the time of Jesus until the end...

(Fifth Trumpet) Revelation 9:11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. (NIV)

Though he shows the demonic beings that came forth onto the earth released from the Abyss, he only says they have a king over them, the angel of the Abyss. These demons go forth to do their king's will on his behalf. Nowhere does it say the king went with them or then led them directly. This passage is compatible with an understanding of Revelation chapter 20 which shows Satan bound throughout this period, later released for a time towards the end.

Second, if God has Satan now bound; it gives reason for why he doesn't directly lead the primary attack on believers during this broad time frame. Revelation clearly shows this wicked leadership given to others during this extensive period of time.

(Sixth Trumpet) Revelation 11:7 Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.

When first introduced, the beast (an empire) comes up from the Abyss. This shows the foundational ideas of this empire come from the Abyss, namely the king of the Abyss bound there. Though personally bound, he gives his authority to the beasts to do his will on his behalf. The devil – while ruler of the earth's kingdoms – is no longer directly manipulating them; it is through proxies that he now does so. His deputations include the first beast...

Revelation 13:4-7 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?" 5 The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. 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. (NIV)

And the second beast...

Revelation 13:12a He [the second beast, or false prophet] exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf (NIV)

An earlier passage highlights the same:

Revelation 13:2b The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. (NIV)

This assigned authority and control of Satan's throne, as a regent, is in keeping with this book's portrayal of the Abyss bound Dragon. Since Satan could not directly exercise his authority, nor personally hold his earthly throne, as God divinely prevented him from doing, he assigned all this to the beasts to act in his stead. (Consider Revelation 2:13 with Revelation 13:2b).

When did God have the devil bound? The text shows that it's a long period (the symbolism of the number 1000, representing a perfect multitude, 10 x 10 x 10). God binds the devil for a perfect multitude of years as determined by Him. John's parallel examples infer this period coincides with much of the tribulation. This tribulation period spans from the time of Christ until His harvesting of His church; also called time, times, and half a time, 1260 days, and 42 months. Nothing specific in the text says the figurative thousand years is all this time frame, yet the passages imply most of it.

Details restrict the beginning of the time frame, note the Devil appears personally active on earth following God having him cast out of heaven:

Revelation 12:9 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.

The following verses (12:10-13:2) are about the devil's personal attack on Christ and the beginning of his warfare on all believers, shown to be leading up to his giving up his authority to the beasts. This implies Satan was fully and directly active in his attack on Jesus, but also for at least a short period during the beginning of the early church. Understanding the first beast of Revelation to be the last kingdom of Daniel's earlier vision, this beast is an empire arising out of the fragmented ruins of the Roman Empire. This also implies the devil remained personally active for a while, perhaps until the Roman Empire began to fragment. He, personally, may have been the direct source of inspiration leading many early Roman rulers voraciously and viciously to persecute the early church. At some point God, in His wisdom, determined it was time to limit the devil's direct actions. God restrained Satan not necessarily to lessen or weaken his overall impact on this world; rather it slowed down Satan's plans. Remember, the devil and his demons are not omnipresent. Limiting the devil to only one location, a prison where he

cannot personally attend to his business, impacts the scope and speed of what he can perform through proxies.

Some mock the view that God has the Devil bound by saying: “If Satan has already been bound, it must be a really long chain!” This disparaging remark does nothing to address what the text itself reveals. It shows a woefully inadequate view of what Satan can still carry out through appointed authority. Speculating over “why” doesn’t help. Some ask why God would allow the devil to assign his authority while confined. They should also ask a related question. Why does God confine then release the Devil later? The same unquestionable answer applies to both: obviously this is part of God’s plan and for His glory alone.

#### **Definition**

**Sphragizo** — A Greek word (pronounced ‘sfra-gee-zo’) meaning to set a mark on something (think seal ring). The mark represents the authority behind the action.

The words used in the text, “bound,” “locked (or ‘closed’ or ‘shut’),” and “sealed,” do not necessarily prevent communications. It’s best to picture the word “bound” as someone tied up with the previously mentioned chain, meaning he is going nowhere. “Locked” or “closed” or “shut” communicate the same, meaning God has prevented Satan from leaving the Abyss. The third and final word, of this threefold example, unfortunately provides a mistaken image because of common English use of this word. We think of something sealed as though glued or cemented shut. Our modern definition has nothing to do with ancient word use. The Greek word “sphragizo” means to set a mark on something (consider the idea behind a seal ring). It represents the authority preventing Satan from leaving. Together this merely states God has physically restrained Satan to one location and he’s kept there by the authority and power of God. The text clearly states the Devil was “cast” or “thrown,” confirming he’s not in the Abyss by personal choice. Nothing in Scriptures shows spiritual beings, such as angels or demons, cannot come and go from spiritual realms. This includes the Abyss (or edge of the Abyss), a place closely associated with the earth and creation, though supernatural. The Bible only shows God has now permanently banned Satan and his followers from one location; God’s throne room (the present heaven). If demons can approach the Abyss, though restricted (or not wanting) to enter, possibility exists for periodic communication between this “king of the abyss” and his demonic troops still free on the earth. Regardless, God has unquestionably bound Satan himself leaving him personally unable to attend to his evil business.

John earlier showed that Jesus had every right to cast out the “ruler of this world.” He recorded words Jesus spoke immediately before His impending death and directly following God the Father’s statement that He would glorify His name.

John 12:30-31 Jesus answered and said, "This voice has not come for My sake, but for your sakes. 31 Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. (NASU, see also John 14:30; 16:11)

It was at Jesus' death and resurrection that Jesus triumphed over sin and death, including all those spiritual forces serving sin and death:

Colossians 2:15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (NIV, see also 1 John 3:8-10)

Now disarmed, these powers, including Satan himself, are at God's mercy to when He will dispose of them in judgment and to how much freedom he allows them before that (see also Ephesians 1:21). His binding of Satan, as shown in the Book of Revelation is a great testimony and demonstration to all other demonic beings that they live and act on borrowed time. Jesus was clearly the one who plundered the strong man's (Satan's) house. The devil, to the time of Christ, thought he alone had right to rule this world and that he had a firm hold on it (Matthew 4:8; Luke 4:5-7).

Matthew 12:25-29 Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. 26 If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? 27 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. 28 But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 29 "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. (NIV, also Mark 3:24-27, cf. Luke 11:17-22)

Having found himself personally defeated, and afterwards bound, Satan has seen his kingdom plundered by Jesus, who came to redeem a people taken out of the devil-ruled Great City. The Devil's proxies continue to rule the City in his stead, and do their worst in his name, but they cannot stop Jesus who has physically bound and detained their leader.

Some protest the earliest Revelation references to Satan are him personally in action. For example:

Revelation 2:8-10a "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. (NIV)

John sets up the context of verse ten in verse 9. It needn't be the devil directly imprisoning to receive attribution as the cause, those in his service can be later responsible. The text's focus was on the "synagogue of Satan," implying they're the ones putting believers in prison, following the wishes of their master, Satan. In this way, we understand references to the devil as being head over those in his employ; his servants granted a degree of his authority.

We commonly do this in our day and throughout history. When someone said to beware of Osama Bin Laden or even King George (during the American Revolution), they use the chief authority as a euphemism or representative for all who would be in his service. Without question, this is the author's intent in many devil-mentioning Scripture passages. Examples include the Bible warnings to be on guard against the devil's schemes (Ephesians 6:1) or his flaming arrows (Ephesians 6:16). Also calls to resist him (1 Peter 5:9) have more than this chief demon in view. Remember, Satan's limited by time and space, even when he was free to roam this world. He's limited to plaguing one individual at a time. These example passages have a broader view, using reference to the chief enemy to warn us to watch out for the actions of all his minions. Consider the entire passage in 1 Peter 5:8...

1 Peter 5:8-10 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. (NIV)

Peter warns resist all the devil's forces, each like this roaring lion and wanting to devour. We resist all in the devil's service. Even the Book of Revelation shows the beasts, who received Satan's authority, doing the devouring. We stand firm and resist them even as we would do the same if Satan himself were present.

The greater Revelation picture, of a bound Devil with assigned authority, is compatible with statements such as these:

Matthew 6:13 [In the Lord's Prayer:] And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.' (NIV)

1 John 5:18-19 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. (NIV)

Acts 26:17b-18 I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' (NIV)

James 4:7 Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

1 John 2:12-14 I write to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you have known him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one. (NIV)

This world's no less under the evil one's control or power, whether he acts directly or has given someone else authority to act in his stead. The colonial rulers over the American states, before Independence from England, are a great example. These local or proxy rulers governed in the king's name and power (who wasn't physically present or readily available).

When John tells us the "the evil one cannot harm" any believer, this remains true whether the Devil attacks directly or through appointed power. Similarly, to say that we have overcome the evil one does not mean only the Devil himself, but also the entire system he fathered and controls. Jesus' prayer to protect His church from the evil one extends to all the means, methods, personalities and proxies employed by this evil one:

John 17:15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. (NIV)

1 John 5:18-19 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. (NIV)

2 Thessalonians 3:2-3 And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. (NIV)

We need reminder of these words of Paul:

2 Corinthians 2:11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes. (NIV)

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (NIV)

When the Book of Revelation clearly reveals one of the Devil's schemes gives authority to the beasts, we must not minimize or ignore this truth. It's dangerous if we focus only on the head and ignore the attacks which come from others in his service. (And it doesn't matter if this assigning authority was the devil's first choice of scheme or a resorted to scheme prompted by God binding him). God provided armor to His church enabling us to stand against all the devil throws at us, directly or indirectly (by proxy).

Can writers legitimately claim Satan is ruler of the kingdom of the air, at work among the disobedient, or taking captives, when not physically present? Consider a few verses:

Ephesians 2:1-2 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. (NIV)

2 Corinthians 4:4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:25-26 Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will. (NIV)

The answer to my previous question is unquestionably yes. Satan, a limited finite being, works in all who are disobedient through the efforts of his entire kingdom. Revelation's first beast and second beast (false prophet) are great examples of this. They wield wealth, power, and deceiving ideas to blind the minds of unbelievers (all at the bidding and under the authority of the one they follow). This wicked spirit is at work in every disobedient person, whether he's immediately present or not. For example: Osama Bin Laden was responsible for the Twin Towers in New York whether immediately present or not and he was at work, even though it was others carrying out his wicked schemes.

It's possible Satan's directly in view in some passages naming him in the New Testament, because God hadn't yet bound the devil. While possible, it's not necessary. For example:

1 Thessalonians 2:18 For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, did, again and again — but Satan stopped us (NIV)

2 Corinthians 12:7 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. (NIV)

Not knowing precisely when God bound Satan (perhaps decades into the Roman Empire after the time of the apostles), Satan might have directly had his focus on Paul. Regardless, this statement's no less true if Satan used a demon or a man to perform this task. Similarly, whether the great Liar himself gave the order or used a proxy. This equivalency is true of Ananias' episode:

Acts 5:3 Then Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? (NIV)

Even before Jesus' death, unquestionably before God bound Satan, we find references that use Satan as a titular head:

Matthew 16:21-23 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. 22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (NIV, also Mark 8:33)

In this account, Jesus ascribes the deeds and thoughts of Peter to Satan, yet we needn't view Satan literally and personally present (see also Matthew 5:37). In like manner, it wasn't necessary for Paul to have knowledge of Satan's physically location, and bodily turn people over to him, for these other passages to be true:

1 Corinthians 5:1-5 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. 2 And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 3 Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. 4 When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, 5 hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. (NIV)

1 Timothy 1:20 Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. (NIV)

Satan doesn't personally tempt every couple for their lack of self-control:



1 Corinthians 7:2-5 But since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. 3 The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. 4 The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. (NIV)

Ephesians 4:25-27 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. 26 "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 and do not give the devil a foothold.

Turning a person over to the fallen world (and the world's ideas and powers, the Great City's themes) is identical with handing someone over to Satan. Similarly the world's thoughts and physical enticements are Satan's means for tempting believing couples, or even angry individuals, whether the Evil One is directly present or not. This is worldly system and pleasures that snatch away the seed of the Word of God, in Satan's name, in Jesus' parable:

Mark 4:13-15 Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? 14 The farmer sows the word. 15 Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. (NIV, also Matthew 13:18-19)

Few who turn from God's truth do so believing that they are directly following Satan, but they need not openly follow him to be follower of Him. Follow a beast, or find fascination in the Great Prostitute, and it's still following Satan (and it legitimately brands you a "child of the devil").

1 Timothy 5:15 Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.

Acts 13:9-10 Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, 10 "You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? (NIV)

Perhaps the greatest masquerade the Devil uses, in these final days, is to wrap himself in the beasts' façade. This tactic arrays Satan in seeming power, might, wealth, and a plethora of "modern" ideas. And yet, people often focus on him as the only real enemy, not recognizing his influence in the rest of his kingdom. Revelation shows the world readily accepts him in this

form. Their acceptance of the beasts prepares the world for following Satan at the final battle's gathering once he is again finally personally present (God having released him from the Abyss).

2 Corinthians 11:4 And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.  
(NIV)

On an ending note: Others mock the idea of the present being part of Revelation's figurative 1000-year period, what they call the Millennium, by saying "If this is the millennium, I want a refund!" Their disillusionment presumes a Millennium with features nowhere in view in the only passage of Scriptures that speaks directly about this time period (and, I would add, nowhere in the overlapping passages prior either). They claim a future utopian era possible only when God binds Satan. This begs a great question: Why would the world's wickedness decrease if still filled with fallen humanity and other demonic beings? Aren't these able to perpetuate and mimic their bound leader's wickedness? Regardless of laws, there would never be a thousand years of peace. Murderous thoughts and lies aren't restrained by laws or even a perfect lawmaker, apart from the lawmaker binding every lawbreaker like their master.

For a world at peace and in perfect harmony, lion with lamb, God must remove sin and cancel its effects. This happens only with final destruction of Satan, the demons, the beasts and the Great Prostitute. Imagery of the harmony applies to the New Heaven and Earth. When you invent a Millennium based on mistaken features and misapplied passages, there's no wonder they can't recognize this 1000-year period in the present.

Praise God that He (in His mercy) has bound Satan for a time. Circumstances could be far worse – and will be when God finally releases Satan at the end. We're assured this release is only for a short time:

Revelation 20:7-10 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. (NIV, see also Matthew 25:41; Hebrews 1:13; 10:12-13)

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Take note Satan's binding came by an angel, a servant and messenger of God, rather than directly by God himself (Revelation 20:1-3). This in no way minimizes the truth that it's God doing it; rather it shows how puny the Devil is in comparison to God. Image how the Devil

would feel with this second-hand binding. It mocks the Devil, who views himself so grandly, with a seemingly insignificant angel having power over him.

### **Definition**

Krateo – A Greek word meaning to seize (often forcibly), to take hold of, to hold fast, to grasp. When used about a person or angel, its meaning includes having power or strength over them.

The angel “seized (Greek: krateo)” the devil, which is to have power or strength over him. God gives strength as necessary to any of His creation (especially His servants), including His holy angels. John makes a fourfold reference to Satan in this passage (likely using numerical symbolism of four to stress his tie to the earth and creation, as a fallen created being), calling him:

- Dragon (Dangerous and Brutal)
- Serpent (Craftiness and Subtleness; a Deceiver)
- Devil (Slanderer [the meaning of the word])
- Satan (Adversary [the meaning of the word])

Why must God set the devil free for a short time (Revelation 20:3)? Unquestionably it is for God’s purposes and His glory alone. In this God ordained final rebellion, He allows evil to be at its worst so their judgment and fail is recognizably total and final. God proves the best of the worst can never triumph over Him.

The devil’s imprisonment for a time and then, on his release, immediately going back to what he did before shows that Satan is incorrigible. When punished he doesn’t repent, he merely plots retaliation.

What I discovered about these 1000 years is not a premillennial view. I previously leaned towards premillennialism through casual reading of these passages. I am persuaded this figurative understanding, with a bound devil, is what the text teaches. Though I have claimed to hold to a historic pre-mill position in the past, nominally on grounds of Scriptures, I must now abandon that position. I formerly held a pre-mill position mostly because mine was a cursory reading of the text, one isolating this passage from the book’s whole. This artificial isolation is a primary reason that has led modern Dispensationalists to their pre-mill position and even some of the early church fathers.

In fairness, many early church writers held to a rudimentary historic pre-millennial understanding of these verses.

“... I and many others are of this opinion (having listed some premillennial views), and we believe absolutely that this will happen. But still, I signified to you that there are many Christians of pure and pious faith who do not share this (premillennial) belief.”  
(Justin Martyr, lived 100-165 AD, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, 138a)

Notice the early church didn't uniformly hold to premillennial views – Justin was clear that many true Christians held otherwise even in his day. To understand why some arrived at this premillennial position led me to examine the context of their letters, or volumes, and overall writings. A few observations are in order. These early writers, as they should, believed all passages were literal unless the context clearly showed, or other Scriptures showed, the passage was figurative or allegorical. This wasn't a stated rule, rather a practice easily witnessed in their writings. For many centuries the church didn't develop (or write down) a systematic theology or defined rules of interpretation – though practice shows common understanding in the church.

Those that held to a premillennial view in the early church did so because they weren't trying to deal with Revelation as a whole. They rarely, if ever, looked at the broad passages and themes spanning many chapters. They acted rather like modern dispensationalists in that they looked for short passages or simple themes. Short and simple passage division works well in most of Scriptures but woefully distort apocalyptic literature such as the Book of Revelation (and even Daniel and some of the other prophets focused on end times). I say “rather like dispensationalists,” because nowhere did the early church writers come up with the elaborate divisions and contrived connections that these modern dispensationalists claim. A simple summary of the earliest pre-mill father's writings on this subject go like this: “John said that Jesus would return and fight a battle against evil and usher in a kingdom that would last a long period of time.” Many of these early church fathers understood some numbers were symbolic and knew that some parts of Revelation were allegorical. They used these figurative understandings in their other works. Their need to focus on other key Scripture teachings kept them from searching out the great unity in Revelation needed to set up the greater context. Few ever wrote on the entire book of Revelation. Their brevity in writing on the 1000 years, or binding of the devil, and related end-times themes, testifies to their lack of diligence on Revelation.

Later writers started to take longer looks at Revelation and they began to see more of the book was allegorical or representative, many identifying some of the greater themes in the book.

Unfortunately, around 500 after John, a new trend arose. These interpreters began to take almost every word of Revelation and make them symbolic. For example; “heaven” became a word representing the church. Interpretation went downhill from there. Circumstances in the church, decrees by popes, errors built on earlier errors and even national events influenced much that was to come. Modern dispensationalists, though rejecting much these medieval writers taught, follow their example by embracing a theology often driven by world events.

Many holding the so-called Amillennial position, by the early Middle Ages, did so based on dubious (unstudied) grounds. Since later early church fathers had defamed the Chiliastic (pre-mil) position, they readily rejected it out-of-hand. Their rejection often admitted that many early fathers held to a literal millennial reign. They embraced amillennialism by default mostly because it wasn't Chiliasm. Chiliasm is a belief there will be a time physical paradise on earth in which Christ will reign for 1000 years before the final judgment and future eternal state (the new heavens and earth). Another name for Chiliasm (kil-ee-az-um) is Millennialism. The name comes from a Greek term “chiliasmos”, “chili (kil-ee)” meaning “1000.” Millennium comes from the Latin “mille (1000)” + “annus (year).”

A few diligent scholars finally undertook Revelation. Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 A.D.) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430 A.D.), both prolific writers and researchers, understood a figurative 1000 years by the text's context. Both held this position on basis of study versus assuming a default position of the church, as became common in following centuries.

Some claim many of the earliest writers as being in the chiliasm camp, as if they wrote works clearly premillennialist. Similarly they assume the early date of writing automatically provides better insight into the Book of Revelation. Early church writings are informative, because these provide insight into what they believed and practiced. But these multitude of writings also show a wide range of opinions on secondary issues, end times being one. Remember the early church writers weren't authors of Scriptures and their works could and did have errors. These father's remarks on Revelation (often brief) remain *their* interpretation. The need to weigh private interpretation against the text, in context, and all Scriptures hasn't changed. Let me provide a few examples:

First is the Epistle (Letter) of Barnabas. Researchers believe this work is from the late first century (perhaps somewhere between 79 and 100 A.D.), written by someone named Barnabas, though not the Barnabas of Scriptures. Premillennialists claim him as a Chiliast because he speculated the entirety of history would finish in six days (using each day to represent 1000):

“Attend, my children, to the meaning of this expression, “He finished in six days.” This implies that the Lord will finish all things in six thousand years, for a day is with Him a thousand years. Therefore, my children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, all things will be finished. “And He rested on the seventh day,” This means: when His Son, coming again, shall destroy the time of the wicked man, and judge the ungodly, and change the sun, and the moon, and the stars, then shall He truly rest on the seventh day.”

Shortly afterward, this Barnabas calls the eternal state, the eighth day:

I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world.

More than 6000 years have passed since creation (even by Bishop Ussher’s conservative 4004 B.C. estimate). Barnabas’ theory over days of creation equaling 1000-year literal periods of history, with the Millennium being the sixth, is time-proven false.

Second is Victorinus of Petovium. He wrote the first known (and brief) commentary on the Book of Revelation in the western church dating to the middle or late 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Victorinus wrote from a Chiliast perspective holding there would be a 1000-year kingdom after the (first) last battle with a second rebellion following a 1000-year reign of peace and beauty.

Everyone should know the “scarlet devil” and all of his rebellious angels are shut up in the Tartarus of Gehenna at the Lord’s coming, and after one thousand years they are released...

Victorinus has all demons bound too, an event nowhere in the text, giving his solution for why circumstances would be far better during this Millennial period. He reduces the 144,000 to only Jews saved during this time “by the preaching of Elijah,” specifically Jews remaining “chaste not only in body but also in speech.” Note that his 1000 years immediately followed the return of Jesus, making this a post-tribulation return of Jesus. But Victorinus further claims the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, spoken of later in Revelation, would be present during this Millennium. He makes the final beautiful city available at his first resurrection.

Pre-Millennialists often cite, or claim, these writers, carefully accepting only one or two parts of their teaching. They discard the other surrounding ideas (as if having no bearing on how that writer arrived at his interpretation).

Papias of Heirapolis is my third example. Eusebius wrote about him hundreds of years after Papias life from 70-163. Eusebius critically notes Papias held “there will be a millennium after

the resurrection from the dead, when the personal reign of Christ will be established on earth.” Premillennialists often cite Papias because Eusebius recorded him having asked questions of those who had known the Apostles (including John, Peter, James and Matthew). Yet, because we don’t have direct basis for his millennial views we have no way to know how he arrived at his conclusion to this specific matter. Surviving writings also record Papias as having cited oral quotations said to come from Jesus, which don’t appear in Scriptures. Most Bible teachers would similarly view these with skepticism too.

Fourth is Justin Martyr who lived about 110-165. He clearly held to, and taught, a literal 1000-year millennia with prior return of Christ:

“But I and others, who are right-minded Christians on all points, are assured that there will be a resurrection of the dead, and a thousand years in Jerusalem, which will then be built, adorned, and enlarged as the prophets Ezekiel and Isaiah and others declare” (Chapter 80, Dialogue with Trypho [the Jew]).

Earlier, Martyr noted many disagreed with this view. He provides his reasons for holding to it in chapter 81. His primary proof was his interpretation of the Book of Isaiah:

“For Isaiah said this concerning this space of a thousand years: 'For there shall be the new heaven and the new earth, and the former shall not be remembered, or come into their heart...’”

He then cites other Old Testament passages, including that of the Lion and Lamb coexisting, before turning Adam’s lifespan into an allegory. His defense and logic went like this:

- #1. God said that Adam would die on the “day” he ate of the forbidden fruit (Genesis 2:17)
- #2. Since Adam lived until 930 years before he died (Genesis 5:5), and this rounds to 1000, a day is a thousand years.
- #3. He then draws on an unrelated verse: “We have perceived, moreover, that the expression, 'The day of the Lord is as a thousand years,' is connected with this subject.”
- #4. Since Justin Martyr believed the day of the Lord had to be 1000 years, he then applied his created time-structure to John’s words in Revelation chapter 20 for a Millennium.

Though Premillennialists claim Justin Martyr as early evidence of Chiliasm, they almost universally reject his method for interpreting Scriptures, including the Isaiah's New Heavens and Earth being the Millennium.

Ending our examples, know that supporters claim still others as supporting Premillennialism in the early church including Irenaeus (lived from about 120-202). The norm for these early writers is complete lack of Scriptural evidence, mostly citing others who held a common view. Those few citing Scriptures used methods and interpretation that we disagree with, violating standard rules of interpretation. Some merely looked at a narrow slice of Revelation (those few verses in Revelation 20) and then grasped at some Old Testament passages for possible support. They never try to find a comprehensive and cohesive view of the Book of Revelation. We can't fault them for trying to hold literally to the text of Revelation, which is a primary rule of interpretation. But we must set aside literal if the greater context shows allegorical or figurative or symbolic use. I find it interesting that many were willing to turn their supporting passages into allegory while leaving the text in Revelation literal. This is odd especially when Revelation, by context, is the passage deserving figurative treatment.

Revelation 20:4-6 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. (NIV)

During the time God has the devil bound, many events are happening in the spiritual realm.

#1. God seats believers with Christ in heaven (on thrones) with authority to judge (see Revelation 5:10). Their involvement in the earth's judgment implies they have view of what's happening here on earth (also implied by the earlier cry, in Revelation 6:10, "how long?").

Consider the opening clause with John seeing thrones on which sat all granted authority to judge. He quickly revisits what he saw to provide emphasis (a threefold statement) that this group includes those:

(a) Martyred for Christ and the Word of God



- (b) Who had not worshiped the beast or his image
- (c) Who hadn't received the mark of the beast

Our reigning with Christ is a fulfillment of Paul's words to Timothy:

2 Timothy 2:11-13 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. (NIV)

The statement "they came to life (Revelation 20:4)" is an affirmation that all who are physical dead, yet in Christ, are alive with Him even now (see 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8; Philippians 1:20-24).

Revelation 20:5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. (NASU)

Beyond those found in Christ and alive with Him now, the rest of the dead remain dead unaffected by the "first resurrection." It's called the first resurrection because it looks forward to a second, God's resurrection of our bodies and completion of our salvation (body, soul and spirit).

Some view this first resurrection as God's act of making us alive at salvation. This internal resurrection would have believers still here on earth as part of this first resurrection (plus in heaven). I hold the context better represents a first resurrection following physical death for believers. (Every person John references are past tense about their life on earth and the only setting under consideration is heaven).

Consider then when a person becomes a believer God makes their spirit alive again. Following their death, at this first resurrection, God makes their soul (mind, will and emotions) alive again (completing His renewing of their mind). Finally, at the second resurrection He makes their body alive again. In this, He forever perfects and glorifies the three-part human (spirit, soul and body).

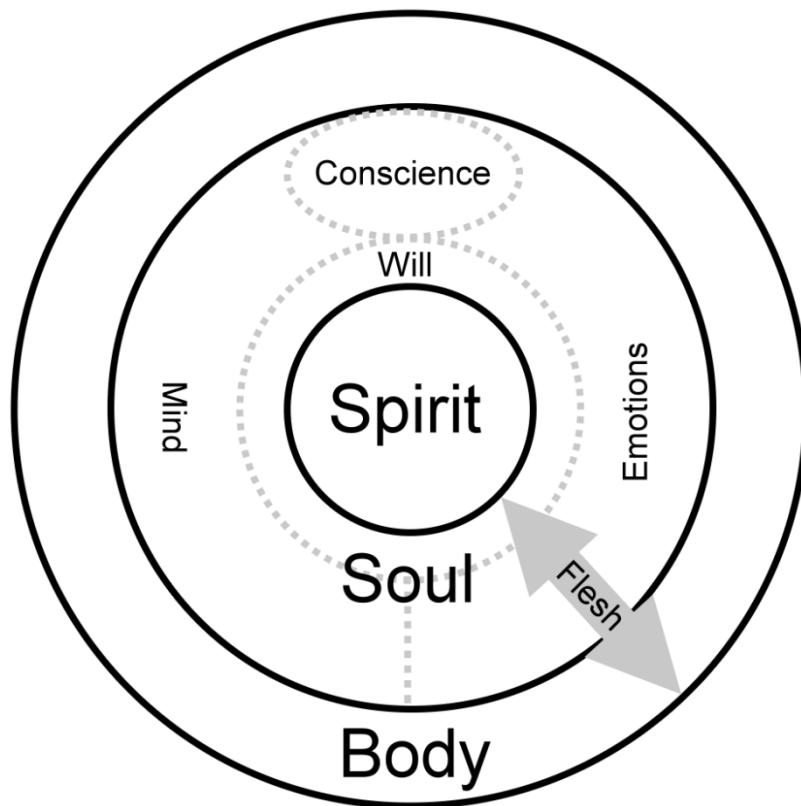
Consider God's progressive revelation on this subject. In the Old Testament most writers seemingly have only a physical resurrection in view (for example Job 19:26; Isaiah 26:19; Daniel 12:2; Psalms 17:15, 139:18). Throughout the New Testament resurrection details expand to include the idea of our soul being alive with Christ. This follows the death of our physical bodies before His resurrection of these bodies (alluded to in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8; Philippians

1:23-24). Only here in Revelation (at the end) does God makes it clear this happens through two resurrections.

As for the lost, both Testaments make clear there is a brief time when they will return to physical life, solely for judgment and receiving their just condemnation (see Daniel 12:2 and John 5:28-29). Again, we do not consider the lost “alive” or “resurrected to life” while awaiting this judgment following death. Their souls remain corrupted by sin – dead. There is no first resurrection for the lost.

Revelation 20:6a Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power (NASU)

After learning of two resurrections (for the saved), the text assures believers the second death has no power over them. Two deaths only apply to the lost. Yes, all people (saved and unsaved) experience the first death, dying bodily (Hebrews 9:27). Yet a far worse spiritual death awaits only the lost. Who has God blessed and made holy? Every believer (see Romans 4:7-8; Hebrews 13:12) – all who have a part in the first resurrection!



For comparison, consider the contrasting state of believers and the lost here in Revelation:

## Two Resurrections

	Lost	Saved
Earth	Spiritually Dead (Spirit)	Spiritually Alive, New Creation (Spirit)
	Flesh Corrupted/Dying (Body & Soul)	Mind/Will/Emotions/Conscience Being Renewed Yet Dying (Soul)
		Physical Dying (Body)
First Death (Body & Soul)		
After	(Soul Remains Dead)	First Resurrection (Soul)
	Final Resurrection (Body)	Second Resurrection (Body)
	Second Death (Body, Soul, Spirit)	Eternal Life (Body, Soul, Spirit)

In summary, in great contrast, the saints rise twice (soul and body) versus the lost that die twice (soul and body). The text assumes the condition of their spirit; the lost remaining spiritually dead; saints made alive as new creations and remaining so.

	Lost		Saved	
Earth	Spiritually Dead	(Spirit) Eph 2:1,5; Rev 3:1	Spiritual Re-Creation (Sealed of God, Seated in Christ in heavenly realms)	(Spirit) John 5:21; Rev 7:3; Ezek 36:26; 2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:10; Eph 1:13- 14, 2:6
	Dead Thoughts / Corrupted Conscience (Living for Self)	(Soul) Col 1:21; Rom 8:7-8; Eph 4:17- 19; Titus 1:15,3:3; 1 Tim 4:2	Mind Being Renewed / Conscience Cleansed (Living for/in Christ)	(Soul) Rom 12:2,13:14; Gal 2:20; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:10; Heb 9:14; 2 Cor 4:16; 1 John 3:3
	Body Dying (or Killed)	(Body) Heb 9:27; John 8:21; Job 14:5; Ps 89:48; Rom 5:12	Body Dying (or Killed)	(Body) Rev 2:10,12:11, 13:9-10; Heb 9:27; Job 30:23
	First Death	(Body & Soul)	First Death	(Body & Soul)
After			First Resurrection	(Soul) <i>Rev 20:4-5</i>

Torment Awaiting Judgment	(Spirit & Soul) Luke 16:22-23,28;	Reign with Christ (Comforted)	(Spirit & Soul) <i>Rev 20:4-5</i> ; Phil 1:23-24; Luke 16:25; 2 Cor 5:8; Luke 23:43; Rev 6:10-11,14:13
Only (Final) Resurrection	(Body) <i>Rev 20:5,11-13</i> ; Daniel 12:2	Second (Final) Resurrection	(Body) 1 Thess 4:16-17; 1 Cor 15:12-18, 51-52; Rev 14:14-16; Job 19:26; Dan 12:2
Second Death (Eternal Torment)	(Body/Soul/Spirit) Rev 14:9-10; Matt 10:28, 13:40-42; <i>Rev 20:6,14</i>	Continuing Life (Eternal Rest)	(Body/Soul/Spirit) Rev 14:13; 1 Thess 5:23-24

**Words used by the Apostle John about the resurrection:**

**Definition**

Anastasis (“an-as-tas-is”) – A Greek word meaning “standing up again,” “resurrection.”

**Definition**

Histemi (“his-tay-me”) – A Greek word meaning “standing up.”

**Definition**

Zoe (“zo-ay”) – A Greek word meaning “life.”

**Definition**

Krisis (“kree-sis”) – A Greek word meaning “judgment given” or a “sentence pronounced.”

**Definition**

Krino (“kree-no”) – A Greek word meaning “judged” or “condemned.”

John 5:28-29 "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice 29 and come out — those who have done good will rise [anastasis] to live [zoe], and those who have done evil will rise [anastasis] to be condemned [krisis]. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Compare John’s choice of wording in the following Revelation passages with his earlier writing in John 5:28-29:

Revelation 20:4b-6a They came to life [zoe] and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life [translator inserted zoe] until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection [anastasis]. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection [anastasis]. (NIV, square parenthesis and underlining for clarification and emphasis)

Revelation 20:11-15 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 [histemi] 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 [krino] 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. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

Another translation of key verses in this passage (removing some translator supplied words and noting another):

Revelation 20:4c-5 And they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead *did* not (until the thousand years were completed). This is the first resurrection. (Mine)

### **Three alternate views on this two-fold resurrection:**

Of these three views, the second best fits the context. I find no textual merit in the first view at all. The third view has an appearance of merit, rooted in scriptural ideas, yet it fails to align with the John's primary themes leading to this point.

#### Two Physical Resurrections Separated Chronologically

Some (especially Dispensationalists) hold the first resurrection is all believers up to that time. Others hold it's only those martyred, the balance those resurrected at a general resurrection (which includes the lost) after the 1000 years.

Context does not allow for this to be two separate physical resurrections. Consider the priority and emphasis of the setting and event outline:

A two-part resurrection or harvest of the earth; God removing His people, followed by the lost for destruction.

#1. The setting (for those who "came to life [first resurrection]") is the throne room of heaven, where God has set thrones for believers (Revelation 20:4a).

#2. In the examples given of those who sat on these thrones, John saw "souls," not resurrected bodies (Revelation 20:4b, compare Revelation 6:9)

#3. All have "come to life" while yet referenced as "souls" (Revelation 20:4c). This clearly points to an intermediate state, still awaiting their bodies' resurrection and completion of their glorification (Romans 8:18).

#4. When the thousand years are over, the final judgment to life or death is in view. Many related passages fix this as the final resurrection of our bodies (Revelation 20:11-15, compare John 5:28-29; Daniel 12:2).

The overall context has this whole scene as the final of a three-part example picturing the twofold harvest of the earth which includes God's grapes of wrath (Revelation 14:14-20). The twofold division is God removing (harvesting) his completed church followed by wrath and destruction of the remaining lost, all preceding one final judgment.

A "Spirit" Resurrection Followed By a Physical Resurrection

Some hold the first resurrection is our spiritual new birth while we are still on earth (God making us alive spiritually). This leaves the second resurrection as being the far future physical resurrection. This chart loosely shows their idea:

	Lost	Saved
Earth	Spiritually Dead (Spirit)	First Resurrection: Spiritually Alive, New Creation (Spirit)
	Flesh Corrupted/Dying (Body & Soul)	Mind/Will/Emotions/Conscience Being Renewed Yet Dying (Soul)
		Physical Dying (Body)
	First Death (Body, Soul)	First Death (Body, Soul???)
After	Final Resurrection (Body)	Second Resurrection (Body, Soul???)
	Second Death (Body, Soul, Spirit)	Eternal Life (Body, Soul, Spirit)

I find this third view to be out of character to the overall passage. While it has the first resurrection accounting for God making believers alive in Christ, it doesn't account for our souls following death being in the presence of God (the greater time frame in view here). For souls to be in God's presence, they must already have experienced a resurrection, a perfecting, because holiness is necessary to see God (see Hebrews 12:14; Matthew 5:8). Also consider that we are reigning with Christ (20:4c) and called to judge (20:4a NASU). This shows active involvement with a perfected soul (mind, will and emotions), something we don't have during our earthly life (regardless that God is now renewing these; we still look for a completion of this). In fact, this view doesn't deal with God's perfecting of our souls at all. It also holds equal the state of believers while briefly alive on earth and for the typically far greater time frame in heaven (awaiting the final resurrection).

Possibly supporting this third view; Scriptures show that God has spiritually seated believers in Christ in heaven immediately as they come to faith, so their overall idea is scriptural:

Ephesians 2:1-10 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. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have

been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (NIV)

The question remains, is this John's focus here in Revelation? Paul's passage focused on our position in Christ – where we are undeniably in Christ, spiritually alive with him in heavenly realms (where He is physically now). John's passage, concentrating chiefly on believers (leaving the spiritual state of unbelievers to 20:11-15), focuses on the active involvement or participation of believers in God's spiritual kingdom in heaven. This doesn't deny there is an earthly part to this present kingdom, while believers are physically alive. It's merely secondary here to John's focus on the continuing primary event in heaven. This behind-the-scenes spiritual realm is what John concentrated on as he began chapter 20. He pictured how events in the spiritual realm (such as Satan bound) allow for conditions on earth during this vast time frame. Here the brief span of a physical life is insignificant. This heavenly scene doesn't change. Believers actively engage in this spiritual kingdom in heaven as they die and God resurrects their souls. All while awaiting their physical resurrection and continuing state of sharing in the then merged spiritual and physical kingdom.

Paul's words of comfort, also referencing the second resurrection, remind us the second death has no power over us:

1 Corinthians 15:52b-55 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." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (NIV)

Don't miss that Revelation says believers will be priests of God:

“they will be priests of God and of Christ (Revelation 20:6)”

Revelation 20:6 is the third and final reference to this important idea, one God intertwined throughout Revelation from the start. These are the two earlier references:

Revelation 1:5b-6 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. (NIV)



Revelation 5:10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (NIV)

Here God reminds us that all believers are priests of God, in His holy temple, under one high priest whose priesthood is forever in the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:14-17 For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about (Levitical) priests. 15 And what we have said is even more clear if another priest like Melchizedek appears, 16 one who has become a priest not on the basis of a regulation as to his ancestry but on the basis of the power of an indestructible life. 17 For it is declared: "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." (NIV, verse 17 quoting from Psalms 110:4)

The scene before John quickly returns to the end:

Revelation 20:7-8 When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, 8 and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. (NASU)

At the end:

#1. God releases Satan enabling him personally to head the final rebellion against God.

#2. The nations of the earth embrace deception (deceived).

#3. Multitudes gather in opposition to God.

This battle of Gog and Magog, the Battle of Armageddon, is God's outpouring of wrath. Earlier we saw the result for the empires (beasts) of the earth plus the world's rulers (19:19-21), now we see the result for wicked spiritual leaders and all else who oppose God (20:9-10).

Consider Revelation 20:7. If the text speaks of more wicked people and rulers, the Great City returns to the scene again. This would run contrary to celebrations in 19:3 where God represents her destruction as complete and final. Again, this passage is a restatement of the events leading to the Great City's onetime final destruction by God.

Revelation 20:9a And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city (NASU)

Revelation 20:9a They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. (NIV)

This verse portrays the entirety of the Great City in opposition to the Holy City. The scope is the whole earth in battle against the “camp” – a temporary encampment for battle – of God’s people. The church returns with their commander on this final day of battle. John used a specific military term for God’s “camp,” (Greek) “parembole.”

**Definition**

Parembole (par-em-bol-ay) -- A Greek word and military term referencing a battle-array encampment or barracks.

Revelation continues with the results of this final battle:

Revelation 20:9b-10 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. (NIV)

#1. God consumes all the earth’s inhabitants (the unbelievers or the Great City) by fire.

#2. The devil (recently released to lead this rebellion) now suffers everlasting and final judgment.

The text makes clear the scope and duration of the judgment on Satan (the Dragon): torment forever. Similar punishment is in view for all inhabitants of the lake of fire (or lake of burning sulfur). Again God reminds us that both these beasts end forever. He casts their ideas, thoughts, goals and methods into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14). Death’s idea and method are forever gone.

The event where God consumes the inhabitants of the earth, by fire from heaven (Revelation 20:9), best parallels the occasion spoken of by Peter:

2 Peter 3:12-13 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. (NIV)

Destroying the earth by fire immediately precedes the new heaven and earth. Some commentators have claimed that Peter's words about the earth's destruction by fire are nowhere else mentioned in Scriptures. But this isn't true when you understand the scope of God's purging the earth of wickedness on this great day of the Lord in this final Day of Judgment. God's fire of judgment and purification has no effect on the redeemed "camp of God," indeed the Holy City. The church at this point no longer needs refining and is never under God's judgment again because of the merits of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 20:11-15 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. (NIV)

Spiritual judgment of the "dead" is now in view, still as part of that Great Day of Judgment. The setting is heavenly. The saint's thrones are already in place (20:4) but John now focuses on a greater throne among them. It's white, even as white is the color of the clothes given the saints; it represents purity and perfection. God's saints are present but not to receive judgment; this is His judgment of the dead. Remember, only a few verses earlier (20:4-5) the text shows saints now alive with Christ as part of the first resurrection. Now the lost, those still dead, come before God to receive their everlasting fate.

"Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them."

Again, John reminds us God has destroyed these former objects – an event alluded to by Revelation 20:9, with fire devouring the entirety of the earth, something specifically mentioned by Peter (2 Peter 3:12-13). There's "no place for them" in what is to come. With the old creation now purified by fire, the beasts and devil gone, all that remains to expel wickedness from the soon-revealed new creation is judgment on the lost. Death must remain a short while

until God's judgment is complete; all here will experience the second death. When done, there is no further need of death.

At this judgment scene there's no reason for judgment of believers any more than Jesus himself would need judgment. Here Jesus is the chief justice and with His saints seated with Him in judgment. It's His blood that atoned for our sins, His righteousness that now clothes us. In fact, the opened books have no negative entries by which to judge us. I say "the books" because there are two sets in view here: the books, plural and a book, singular. The latter John directly calls the Lamb's Book of Life. Through His use of the book of life God makes clear all those seated on thrones with Christ have no purpose before the courts, even as "the books" confirm this. God recorded all His redeemed in this book from the beginning (Revelation 13:8; 17:8; compare Philippians 4:3)! All these saints overcame (by God's grace and power) and He will never blot them out of this book for eternity (Revelation 3:5). God destined these alone to enter the new heavens and earth, the new and perfect creation of God, the eternal Holy City (Revelation 21:27).

As I already said, God's redeemed have no entries in the books demanding punishment (judgment). The "books" concern what everyone "had done (NIV)," their "deeds (NASU)." These books show only a positive for believers: Jesus did it all. God has credited His perfect works to us. God permanently blotted out all those earthly failures and sins of commission or omission, whether before salvation or following it.

#### **Definition**

Exaleipho (ex-al-i-foe) – A Greek word which means "to smear away or obliterate any evidence of."

Acts 3:19a Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out (NIV; "blotted out" KJV, ESV; "wiped away" NASU; "be erased" CJB. Greek "exaleipho.")

Psalms 32:1-2a Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.  
2 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him... (NIV, also restated in Romans 4:7-8)

No judgment of believers is in view with the scene John's recording here in Revelation. His vision clearly shows what Paul said earlier:

Romans 8:1-2 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. (NIV)

Some will protest; what about the judgment seat of Christ that all believers have to appear before (see 2 Corinthians 5:10; compare Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1; 1 Peter 4:5)? As I mentioned already, that appearance isn't in view at all during this final judgment. It happens in a different fashion removed from this specific judgment. In keeping with the picture that John has unfolded in Revelation, I would hold the judgment seat of Christ, for believers, is immediately after death. Rather than a mass scene, similar to the present one in Revelation, this appearance before the judgment seat of Christ for believers is singular. Each believer comes into God's presence at death, and first enters His throne room to receive His pronouncement. This is a declaration recognizing Christ paid for our sins and completed our pardon and salvation. Every following good deed we ever did was through the power of Christ. This is God's presentation of the white robe (see Revelation 6:11, 7:9, 13-14). This is the last time a believer needs to appear before God's judgment throne. There's no further need of judgment, for God has now seated all these saints on thrones with Christ.

Hebrews 9:27 Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment... (NIV)

When an unbeliever dies, they have no first resurrection (Revelation 20:5-6). In contrast, the believer has the first resurrection. It's then, as our soul comes into our Lord's presence, that he judges our works, throwing away everything not by Him (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). We see we have no goodness of our own, needing only God's robe of righteousness (that John shows given to all the saints in heaven. See Revelation 6:11; compare Isaiah 61:10). In this setting we find out that every crown God gives is solely because He graciously gave it despite our inclination to sin and our failings that accompanied our journey in sanctification.

Imagine with me the scene at believer's death. Standing before Jesus, He lovingly shows them every tainted work that depending in anyway on them (and not on Him). He then throws away these self-acts, instead clothing them in a robe of His righteousness. They're told they need to wait awhile until their salvation is completion (with resurrected body and the New Heavens and Earth). Jesus then places a crown on their head (see Revelation 2:10; 3:11; 4:4) and sets a throne for them alongside His (see Revelation 20:4; 11:16; 4:4). If this scene doesn't blow your mind and cause you to bow in gratitude and praise, nothing will! This is no judgment seat of shame but an event of blessing (shame awaits only unbelievers). [Dispensationalists have made

many videos over the years showing believers having their entire life played for all to see (often on a screen) displaying every failing, every sinful thought. This is not a scriptural view.]

For the unbeliever, God judging them for what they have done is something they should fear. It's not merely external appearances recorded in these books. God judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12) and repays the wicked according to their deeds (Revelation 2:23).

Jeremiah 17:10 "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (NIV)

When the best so-called goodness a person can muster is as trash in the sight of a Holy God (Isaiah 64:6), consider what a willfully wicked thought or action deserves! The book of Hebrews says it this way:

Hebrews 10:28-31 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people." 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (NIV)

When God finishes judging the wicked, from the books, I believe He will cast "the books" themselves into the Lake of Fire (but not the Lamb's book of life). John doesn't give this specific detail, so why do I believe so? Because "the books" are a record of sin that's no longer necessary, the memory of which has no purpose for eternity:

Isaiah 65:17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. (NIV)

What "former things" would God want to not come to mind again? Unquestionably sin and sinful acts, and "the books" are full of them.

A portion of this passage, Revelation 20:13, is worth considering further.

"The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them"

Death is an idea. Hades (the dead's post-life home, the afterlife) is also more an idea than a specific place. Those spirits within can be in several distinct places (including a place of torment, the present heaven, even the abyss). So why do many interpreters take the "sea" to be literal earthly body of water here? Are only the dead in one earthly sea in view (sea being singular), God somehow sparing or omitting those on land? The focus of all three clauses (sea-death-Hades: a threefold example, as John often gives) is about the lost. God rescued believers from death, so only those still dead, specifically spiritually dead, are in view. He resurrected believers, at the second resurrection, so being fully alive they are no longer in Hades. So why use "the sea" for the spiritually dead? John earlier uses "the sea" to represent the lost peoples of the earth or the nations. In Revelation 13:1 a worldly empire, a dragon-inspired beast, rises from the sea, now this sea gives up all its dead. The scope is the entire earth. This is why verse 14 then stresses God's destruction of death and Hades in the Lake of Fire. John doesn't need to repeat "the sea" in verse 15. His mentioning God's banishment of everyone not found in the Lamb's book of life (represented by the sea or the nations), into the Lake of Fire, restates the same idea.

Revelation 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. (NIV)

For a third time, John stresses the sea is no more. His words, "and there was no longer any sea," stand out. They come immediately after stating the old is gone and the new has come, immediately before figuratively speaking of the saints as the New Jerusalem prepared as a bride. Out of a seemingly endless list of wonder features in God's new creation, why would John's focus on "the sea?" Four possibilities are in view:

#1. The text allows that John is merely highlighting a major geographic feature now missing from the new heavens and earth (as in NIV & NASU). If so, he's highlighting a major difference of this new earth to the present, since waters in large quantities have covered much of this present planet from creation's start. Indeed, until the dry land appeared, waters covered it all:

Genesis 1:1-2 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. 2 Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (NIV)

Genesis 1:9-10 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good. (NIV)

This earthly feature's removal, if this is literally what the text implies, stands out from all else we know about God's re-creation. All other features I can recall, as He's revealed them, show the new creation a restored paradise. This makes it similar to the original except never tainted by sin and death. In fact, in wording reminiscent of Revelation 22:1-2 (contrast especially Revelation 22:2 and Ezekiel 47:12), still speaking of the new earth, Ezekiel refers to rivers flowing into seas:

Ezekiel 47:7-12 When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. 8 He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh. 9 Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. 10 Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds — like the fish of the Great Sea. 11 But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. 12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing." (NIV)

Some interpreters place Ezekiel's vision in a future Millennium (especially Dispensationalists), yet little in this passage allows it to belong to anything other than the final restoration. The evidence of both testaments better implies God still has a sea on His new earth. Rejecting this as reference to a literal sea brings us to our second possibility on the meaning of this phrase...

#2. The text allows that John is merely highlighting, as part of a three-part example, a third item God is doing away with and replacing. If John only said the first earth (understand as land) passed away, some may think God left the old sea alone. By specifically adding the sea to this list, he makes clear the global scope of God's replacing this planet. Only a few verses earlier, John had referenced the sea:

Revelation 20:13a The sea gave up the dead that were in it... (NIV)

If this verse references literal oceans on this planet, we could understand the passage in this fashion: This old sea once held bodies of so many people in watery graves. This makes the sea so symbolic of the death and decay infecting this present sin-filled world. God cannot leave it alone. Every sin-tainted feature cannot remain as it was and be part of the new heavens and



earth – a place of righteousness (see 2 Peter 3:13). Renderings of some translations better allow for this understanding that John’s wording here in chapter 21 points to the old creation (using a threefold example):

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. (ESV)

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and earth had ceased to exist, and the sea existed no more. (The NET Bible®)

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had passed away, and the sea was no longer there. (CJB)

The text allows for an alternate translation of the passage:

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away and this *old* sea was no more. (My Translation – The Greek unquestionably allows for translating “the sea” as “this sea.” Positioning the sea with two other old items God is replacing certainly allows the clarification word “old” sea.)

### #3. Figurative Parallel

The NASU shows a possible parallel not as readily seen in the NIV’s version of Revelation 21:1-4...

Revelation 21:1-4 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." (NIV)

Revelation 21:1-4 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the

tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (NASU)

Some (as Hendriksen and Kistemaker note) hold John's words about the absence of the sea are merely a figurative expression meant to express a parallel thought about God abolishing death, grief, crying, and pain. Such use of "sea" imagery appears in other places throughout Scriptures.

Isaiah 17:12-14 Oh, the raging of many nations — they rage like the raging sea! Oh, the uproar of the peoples — they roar like the roaring of great waters! 13 Although the peoples roar like the roar of surging waters, when he rebukes them they flee far away, driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale. 14 In the evening, sudden terror! Before the morning, they are gone! This is the portion of those who loot us, the lot of those who plunder us. (NIV)

Psalms 65:5-7 By awesome deeds You answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation, You who are the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea; 6 Who establishes the mountains by His strength, Being girded with might; 7 Who stills the roaring of the seas, The roaring of their waves, And the tumult of the peoples (NASU)

If John intended similar meaning in Revelation, the removal of the sea would stand for a removal of afflictions endured by God's people as they once suffered in a sinful world. Take note that Luke ties the time before the coming of the Son of Man to wording highlighting the "roaring of the sea and the waves." This contrasts Revelation's later statement showing the sea's removal...

Luke 21:25-29 "There will be signs in sun and moon and stars, and on the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, 26 men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 27 Then they will see THE SON OF MAN COMING IN A CLOUD with power and great glory. 28 But when these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (NASU)

#4. While the second and third possibilities seemingly have biblical merit, another alternative remains. This fourth and final possibility better fits Revelation's overall context:

The sea is “the nations” from which the beast arose (Revelation 13:1). Revelation’s text and theme shows that all nations disappear at the end, removed by God in judgment. When God finishes, there are only one people, God’s people with no more sea (or nations). John’s use of the sea for “the nations” flows immediately out of ideas in chapter 20. Chapter 21’s sea continues to represent the peoples of the earth, the nations, and all the lost.

John’s three-part emphasis shows the scope of what God replaces, each having no part in His new creation...

First - The present earth and everything this fallen sphere included.

Second - The heavens and all that word encompasses: from the skies above, to planets, stars and other heavenly bodies and even God’s present heaven.

Third - John returns to the nations, the lost, represented by the “sea,” to make clear that all those lost individuals no longer have anything to do with God’s new creation.

This new heaven and earth no longer has a sea because there’s only one group of people entering this new world, namely the redeemed of God, those taken out of that lost sea (Revelation 18:4).

Consider how God removes the sin-tainted world. He destroys the former heaven and earth by fire, as Peter foretold:

2 Peter 3:10, 12b-13 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. ... 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. (NIV)

Once God destroys the former sin-tainted heaven and earth by fire, He replaced them with a new heaven and earth forever untainted by sin. In the verses building to this point, John has covered God’s disposal of sin, death, Satan, demons, and the wicked and rebellious (the sea). They cannot, in any way, disturb God’s new creation. Simply put, the old is gone and only God’s new creation remains. God permanently replaces this present heaven and earth, which once groaned from sin (Romans 8:22).

John has included parallels here in the first four verses of Revelation chapter 21. Each follow up parallel clause provides key details to what the former statement meant:

- New Heavens and Earth (v1) – Dwelling of place of God (v3)
- No longer any sea (v1) – Old order passed away (v4)

Keep in mind, as we continue to examine these verses 3 to 4, that John gave them as parallels to explain verse 1 with more detail. The Old Order, now forever gone, was part of the sea. This sea is the multitude of lost peoples which once filled the earth and out of which the beasts (empires of the world) arose (Revelation 13:1; Daniel 7:3).

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

Beyond God, the New Heaven and Earth's architect, who else lives in it forever? This verse clearly gives answer: the bride! Revelation now presents the Holy City (also called the New Jerusalem), the entirety of God's redeemed, all resurrected and glorified, as the Bride of Christ. John uses a threefold reference for one entity: The Holy City is the New Jerusalem and the Bride! This spiritual imagery of a woman representing Jerusalem builds on Old Testament imagery which first shows Jerusalem as "the virgin daughter of Zion (Isaiah 37:22)."

Consider these two terms:

"Holy City" – 11 uses through the Old and New Testaments

"New Jerusalem" – used only twice (Revelation 3:12; 21:2)

The earlier instance of "New Jerusalem" also calls it the "city of my God"...

Revelation 3:12 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. (NIV)

The beautiful imagery employed here portrays the entirety of the saints as a bride (singular) and as a city housing the entirety of God's church (His called out ones). In the next verse God assures us that He lives amid this city. Consider that God, even now, lives in each of His children (John 14:23; 17:23). Yet here, in the fullness of paradise restored, God will directly live with His people in this New Jerusalem, the city of our God.

It's God's presence that makes it a Holy City. God's full presence in this final Holy City makes it different from the Old Jerusalem, yet God's presence even in the old allowed it to claim the title Holy City. As long as God enshrined His name in the temple He allowed Israel to build in Jerusalem, the former city was a Holy City. Nehemiah called it such (Nehemiah 11:1, 18); Isaiah referred to it in the same manner, though he clearly looked towards the final city (Isaiah 48:2; 52:1). Daniel's prophecy of the Anointed One's coming ties this to the Holy City (Daniel 9:24); and Matthew echoes this referring to Jerusalem before and after Jesus' crucifixion as the Holy City (Matthew 4:5; 27:53). The apostle John, in Revelation, only refers to the Holy City when speaking of the New Jerusalem, because he sees there God's everlasting presence amid His people.

Revelation shows this crowning Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven. It has no earthly origin; it comes from the presence of God. All people within formerly were part of the old creation. Yet God harvested them and kept each as genuine (Matthew 13:37-43), raised imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:52), and then gathered them round His throne (Revelation 19:4-8). Now, as God's dwelling place forever becomes part of the new earth, every one of His redeemed now descend together from heaven to live in this new perfect city for eternity. God himself fully lives among them.

God's planned from the beginning to redeem for Himself a people of His own (Titus 2:14). At the final judgment God declares that she (the bride) has made herself ready (Revelation 19:7). Now she's presented as coming from the throne room of God (where God earlier gathered her until complete, as shown previously by John).

God now adorns the bride, the entirety of the church, the same – whether formerly a great preacher, or lowly slave – “as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.” The text stresses her beautiful dress. And what does John symbolize by this clothing? John earlier described it in this way:

Revelation 19:6-8 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.) (NIV)

God adorns His people with their righteous acts, not one of them a self-capable act. We know these clothes are the righteousness of Christ imputed to her (Revelation 19:8). Every act of righteousness clothing the people of God's church is as little or as much as God wanted and

God enabled. He perfectly weaves each action to craft the finest wedding garment for the bride, where not one stitch is lacking, or in error, or in excess. This was a garment miraculously fashioned amid a corrupt and fallen world, seemingly beset by wickedness and failure, yet every detail worked out in perfection. Here, on display for all to see, we view God's completed plan, carried out solely by Him for His praise and glory alone, for all eternity.

The fitting home for a redeemed people, all made new, is a new heaven and earth untainted by the former sins now forever forgotten:

Isaiah 65:17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. (NIV)

This prophesied new heavens and earth is unlike the former. God created the first with knowledge that it would last for a limited time. He designs the new to be permanent:

Isaiah 66:22 "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. (NIV)

With promise that this new heavens and earth will endure, God similarly guarantees those living there are also permanent. Not surprisingly, this same John recording Revelation was the same who earlier recorded Jesus' words stressing the permanency of our union with God.

John 6:37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. (NIV)

John 14:1-3 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. (NIV)

In support of these passages, God often uses the term "forever" about our relationship and reward. John recorded more of these "forever" statements than perhaps any other New Testament writer. Therefore, we'll first examine four of his verses before moving to other books.

John 8:35 Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. (NIV)

John 14:15-17 "If you love me, you will obey what I command. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. (NIV)

1 John 2:17 The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (NIV)

2 John 2 because of the truth, which lives in us and will be with us forever: (NIV)

1 Corinthians 9:25 Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. (NIV)

Hebrews 10:14 because by one sacrifice he [Jesus] has made perfect forever those who are being made holy. (NIV)

Revelation of this new, permanent, and perfect dwelling-place raises a question, what will happen to the old? Earlier passages in Revelation make clear that sin has irreparably ruined the old – the world being in a wicked, rundown, decaying state, far from the perfection it once had in the Garden of Eden. Peter gives provides greater detail on how this present world passes away:

2 Peter 3:10-13 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. (NIV)

Simply put, there's nothing worth saving in the old order of creation, so God removes it with purifying fire and then replaces it by making it into something new and far better. Some might protest that believers were worth saving. Yet, at this point, nothing is. Saints were once part of it, yet God made every one of His redeemed new and they are no longer part of that old order. Even as God has redeemed and transformed us into something new, so too God makes new this once sin-tainted heavens and earth.

Revelation 21:3 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. (NIV)

We have declaration of paradise restored. What God gave originally in the Garden of Eden, a place where Adam & Eve could have direct companionship and communication with God (Genesis 2:15-17; 3:8), He declares to exist again. God removes the separation brought about by sin. He erases the long ages of God having to reveal Himself in part because of humanity's sinfulness versus His awesome holiness. He wipes away the rift Christ repaired, finally and permanently removing all barriers in this new creation: "The dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them." Yes, God has lived with His people, in Christ, spiritually throughout the ages (John 14:23, 26). Yes, Jesus (God) came to live among people for a time in this fallen world (John 1:1, 14). Yes, the souls of believers went to stay with God in heaven (Revelation 6:9). Yes, God gathered the resurrected church around His heavenly throne (Revelation 19). These weren't our permanent dwelling place. God originally made the earth for people to occupy it (Isaiah 45:18). Now this new and sinless earth is once again populated by people, God's people, and God has come to live with them. We, God saints, can want nothing more than to be His people with Him present as our God!

Revelation 21:4 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." (NIV)

John finally gets to what Isaiah prophesied, that we considered earlier:

Isaiah 65:17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. (NIV)

The old order is gone. The way everything has been throughout history, whether disease, suffering, deception, lies, cheating, stealing, all items related to sin, they are gone forever. When Isaiah said former things won't come to mind, he was stressing that everything of sin won't come to mind. It's the same reason John says that mourning, crying, and pain are gone with death (all cast into the Lake of Fire). Consider that everything we mourn over and causes us pain belongs to sin. These are gone forever. No longer will there be saints righteously crying out to God "how long?" This cry was a result of sin; that mental anguish (what you could call pain) is also gone.

The Greek word translated "wipe" in Revelation 21:4 can also appear as "blot out" (or smear, or obliterate any evidence of). This provides one part in a three-to-one comparison...



- God blots out our sins (from the books) – Acts 3:19
- God blots out the debt of the written code that was against us – Colossians 2:14
- God will blot out all tears (and death, and sorrow, and crying, and pain). [Note the word for tears appears 11 times in the New Testament, always in association with sorrow. This Revelation verse would in no way imply that “so-called” tears of joy could not still exist]

These three “God will blot” statements are in contrast to:

- God will not blot out our names from the book of life – Revelation 3:5

Imagine having no memory of sin or the general effects of sin but also, specifically, my own sins!

Revelation 21:5 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." (NIV)

Verse 5 begins with “kai (and),” not shown by the translators, a continuing emphasis directly from God that He is making everything new. God knows how hard it is for us to imagine a world where everything is new and perfect and no memory of sins exists. And yet, He commands John “Write it down!” It wasn’t necessary for John to understand it all; it’s still trustworthy and true. God call us to accept what He had written – to believe it.

During my pause in writing the last paragraph and beginning this one, I was sitting on a high hillside alongside a desolate portion of the Nile River in north Sudan. As I sat under an acacia tree, with a soft breeze blowing, mesmerized by the beauty of the scene before me, I thought of this passage: “I am making everything new!” One sentence summarizes my thoughts... If God’s fallen creation can have so much beauty and wonder, what will His new look like? I think God doesn’t give us more than a hint because we can’t begin to grasp it. I know for sure it’ll be so wonderful that former things (meaning this view I experienced today) won’t come to mind at all. Amen, come quickly Lord Jesus!

2 Peter 3:13 But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

This is the 12<sup>th</sup> and final time that John receives command to write by the One who is truth (John 14:6) and who is the living Word (John 1:1, 14). Set aside any protests that some of these

twelve commands to John came from an angel. Their coming through one of God's messengers makes them no less a command of God. [All 12 instances: Revelation 1:11, 19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5]

Revelation 21:6-8 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." (NIV)

What is done? The Greek literally says "They are done." The same question remains; what's John referring to with "they?" "They have become" is another way of expressing the Greek meaning. In Revelation 16:7 the last angel pouring out God's wrath uses this expression, now God himself uses it to express His completion of the new heaven and earth. God is expressing this event as though past here in John's future vision, a past reality when these events occur. God, who cannot lie, guarantees the result.

We examined the titles of God earlier in Revelation 1:8. God again provides two double titles to stress that He's over all of creation, that this was His plan from beginning to end. Notice especially "the Beginning and End." This title is solely for creation's purposes as God, himself, hasn't a beginning or end. It's in harmony with Revelation's emphasis that Jesus (God) is sovereign over everything that has taken place in creation, from beginning to end. We might better state "end" as "end without end" as Revelation shows the end to include a new beginning.

Revelation 21:6b To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.

This sentence reminds of an Old Testament passage in Isaiah:

Isaiah 55:1-7 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. 4 See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of the peoples. 5 Surely you will

summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor." 6 Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. 7 Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (NIV)

Notice Isaiah's greater context here, he was speaking of an everlasting covenant that would see sins forgiven. This was not the covenant connected to Israel's earthly land but the greater covenant of salvation belonging to those God loves (David being an example). His calling of the nations, from outside Israel, wasn't to have them go to the land of Israel; it's to become part of spiritual Israel. Jesus explained that this spiritual water was available to more than Israelites, even Samaritans:

John 4:13-14 Jesus answered (the Samaritan woman at the well), "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." (NIV)

Revelation makes clear that this water of life is to all, Jew, Samaritan, or Gentile, who will come and drink. When Israel, mostly, rejected God, He issued a twofold charge against them:

Jeremiah 2:13 "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water. (NIV)

All who search for living water anywhere but through God are guilty of making their own cisterns that can never hold true living water. In contrast God's people, who hunger and thirst for righteousness will always receive filling (Matthew 5:6; Revelation 7:16-17). In saving us, God made us cisterns for living water.

Isaiah 49:8-10 "In the time of my favor I will answer you, and in the day of salvation I will help you; I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people, to restore the land and to reassign its desolate inheritances, 9 to say to the captives, 'Come out,' and to those in darkness, 'Be free!' "They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. 10 They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water. (NIV)

In Revelation, John now offers a contrast, between chapter 21 verses 7 and 8, between believer and unbeliever. For the believer (for every believer will overcome, see 1 John 5:4-5)...

Revelation 21:7 He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (NASU)

God has declared us His sons (children), joint heirs with Jesus!

Ephesians 3:6 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. (NIV)

Titus 3:7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. (NIV)

Romans 8:16-17 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. (NIV)

Galatians 3:26-29 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. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (NIV)

For the nonbeliever...

Revelation 21:8 But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (NASU)

Using a brief list, God reminds of the sins that He will charge against those standing before the great white throne. We've already seen that their destination is the lake of fire, the second death. God didn't intend this list to be exhaustive, but enough to show that every single person deserves this fate apart from the grace and salvation of Jesus Christ.

- Cowardly ("fearfulness" a charge against the disciples in Matthew 8:26; Mark 4:40; how much more against an unbeliever). A detailed examination of this charge follows below.

- Unbelieving (“without Christian faith”, see 2 Corinthians 4:4).
- Abominable (from the word “to stink,” detestable. The Septuagint Old Testament translation uses this word of the nation’s pagan practices in Leviticus 18:30. This describes all who drink of the cup of the Great Prostitute, see Revelation 17:4).
- Murderers (intentional illicit killing of a person. The same word appears in its noun form in Matthew 5:21-22 equating unjust anger as being murder of the heart)
- Immoral Persons (anyone, male, female, same sex, prostituting themselves for gain or any self-benefit. Sexually immoral [even as Paul used this term in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11]. See also Ephesians 5:5).
- Sorcerers (An enchanter with drugs; meaning someone who promotes altered states of consciousness, especially for spiritual purposes or to deceive someone. This Greek word appears only once in Scriptures.)
- Idolaters (a worshiper of idols, or objects [the latter synonymous with covetous, as used in Ephesians 5:5].)
- Liars (speaking that which is false. See Proverbs 19:9 where the Septuagint uses this word.)

As with other summary lists of sins in the New Testament (see Matthew 15:19; Mark 7:21-22; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21) these less than exhaustive lists of sins are intentionally representative. They show the widespread nature of sin (that is so common in the world around us). Here John is recording God himself contrasting the blessing of eternal life for His redeemed versus the eternal state of torment for those still in their sins. This is His plan.

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### **No Cowards in Heaven!**

Revelation 21:7-8 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 8 But the cowardly [so too NASU, ESV, NET], 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.” (NIV)

#### **Definition**

Deilos – A Greek word typically translated “cowardly.” It means cowardly, fearful, and timid. Its root word is “to fear.”

Matthew 8:23-27 When He got into the boat, His disciples followed Him. 24 And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. 25 And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, "Save us, Lord; we are perishing!" 26 He said to them, "Why are you afraid [so too NIV, ESV. NET retains "cowardly"], you men of little faith?" Then He got up and rebuked the winds and the sea, and it became perfectly calm. 27 The men were amazed, and said, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" (NASU)

Mark 4:40-41 [Read 4:35-41 for context] He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid ["deilos"]? Do you still have no faith?" 41 They were terrified ["phobeo phobos megas"] and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" (NIV)

**Definition**

Megas – A Greek word for "great" or "large" which also expresses intensity.

**Definition**

Phobos – A Greek word meaning "fear" or "terror," from a root word meaning "to flee from."

Phobeo – A Greek word which means "to become fearful, afraid or terrified."

In the Mark passage a contrast occurs between verse 40 and verse 41. Having used the word "deilos" in the question, the disciple's response appears in a different fashion. The NIV combines three Greek words as "terrified," "phobeo phobos megas." Placing them together displays the result of the disciples' "deilos" – they became exceedingly fearful and terrified. Their lack of faith had them in great and just fear of a righteous and Holy God.

We can translate Jesus' question in Matthew 8:26 as, "Why are you afraid, (you men of) almost no (literally 'puny') faith?" Notice the supplied "you men of," as used in the NIV, makes the sentence read better in English. Still another translation delivers this as:

Matthew 8:26 And he said to them, Why are you full of fear, O you of little faith? Then he got up and gave orders to the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm. (Bible in Basic English)

Use of the word “deilos” also appears in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament used in Jesus’ day.

Deuteronomy 20:8 (start at 20:3 for context) Then the officers shall add, "Is any man afraid [Septuagint “deilos”] or fainthearted? Let him go home so that his brothers will not become disheartened too." (NIV)

Judges 7:2-3 The Lord said to Gideon, "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands. In order that Israel may not boast against me that her own strength has saved her, 3 announce now to the people, 'Anyone who trembles with fear [Septuagint “deilos”] may turn back and leave Mount Gilead.'" So twenty-two thousand men left, while ten thousand remained. (NIV)

These two Old Testament instances echo the same theme as the New Testament – specifically associating the word translated cowardly (“deilos”) with people who lacked faith in God. This is clearly John’s intended association in our passage of Revelation. Those with puny faith have only man-made faith and not faith coming from God. Like everything crafted by fallen creation, it’s no better than magic arts and idols. Every descriptive term in Revelation 21:7-8 is characteristic of the lost and never those overcoming by God’s power. In fact, by this time in Revelation, God has glorified every believer previously coming to fullness of faith and love – now made perfect in Christ. Something clear in Scriptures; perfect love casts out all fear:

1 John 4:17-18 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (NIV)

With God’s saints now having perfect faith and all fear cast out, the only imperfect, puny, faith remaining is that of unbelievers. This means the only remaining fearful or cowards (“deilos”) are those who don’t have God-given faith, they have only weak natural faith. This is the reason John uses the term “unbelieving” or literally (in Greek) “without faith” immediately following the word “deilos.”

Revelation 21:8 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.

Consider this, in broad terms, everyone who experiences the second death fits every category listed in Revelation 21:8.

- Each is cowardly, having puny natural (or man-made) faith
- Each is unbelieving, having rejected God and His son Jesus Christ
- Each is vile or detestable, willfully having embraced the filth of sin
- Each is a murderer, hating their brother (murder of the heart) and responsible for Jesus' death.
- Each is sexually immoral ( pornos ), in thought or deed, prostituting themselves to false gods.
- Each practice magic arts (“pharmakeus”). They seek power, health, and life, by looking to and relying on potions, drugs, or powers apart from God (see synonym “pharmakos” in Revelation 22:15 and Deuteronomy 18:10 [Septuagint]).
- Each is an idolater advancing an object or someone (perhaps themselves) into first place, the place reserved for God.
- Each is unquestionably a liar, as all people are naturally from birth (Romans 3:4).

John made clear the joint association of these points in the Greek. He didn't have commas, as we have in English; he used the Greek word “and (‘kai’)” to join every one of these words together. Using a more literal English form, the Greek passage could read as this:

Revelation 21:8 But the coward and unbeliever and vile and murderer and sexually immoral and practitioner of magic and the idolater and every liar — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. (My translation)

Praise God there's no cowards or fearful (“deilos”) in heaven, for God himself has taken away our fear!



## Definition

Gune – A Greek word, pronounced “goo-nay” that means woman or wife. In Revelation John uses it of Jezebel and the Lamb’s bride (see Revelation 2:20 and 19:7). John sometimes uses another specific word for the bride: “Numphe,” see Revelation 21:2, 9; 22:17. In Revelation 21:9 He uses both words in parallel speaking of the same subject.

Revelation 21:9-10 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 [“numphe”], the wife [“gune”] 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. (NIV, square parenthesis mine for clarification)

In Revelation 21:2 the text introduces the bride as coming down from God, where He had gathered her (complete) around His throne. Now an angel (previous involved in pouring out one of the bowls of wrath) provides a “looks like” vision of the bride. Remember, the bride isn’t a single individual; she’s the entirety of the church. Also take note that John is using wording that is a direct contrast to his detailed look at the Great Prostitute given earlier (Revelation 17:1-3). The Prostitute has no husband and goes to destruction; the bride has a husband who gives her life and all she wears. The Prostitute was in the wilderness or desert and God’s angel took John there to see her (Revelation 17:3). Now another angel takes John to a place of prominence, a mountain high and great, to see the bride’s presentation to her husband.

The Holy City, the Bride, and the New Jerusalem are all interchangeable synonyms; each term labels the same collection of people. Remembering this, readers mustn’t view the city’s description as a description of a literal place. It is, rather, a figurative description to representing qualities of the bride.

Revelation 21:11 It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (NIV)

#1. The bride is a reflection of God’s glory; she’s never a source of glory. In fact, God later tells us the entirety of the light of the city comes from God (Revelation 21:23).

Isaiah 60:19-20 The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your

glory. 20 Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. (NIV)

The reflected glory's luster looked like crystalized jasper – some have compared this sight to a diamond's brilliance. A brilliance set in stone pictures something permanent and unchanging, a beautiful and lasting radiance (unlike Moses, 2 Corinthians 3:13; Exodus 34:29)

Revelation 21:12-14 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. 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. (NIV)

#2. The bride has a great and high wall. Walls represent protection and safety. Revelation shows the bride as having eternal protection given her by God. No physical walls are necessary, explaining why prophets call Jerusalem a city without walls while simultaneously describing it as having a wall of fire...

Zechariah 2:3-5 Then the angel who was speaking to me left, and another angel came to meet him 4 and said to him: "Run, tell that young man, 'Jerusalem will be a city without walls because of the great number of men and livestock in it. 5 And I myself will be a wall of fire around it,' declares the Lord, 'and I will be its glory within.' (NIV, Don't miss that the glory of the Lord is said to be within!)

Consider also this prophecy of David:

Psalms 144:14b-15 There will be no breaching of walls, no going into captivity, no cry of distress in our streets. 15 Blessed are the people of whom this is true; blessed are the people whose God is the Lord. (NIV)

And Isaiah:

Isaiah 26:1-4 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. 2 Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. 3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. 4 Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal. (NIV)

Isaiah 60:18 No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. (NIV)

#3. The bride has twelve gates. Gates symbolize freedom, to come and go. A city with closed or sealed gates makes all within captives. Here, in the New Jerusalem, there is perfect freedom (see also John 10:9). Equal distribution of the gates shows this, allowing access to the four ends of the new earth (Revelation 21:13). The names of Israel's twelve tribes appear written on her gates, meaning the bride is Israel's completion. All who comprise her now belong to a tribe of Israel (including all grafted-in Gentiles, shown in Revelation 7:4-8).

#4. The city has twelve angels, one standing at each gate. God's angels guard all around (as shown by placing them at equally shared gates). This picture shows an unchanging truth, past to future. God's angels are:

Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (NIV)

Also:

Psalms 91:11-12 For he [God] will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; 12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. (NIV, parenthesis for clarification)

If God now protects His bride, we expect no change to His actions in His New Creation!

#5. The city has twelve foundations under its wall. God inscribed these foundations with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, representing the foundation of the church:

Ephesians 2:19-21 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.  
(NIV)

Notice Revelation 21:14's reference to the Lamb again. The term highlights a particular time period. Jesus, the Lamb, came to be the necessary perfect sacrifice, setting the cornerstone by which His apostles became a foundation for the gospel's proclamation. If Jesus hadn't come as that sacrificial lamb, there would be no foundation for the church, Old and New.

It wasn't necessary for John to restate a foundation including the Old Testament prophets. The name Jerusalem plus tribe names on the gates both show the Jewish roots to which the church came in fullness. (Together they match what the 24 elders represented, one church of Jews and Gentiles. See Revelation 4:4). Abraham looked forward in faith to this city, as did all Old Testament saints:

Hebrews 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (NIV)

Now the angel gives even more details on what John just described. Don't forget, this is still a figurative description of the bride (singular) comprised of the entire church (plural).

Revelation 21:15-16 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. (NIV)

The measuring rod is a means of examining something in more detail; exactly what the angel is now doing for John as he revisits the items briefly mentioned previously (21:11-14). This rod is visually of pure gold, showing it a pure standard, also heavenly and royal.

To assure understanding of the gates' equal distribution, the angel notes the walls are square. Now, for the first time, we hear the city is as tall as it's wide and long.

Each side's 12,000 stadia is much the same symbolism we saw in Revelation chapter 7, looking at the 12 tribes of 12,000 (144,000). Here the completed church is 12,000 (12 x 1000) cubed; large enough for every person that God saved from the Jews and Gentiles. This imagery uses a cube for the same reason the holy of holies (or inner sanctuary) of Solomon's temple was a cube (20 x 20 x 20):

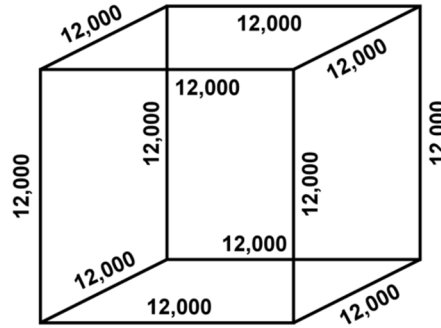
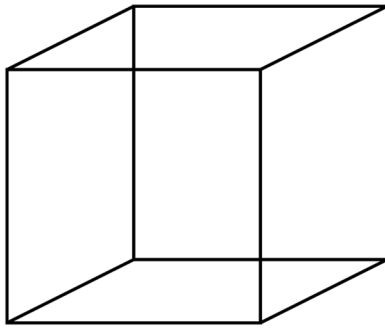
1 Kings 6:19-20 He prepared the inner sanctuary within the temple to set the ark of the covenant of the Lord there. 20 The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty wide and twenty high. He overlaid the inside with pure gold, and he also overlaid the altar of cedar. (NIV)

A cube is a visual symbol of perfection, similar to having numbers symbolic of perfection. In Solomon’s temple the inner sanctuary was small, as only a high priest could enter God’s presence there. In this perfect and final temple, where God lives with all his people forever, it’s far larger (John sees about 1400 miles, 2300 km, for each direction) – and, of course, it’s perfect. The distances express that this Eternal City (living temple) is far larger than the old temple. Literal measurements aren’t John’s concerned. He’s using the size and shape to express ideas.

Dispensationalists focus on the size as though a physical city would span a massive geographic area:



Graphic showing approximate size of the city, if literal, centered over present Jerusalem



Revelation uses a cube to represent the 144,000. Twelve lines draw a cube, four each for the top and bottom and four more to connect the top with the bottom. Take these 12 lines, each 12,000 in length, add these up and you have the 144,000 – all of God’s church, as we saw earlier. The bride is the 144,000 (Revelation 14:1; 7:4-8).

Revelation 21:17 He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man’s measurement, which the angel was using. (NIV)

In this visually symbolic representation of the bride, the description continues with details about the wall. The emphasis again is the protection God has placed around her has no weakness and no unguarded or low spots by which an enemy might try to enter. The NIV translators added the word “thick,” assuming width is in view. John leaves it to your imagination on whether the wall is about 200 feet thick (cubits varied in size making this distance rough) or perhaps that tall. On a city of the massive size previously given, a wall of this height would look decidedly short. I agree with the NIV translators that John’s vision likely showed a wall of that thickness (agreeing with the NIV). It’s probable the wall was the same height as the city (showing perfect salvation and protection surrounding her).

Once again, literal measurements aren’t John’s concern, rather what these features and values represent. The 144 cubits is 12 x 12, the apostles (as on the city’s foundations) x the tribes (as on her gates).

The Greek allows for two alternate renderings for the end of verse 17:

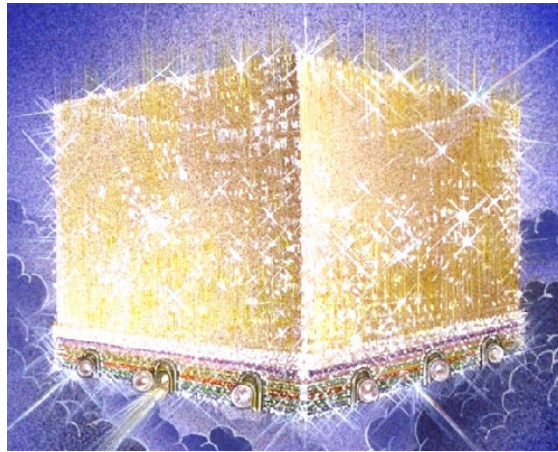
“... 144 cubits thick, the measure of mankind, of the angel”

“... 144 cubits thick, the measure of mankind, which are angelic”

The NASU unwisely removes their reader’s ability to see this 144 symbolism by translating the verse’s start into modern values (as though the literal sizes are the primary matter in view):

Revelation 21:17a And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards... (NASU)

Some say the city's description, in Revelation, allows for a pyramid. Their understanding ignores the symbolism that John was employing – not to mention God's earlier use of the cube shape in His ancient temple.



Graphic showing an artist's rendering of a literal cube-like city (from internet)

Speculation about a literal three-dimensional city has led to speculation over the workings of its height and streets. For example:

It should also be remembered that the new bodies of the resurrected saints will be like those of angels, no longer limited by gravitational or electromagnetic forces as at present. Thus it will be as easy for the inhabitants to travel vertically as horizontally, in the new Jerusalem. Consequently, the "streets" of the city (verse 21) may well include vertical passageways as well as horizontal avenues, and the "blocks" could be real cubical blocks, instead of square areas between streets as in a present-day earthly city. (Henry M. Morris, *The Revelation Record*)

Leaving such speculations, we must remember that John is using looks-like and numeric imagery to express ideas. His vision isn't about some literal three-dimensional city, rather a description of the bride's qualities. Knowing this, we continue the given description:

Revelation 21:18a The wall was made of jasper, (NIV)

The wall surrounding her has an appearance that reflects the one sitting on the throne in heaven (Revelation 4:2-3).

Revelation 21:18b and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. (NIV)

The city itself appears as pure gold, as in fully refined gold (see Malachi 3:2-3; Revelation 3:18; Daniel 12:10). Gold, no matter how well refined in ancient times, always looked opaque in what it could reflect. John's vision has it so well refined that it would reflect clearly "like glass."

Revelation 21:19-20 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, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. (NIV. Consider the descriptive language and use of precious stones in this Old Testament description: Ezekiel 28:12-16)

The foundations also reflect God's appearance (see also Revelation 4:2-3). These foundations appear as precious stones, one for tribe. Precious stones also represent good works, enabled and energized by God (1 Corinthians 3:10-14). In other words, God-enabled good works by His people are the city's foundations – these works built on the one true foundation, Jesus Christ. This scene is a spiritual fulfillment of Isaiah:

Isaiah 54:11-13 "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. (NIV)

The high priest in the Old Testament wore a breast piece covered in precious stones, 12 of them (Exodus 28:17-21). Some have speculated an association here, yet the stones don't match exactly. Any implied association appears coincidental.

Revelation 21:21a The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. (NIV)





Artist's rendering of literal pearl gates (from internet)

Returning to Isaiah 54, the prophet describes the gates as sparkling jewels. In ancient times people considered pearls jewels, similar to precious stones. They would contribute to the bride's beauty. The visually huge single pearls, associated with the apostles (whose names are on the gates), points to their incredible value. Fittingly, a pearl is a jewel formed by a living creature, the result of a wound or physical irritation in the oyster. Through Christ's suffering and wounds God formed these human pearls (the apostles) in perfection. These pearl gates remind of the pearl of great price, the message brought to the church by the apostles:

Matthew 13:45-46 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. 46 When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it. (NIV, see Matthew 7:6)

#### **Definition**

Cardo – The cardo was a north-south oriented street integral to Roman cities. Shops and vendors lined the street and it was the heart of the city's economic life.



Cardo of the ancient Roman city of Scythopolis at Beth She'an, Israel.

A large city in Roman times would always have a main street (or cardo), and so continues the imagery of John's vision of the New Jerusalem:

Revelation 21:21b The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass.  
(NIV)

John's use of gold here continues the same imagery used in Revelation 21:18b. Consider two ideas or thoughts about this passage. These speculations aren't original as I have read or heard these viewpoints before. My personal assessment follows each:

#1. Governments normally use common and cheap materials for street pavement. Since this city's street has gold pavement it shows gold is commonplace and insignificant. I reject this cheapening of gold because all through the Book of Revelation John portrays gold as something royal, valuable and heavenly.

#2. Every person, rich, poor, great or small, that is part of this Holy City, is all purest gold. Since the city represents people, John's use of gold streets shows that God purifies even common folk as gold too. I'm not sure I can agree with this fully, especially where one commentator thinks the streets are lowly commoners, versus respectable clergy such as himself. He believes someone of his stature would appear as something more important than a lowly street. In John's imagery, unquestionably the entire city is people and each has a purpose, even as each individual in God's church does today. It's taking this too literally to try to identify individuals,

or classes of people, with specific features of the city. If literal, I'm inclined to think that maybe the previously mentioned, now dead, clergyman might be part of the street instead of the lowly and poor. "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first (Matthew 19:30)."

John's description of Revelation's Holy City continues a comparison to Solomon's temple, the floor each temple paved with gold (1 Kings 6:30). In the former earthly temple only priests could walk on this gold. In the heavenly temple every person is a priest before God and equally walks on finest gold!

Revelation 21:22 I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. (NIV)

Throughout the Old Testament and into the New, believers went to a temple to worship God. This changed with the first coming of Jesus and now John again makes clear that no further temple is any longer necessary for eternity. Jesus pointed out this soon-coming change to the woman at the well:

John 4:21, 23-24 Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ... 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth." (NIV)

The church, even now, has need of no earthly temple. God abolished the need of a temple in Christ (and the last ended even as Jesus predicted). While believers need no earthly temple now, there's still need of an external temple – the temple in heaven, to which our prayer come and to which our spirits go at death. This present heavenly temple is still external, even though God lives individually within us (to a degree as a living temple; 2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Corinthians 3:16).

In Revelation's picture of the bride as a city, there's no temple within (or place to visit). The bride herself is a temple of God, in that God lives within her (Revelation 21:3). No longer does God live only individually in a specific believer, He lives corporately within all His people. The bride is always, fully, in God's presence with no need to go anywhere to spend time with Him or speak with Him.

Revelation 21:23-24 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. (NIV)

In verse 23, John restates a passage of Isaiah. In typical fashion, he doesn't cite it directly; rather he restates it to clarify its meaning. Here's Isaiah's passage with John's Revelation parallels in parenthesis:

Isaiah 60:19 The sun will no more be your light by day [The city does not need the sun], nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you [or the moon to shine on it], for the Lord will be your everlasting light [for the glory of God gives it light], and your God will be your glory [and the Lamb is its lamp. (cf. John 1:14)]. (NIV, it's even better to read verses 18-21 for context. See also Isaiah 24:23)

The whole idea behind no night or day is that time has ended as we have known it. We have marked time, since creation's beginning, by the great timekeepers God set in place for this existing creation (see Genesis 1:3-5; 14-19). Removal of these timekeepers becomes fulfillment of Zechariah's "unique day" as this is a day that never ends.

Zechariah 14:7-9 It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime — a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light. 8 On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. 9 The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. (NIV)

John's continuation in Revelation 21:24, resumes drawing on the Book of Isaiah. Once again, I've shown the parallel ideas in parenthesis:

Isaiah 60:3 Nations will come to your light [The nations will walk by its light], and kings to the brightness of your dawn. (NIV)

Isaiah 60:5b the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come [and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.]. (NIV)

John is showing the kings and nations bringing items into the city are no longer the nations of the world (who God earlier judged). Rather they are the redeemed people of every stature and nation that are part of the Holy City (the bride). [Notice these last 3 instances of the word "nations" in Revelation are in contrast to all earlier. Previous uses spoke of lost nations of this

world; the last three uses are of the nations (and diversity) out of which God redeemed His people. See Revelation 5:9]

Nowhere does the text provide any idea that these nations or kings live outside the city of God (the bride). The only location unquestionably remaining outside this city, according to Revelation, is the lake of fire. The referenced kings and nations are part of God's redeemed and their splendor is part of the city (the bride). Sadly, misunderstanding "the nations" in verse 24, to somehow need people beyond the saints (the bride, the inhabitants of the New Jerusalem) has led to much speculation. For example:

And the nations shall walk in its light. ... Another possibility is that God will create human beings to live on the new earth just as He created Adam and Eve—sinless people whose status and condition will be similar to Adam and Eve's before the Fall (see comments on Rev 22:2). More likely, believers who are alive on earth at the end of the Millennium will be brought into the new heavens and earth in their unresurrected bodies to populate it. These bodies will be transformed into sinless bodies, but will not have been resurrected. They will be like Adam and Eve before they sinned, but without the ability to sin. As such, they will procreate and populate the new heavens and the new earth, and so they will form the nations.

The kings (i.e., the overcomers; cf. 2:26-27; 22:5) who rule over them will bring the glory and honor of the nations into the New Jerusalem (cf. 21:6). The new earth will be a wonderful place where everyone brings glory to God. And because its gates shall not be shut, there will be continual access for the nations and their rulers into the city.

(Section on Revelation 21:24-25 from *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Copyright © 2010 by Grace Evangelical Society)

Moving beyond unwarranted speculation and continuing with John's illustrative description of the Holy City:

Revelation 21:25-26 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. (NIV)

John's again stressing this is the "unique day," a day without end ("no night"), where the gates of freedom are always open. Verses 24, 26 and 27 all mention going through the gates. Consider the following Old Testament passage and its emphasis on who will enter:

Isaiah 26:1-2 In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city; God makes salvation its walls and ramparts. 2 Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. (NIV)

It's a people of faith, a people made righteous, that enters these open gates. In fact, John better alludes to a later passage in Isaiah (again with parallel from Revelation):

Isaiah 60:11-12 Your gates will always stand open, they will never be shut [On no day will its gates ever be shut], day or night [for there will be no night there], so that men may bring you the wealth of the nations — their kings led in triumphal procession [The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it]. 12 For the nation or kingdom that will not serve you will perish; it will be utterly ruined. (NIV)

David proclaimed the same idea:

Psalms 72:8-11 He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. 9 The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust. 10 The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts. 11 All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him. (NIV)

Take note of verse 12 in Isaiah's passage, and verse 9 in Psalms. They both show that all nations, kings, and people not following God — His enemies — will bow and perish. At this point in Revelation they've all perished in the Lake of Fire as we've already seen. A further detail about the bride arises from John's focus on the city having no day or night. No one any longer needs rest. God originally designed night for us because we needed physical rest in the present creation. This no longer applies in this Holy City, for all of us have entered God's eternal Sabbath of rest.

Hebrews 4:9-11 There remains, then, a Sabbath — rest for the people of God; 10 for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. 11 Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience. (NIV)

Revelation chapter 21 ends with further emphasis on the bride's purity:

Revelation 21:27 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. (NIV. The “whose names are written” is literally “who have been written” in the Greek.)

This new city is holy in every detail. While impurity is something that constantly affects believer’s day-to-day walk here and now, nothing impure will ever enter the new, whether fallen angel or sinner. God has permanently removed everything shameful and deceitful. Here saints find comfort that everything condemned to the Lake of Fire will never return and can never escape to cause trouble. The Lord’s bride is complete. She includes – for eternity – only those God set out to redeem, everyone an entry in the Lamb’s book of life.

In Revelation 21:27, John’s likely restating a passage of Isaiah once again:

Isaiah 52:1 O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. (NIV)

Only in this perfect Eternal City can God assure us, “Never again!”

Revelation 22:1-2a Then the angel (“angel” inserted for the Greek “he” by context of 21:9) 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. (NIV)

Chapter 22 is a continuation of the bride’s description. John again links this verse to the previous verses on the Holy City using “kai (and).”

In Revelation 21:6 God promises all that are thirsty they would drink from the spring of the water of life. Here in 22:1 we see the bride (the Holy City, the New Jerusalem) has a river of this water of life. Not only do we drink from the water of life coming from God, we have this water in excess, enough that it flows outward. The source of life for this Eternal City comes from God and the Lamb’s throne, meaning God himself. Note this throne is singular, one “throne,” because there’s one God (see John 14:20; 17:22). Further, in this imagery, water flows down the middle of the city’s great street, showing that living water is central to this city – specifically that God is central to this city. In this everlasting city, all roads lead to God (or better said, “the street” leads to God).

Earlier, in Revelation 7:17, God promised everyone coming out of the Great Tribulation (meaning all believers), that they would have the Lamb as their shepherd and He would lead them to springs of living water. Revelation now confirms this promise fulfilled in the Eternal City. In God’s original paradise, revealed in Genesis, a river of water flowed out of the Garden of

Eden, providing a source of natural life for the inhabitants. Here, in paradise restored, we have a spiritual river from which He nourishes everyone forever (and we'll never be thirsty again. See John 4:10-11; 13-14).

Zechariah's unique never-ending day portrays the same idea, a river of living water coming out from Jerusalem continuously ("summer and winter"):

Zechariah 14:7-9 It will be a unique day, without daytime or nighttime — a day known to the Lord. When evening comes, there will be light. 8 On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem, half to the eastern sea and half to the western sea, in summer and in winter. 9 The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name. (NIV)

This portrait of the bride shows fulfillment of Jesus' words that John recorded earlier:

John 7:37-39 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." 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. (NIV)

Based on these words, it's safe to view the river of life in this imagery as the Holy Spirit which comes from the Father and Son. Even as the Holy Spirit gives us life now, He continues to give the bride life for eternity. Without getting deep into Ezekiel, John's images appear similar to one that Ezekiel had about an end-times temple:

Ezekiel 47:1, 5-8 The man brought me back to the entrance of the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east (for the temple faced east). ... 5 He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in — a river that no one could cross. 6 He asked me, "Son of man, do you see this?" Then he led me back to the bank of the river. 7 When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. 8 He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea. When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh. (NIV)

Dispensationalists tie Ezekiel's passage to a yet unbuilt temple, needing construction on the present earth, often called the Millennial Temple, and see a new literal river with it. John's later



revelation shows their overall interpretation mistaken; later revelation must clarify earlier. As Revelation chapter 22 shows, John clearly ties this Ezekiel passage to the Eternal City and not a millennial reign on this present earth. Joel also speaks of this figurative river (Joel 3:18). Joel shows the river is figurative by saying it comes from the house of the Lord and waters the Valley of Shittim. Numbers 25:1 reveals Shittim is in Moab, forcing a literal river to flow across the Jordan River. This route would have both rivers merge, effectively destroying the Jordan, an event not hinted at in end-times imagery. Joel's wording shows this living water spreads from the Lord's temple to the rest of the world, represented by the Gentile Moabite lands.

Revelation 22:2b-3a 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. (NIV)

John refers to an item from the original paradise revealed in Genesis. The tree of life that God banned humankind from because of sin (Genesis 3:24), He has now implanted within the Holy City. The bride has eternal life rooted within her. There's no surprise the tree of life, growing in living water, bears fruit. The fact God makes us alive in Christ now, powered by His Holy Spirit, we bear fruit even now (Galatians 5:22). Revelation's wording shows the fruit of the spirit is part of the bride continuously – year-round. John's use of the phrase "every month," and twelve of them, uses present ideas rather than implying time limits in the new city. The phrasing merely stresses a continuous bearing of fruit that's always part of the bride.

Some try to force literal understanding of the phrase "And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." They have a problem. If healing is still necessary it implies continuing sickness, injury, and pain. Since God assured us that pain is gone in the new city's (the bride's) perfection, it shows the text has other meaning. The verse division here hinders proper interpretation. The sentence about healing belongs to this thought: "No longer will there be any curse." In fact, John's favorite word "kai (and)" joins the two sentences. Remember, John is describing the bride as she appears then and for eternity. God has removed the curse and healed the bride, a continuing state. Nothing from the curse remains and needs healing any longer because the curse is gone and everlasting healing has come. These leaves never wither and fall; they are part of the tree of life forever growing in living water.

This imagery of healing leaves comes from Ezekiel's vision. Using the later revelation to expand and clarify the earlier, we see Ezekiel's passage refers to the new city and not the Millennium as some claim.

Ezekiel 47:12 Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing." (NIV)

The last part, that "No longer will there be any curse," is John joining Ezekiel and Zechariah's visions of the end. Unfortunately a reader might miss this connection if reading only the NIV...

Zechariah 14:10-11 But Jerusalem will be raised up and remain in its place, from the Benjamin Gate to the site of the First Gate, to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the royal winepresses. 11 It will be inhabited; never again will it be destroyed. Jerusalem will be secure. (NIV)

The NASU provides a better understanding of the Hebrew text:

Zechariah 14:10-11 All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. 11 People will live in it, and there will no longer be a curse ["anathema" in Greek Septuagint; "cherem" in Hebrew], for Jerusalem will dwell in security. (NASU, square parenthesis for clarification)

#### **Definition**

Anathema – A Greek word meaning "accursed by God" or given over to God for His condemnation. The Septuagint uses this word for the Hebrew "Cherem."

Kathathema – A Greek word, used only once in the New Testament (Revelation 22:3), means the same except, by Kittel, "perhaps a sharper form" of "accursed by God" or "under a Divine curse."

Cherem [khay-rem] – OT:2764. A Hebrew word meaning an item or object or person awaiting complete destruction as something accursed by God (examples: Deuteronomy 7:26; Joshua 6:17-18; Malachi 4:6)

The Hebrew word in question here in Zechariah, "cursed (NASU)," becomes "anathema" in the Septuagint, namely something accursed by God. John uses a more pointed Greek word in Revelation, a rare related word found only in this one place in the New Testament,

“kathathema.” They’re equivalent to the Hebrew word “cherem” used throughout the Old Testament for items or objects or peoples accursed by God and needing destruction.

The curse of Genesis 3:17-19 is gone forever and no longer will God slate anything for destruction.

Revelation 22:3b-4 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. (NIV)

Though much stressed already, Revelation presents this wonderful idea once more: There is no longer a separation between God and humankind, God lives within the city (the bride) for eternity (Revelation 21:3). His throne is there. He rules from there (God and the Lamb having one throne, stressing the Lamb’s deity!). And, all comprising this bride are the King’s willing servants (as shown back in Revelation 7:15-17).

And (“kai,” as the Greek text joins this) “They will see his face”

Some have seen God in part, in veiled visions of heaven (such as Isaiah and John). Others saw God in the flesh of Jesus. Now there’s finally no reason that humanity cannot see God in all His fullness. In the Law, God told Moses:

Exodus 33:20 But," he [God] said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." (NIV)

God afterwards only allowed Moses to see Him in part (His back):

Exodus 33:23 Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen." (NIV)

Moses’ event matches what John stated in his earlier works:

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (NIV)

John 6:46 (Jesus said...) No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. (NIV)

1 John 4:12a No one has ever seen God (NIV)

Why did God keep people from seeing Him in all His fullness? The Bible clearly says:

Hebrews 12:14b without holiness no one will see the Lord. (NIV)

The holiness of God would consume us to look on Him in our present state of sinfulness, even as (justified) believers. God knew this and sent Jesus in a fashion that He could reveal God among sinful men (limiting His glory for a time) and, at times, revealing a greater portion of Himself to some. But, to see Him in His fullness and to look on His face awaits the end:

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (NIV)

Only when made perfect at the second coming of Jesus and at this presentation of His bride will people see God in His fullness, each spectator completed living human beings (body, soul, spirit). This is final restoration of fellowship waiting since it Adam and Eve lost it in the original paradise (the Garden of Eden).

“and his name will be on their foreheads.”

Again the text stresses that every person comprising this bride has the name of their Lord spiritually written on their foreheads (see also Revelation 14:1). Every single person there visibly belongs to God forever, citizens of the New Jerusalem.

Revelation 22:5 (kai “and”) 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. (NIV)

In repetition to Revelation 21:23 & 25, John again confirms that this is the unique day of Zechariah (14:7), the unending day. There will be no more night, so lamps aren’t needed. Further the sun itself is no longer needed because God, who made light, will now directly be the source of light for the bride.

This reemphasis of an unending day joins an idea in verse three, that God’s servants will serve Him. Consider an unending day, with no need of rest, or sleep, meaning that all of God’s servants will unendingly, continuously, without growing weary, serve Him always.

Other prophets foresaw, in part, this unending day, a day when God's people will "will reign for ever and ever":

Isaiah 60:19-21 The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. 20 Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. 21 Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. (NIV)

Daniel 7:18 But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever — yes, for ever and ever.' (NIV)

Daniel 7:27 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.' (NIV)

One argument often made for a future millennial reign on earth is that saints need lost people to reign over (Revelation 20:6). Saints reigning is not in question. Another New Testament passage:

2 Timothy 2:11-12 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. (NIV, see also Revelation 3:21)

Revelation 22:4 makes clear that saints can and will reign with Christ for eternity (even after the last wicked entity lands in the Lake of Fire). He doesn't provide detail to what this means, nor is it necessary. Simply put, the bride reigns with Christ for as long as He reigns, which is eternity. This reign starts now (see Romans 5:17), but more fully begins in the present heaven, as saints gather around the throne awaiting the resurrection (see Revelation 20:4-6).

Revelation 22:6 The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." (NIV)

The angel speaking with John stresses we can trust everything John has seen and heard; it's all true. To say it's true, since it encompasses the past, present, and future, says that it's promised by God, who planned it all from the beginning. This is Revelation's overall message that no one should miss. John testified that God sent him as witness of these events (Revelation 1:1-2). Now

the speaking angel uses similar wording to testify that God also sent him for similar purpose. God's witnesses represent earth and heaven.

The "soon take place (1:1; 22:6)" began way back in John's day and continues to the present and continues to the end, even the never-ending new beginning. This includes within it the promise that Jesus, Himself, is coming soon (3:11; 22:7, 12, 20), within God's timing and unfolding of all these planned events. God guarantees it. Remember God alone is the primary author of this book. Yes, John authored Revelation's Greek text based on contribution from angelic messengers combined with elaborate visions of coming events. It's God who prepared these messengers and the message they would bring. It's God who crafted John's visions. We can trust that John wrote exactly what God wanted us to know (see Revelation 19:9; 21:5).

Revelation 22:7 "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." (NIV)

Three times, here at the end of Revelation, Jesus himself stresses that He is coming soon (7; 12; 20). When the world's sins have piled up to heaven, the end will come (Revelation 18:5). In that day God's church will be complete and He will pour out His wrath on the wicked (Revelation 17). But this event, or series of events, is not the end; rather they bring a new beginning for the Bride (Revelation 21:1-5).

While we wait for Jesus' soon coming, there is a promise that spans all the time frame of this book:

"Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

God has blessed every one of His people. We're blessed now and we'll continue to be for eternity. How do we keep the words of the prophecy of this book? Worship God! God has sealed us and given His name on our foreheads. By His power we persevere, we endure, and we overcome. We don't take the mark of the beast, or worship the beast or the dragon, we come out from the great city, and we're part of the Holy City. God made it possible and He's working it out in us. Our state of blessing doesn't depend on ourselves. We're blessed because God blessed us, giving us the grace to follow Him.

While we experience God's blessed now, we still long for that soon coming of our Lord and that day when we can see God. An English word, from two Aramaic words, that expresses this is Maranatha (see 1 Corinthians 16:22 in Greek, plus early church usage in Didache 10.6 as part of the Lord's Supper). It means "Come, O Lord!" or "O Lord come!"

Revelation 22:8-9 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!" (NIV)

As John did at the beginning of Revelation (1:1-2), he does again – confirming that he was an eyewitness to all he recorded for God. He then confirms that he's human, a saint with unfinished sanctification and still prone to sinning, even as we are. He does so through recording a personal incident, his reaction to all that he saw and heard.

John overwhelmed at all he's seen shouldn't surprise us. We don't know how long the vision took, but the implication was that he saw all of this in one day (or a part of one day) – see Revelation 1:10. We have the luxury and privilege of studying this material over many days; image seeing all these events in a compressed time frame. I know I would fall down too.

And yet, John didn't fall solely from exhaustion, he fell down to worship the angel. Here's a disciple that knew Jesus, who worshiped God, and yet still blew it now. He knew better. Consider how many times we blow it because of circumstances even when we know the truth and we know what we should be doing or shouldn't be doing. Consider also, that this is the second time that John has made this exact mistake (see Revelation 19:10). It's a reminder to all believers. When we've failed, and thought we've learned from it, it's easy for temptation and failure to come in the same manner again.

We can take further warning from this incident. Regardless how good, or accurate, or holy appearing, the messenger, worship belongs only to God. Too often believer's put pastors or teachers or authors on pedestals encouraging people to bow at their feet. Worse still, far too many recipients want it, encourage it, or accept it. This Revelation angel has the only right response. In effect he said: What are you doing? Get on your feet and stand with me. You're a partner servant of God, serving alongside me and all the others who also serve God, and we should only be worshipping God (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9; Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8). Oh that all Christian teachers and leaders would have a matching response.

Revelation 22:10 Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. (NIV)

Daniel received visions that provided an outline of future empires between his time and the time of the (second) coming of Jesus Christ to unveil His everlasting kingdom. Daniel had wanted more details, especially about the last empire in his vision (Daniel 7:28) but learned it wasn't for him to know. In fact, God's angel told him:

Daniel 8:26 "The vision of the evenings and mornings that has been given you is true, but seal up the vision, for it concerns the distant future." (NIV)

Daniel 12:4 But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge." (NIV)

Daniel 12:9 He replied, "Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. (NIV)

Daniel's vision wasn't to make sense until the time of the end. It's at the beginning of this time of the end John receives a Revelation that expands on that vision and provides added details especially of the last empire. God now tells John to not seal up this expanded prophecy, because its time has begun. Revelation's details build on Daniel's (and other prophet's) earlier prophecies, providing important specifics for these last days.

The time is near – John reaffirms at Revelation's end what he said at the beginning (1:3). This named time spans from John's day until the end. Some events remain further away, yet decreasingly so as the end approaches. The nearness remains present and future until God completes all within this Revelation.

Revelation 22:11 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." (NIV)

John provides here a great contrast within a single statement, contrasting the course of the wicked to God's redeemed. The wicked will continue their wickedness (Proverbs 26:11; compare 2 Peter 2:22) in contrast to those enabled (by God) to do right and made holy. These latter will continue to do right and be holy (Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:15-16), and God commands each to do so. The Greek word "let" has two meanings and John uses it in both ways within this contrasting statement. For the wicked he uses it as "let him be," meaning they will remain as they are. For the believer he uses the word "let" as a positive command (as in "let the boy return," Genesis 44:33). For God's saints there's always a positive command to be obedient to Him.



Saints grow, sinners stay the same. (Some would argue that sinners *can* grow worse. I disagree. Though their sin's outworking can appear viler, all sin is vile and wrong. Every non-Christ centered thought and deed is fully that: vile and wrong. See Isaiah 64:6). Unquestionably, John intended his words to echo the message found near the end of the book of Daniel:

Daniel 12:10 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. (NIV)

This dichotomy isn't an excuse to not call the wicked to repentance. God wants that call proclaimed to the entire world (Mark 16:15; compare Ezekiel 18:32, in context of 18:30-32).

Revelation 22:12-16 "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." (NIV)

Jesus, himself, gives John several closing statements:

#1. Jesus stresses that He is coming soon to reward the righteous and the wicked for what they have done (see Matthew 16:27; 25:31-46; Romans 2:6; 1 Peter 1:17; Revelation 20:13). We remain ready and steadfast because His return is near. As we've seen this reward rests on what God alone has done by His unmerited grace. It's His righteousness, His plan, His enabled works. The reward is for all the righteous, not for any works that we hold personal claim to (see Isaiah 40:10). The wicked are different; their personal actions belong solely to them. They can lay claim to and accept the just reward for their deeds (see Psalms 28:4; plus the three Revelation references, 2:23; 18:6; 20:12-13).

Jeremiah 17:10 "I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve." (NIV)

I praise God that He has forgiven all conduct coming from me, and not Him, and it's all forgotten in that Day of Judgment!

#2. Jesus reaffirms His identity as Lord over all of history, from beginning to end. In chapter 1, God identifies Himself as the Alpha and Omega (1:8); here, clearly, Jesus claims this title as well, making Himself equal to God.

#3. Jesus reaffirms that those who wash their robes will live forever as part of the bride, the Holy City. Earlier revelation provides understanding. The robes were a gift given each by God (Revelation 6:11; 7:9-10; 7:13-14; 19:8) representing a righteous that came from God solely by His grace. He clothed saints in His righteousness. God's provision to His bride was foretold by the prophet Isaiah:

Isaiah 61:10-11 I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. 11 For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the Sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations. (NIV)

This brings to mind Jesus' words in Matthew:

Matthew 22:11-14 "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. 12 'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. 13 "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' 14 "For many are invited, but few are chosen." (NIV)

Notice God has restored to humankind the "right" to eat from the tree of life. This tree was originally in the first paradise, in Eden. When Adam & Eve sinned, God banned them and their offspring from eating of this tree because of sin (Genesis 3:22-24). God mercifully did not want sinful humanity to be able to live forever. Now with creation restored, and all remaining people free from sin forever, God restores this access. He makes it a right (meaning permanently), to eat of the tree and live forever. (See also Revelation 2:7; 22:2).

Believers can enter through the city's gates, into the city, because God also gives them that right. Their names appear in the Lamb's Book of Life, permanently giving them access to the city (Revelation 21:26-27).

#4. Jesus reaffirms that everyone who remains in their sin and wickedness has no part in eternal life and this Holy City. Once again, the text includes a representative list of sins (see the earlier list in Revelation 21:8). As is typical, the list isn't exhaustive; rather it portrays broad examples of the wickedness that is common in this world. First:

- Dogs – Dogs were commonly detestable creatures in Old Testament times, disgusting scavengers, something still common in much of the Middle East. (See 1 Kings 14:11; 2 Kings 8:13; Exodus 22:31; 1 Samuel 17:43; Proverbs 26:11). Figurative uses imply disgust. The Hebrew text calls male prostitutes dogs in Deuteronomy 23:18. Paul called Jewish legalists opposing him “dogs (Philippians 3:2).” This was Paul’s application of Jesus’ words in Matthew’s gospel. There the Son of God called those intractably (or stubbornly) opposed to the truth “dogs (Matthew 7:6).” Shortly after, Jesus made clear that these evildoers might externally appear as devoutly religious (Matthew 7:21-23). In summary “dog” is a disapproving euphemism for someone rejected because of their entrenched and unrepentant wickedness.

The contrast here comes from common Old Testament practice, continued in John’s day. Society banished their unclean outside the city gates. God has made clean the bride, who is inside the city (Revelation 19:7, 14).

We considered earlier the next four representative examples (see especially Revelation 21:8):

- Practice Magic Arts
- Sexually Immoral
- Murderers
- Idolaters

I think John’s last clause is satisfactory indictment all on its own:

- Everyone who loves and practices falsehood. Unbelievers act on the unregenerate state of their heart; they “love” dishonesty resulting in the “practice” of sins based on that falsehood. This explains why we see so many embracing ideas and sins that believers can see to be clearly harmful. The world loves a lie (the same reason they reject Jesus who is the Truth).

Together these examples provide a far-reaching warning from Jesus; God excludes those who love and practice these sins. Further they’re given as a caution, believers must personally be on

guard against embracing, accepting, or practicing any one of these (see Hebrews 2:1; 3:12; 4:11; 1 John 2:24; Revelation 3:3). It's also a reminder that believers need to take the truth to those surrounding us, to those still caught in these sins. We must take them the whole gospel of Jesus Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:10-11).

#5. Jesus reaffirms that it was His messengers who carried this message to John; the source of the message, directly or indirectly, was always God.

Revelation 22:16a "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. (NIV)

People cannot send angels, only God can. They are His messengers. This verse again stresses Jesus is God with a divine right to reveal this prophecy to His people. "To give you," in Greek the "you" is plural, which could read "To give you all." God gave this Revelation message to everyone in the church – past, present, and future. His testimony is for everyone reading and listening to this book (having received "ears to hear." See Revelation 2:7; 2:11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; compare Mark 4:3-20).

The reference to "the churches" reminds us God sent this message to the seven literal churches, in Asia, mentioned at the start of this book (Revelation 1:4). While they were seven historical churches, God selected them for a specific purpose, to characterize and represent the church of all history. Revelation's message remains a message for today's church and the future church until it's complete.

#6. Jesus confirms that He alone has the right to rule in the line of David. He's the eternal king and the bright Morning Star.

Revelation 22:16b "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." (NIV)

This association with David draws attention to Jesus as being the prophesied Messiah from the line of that ancient Jewish king. An Old Testament prophecy of Isaiah specifically calls for the Messiah to come from this line. Notice Isaiah's prophecy has within its greater context references about the new heaven and earth (note especially verses 6-10, a description of the "place of rest" – this eternal Holy City):

Isaiah 11:1-10 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. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. 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. (NIV, also Isaiah 53)

Revelation's reference to Jesus being the bright "morning star" directs the reader to this prophecy of the Law:

Numbers 24:17-19 "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. 18 Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong. 19 A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city." (NIV)

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter uses the term "morning star" to refer to Christ:

2 Peter 1:19 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. (NIV)

Jesus himself promised every believer, every overcomer, that they would receive the "morning star." His words to the church at Thyatira:

Revelation 2:26-28 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. (NIV. Verse 27 quoting Psalms 2:9, in the context of Psalms 2:7-9, a messianic prophecy).

The true morning star is far different from the counterfeit pretender to God's throne and one who believes that he can "be like the Most High" by his own power and efforts (see Isaiah 14:12-15).

If we accept the non-inspired additions to the text found in red-letter bibles, such as the NIV, ESV, and HCSB, they have Jesus stop speaking at the end of verse 16. And yet, verse 17 starts (continues) with John's typical joiner "and (Greek 'kai')."

Revelation 22:17-20a 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." (NIV)

It's Jesus who continues to speak, revealing what the Spirit says, and fully knowing what the entirety of the Bride will say. This is a threefold call to "Come!" It comes from Jesus, the Spirit, and the Bride (the completed Church). The focus of continuing this threefold call is individual. Yes, the completed church says "Come!" but every individual (in the church) who hears the message of this book ("let him who hears") is personally to take the same message to the world (including friends, family, associates, etc.).

Mark 16:15-16 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (NIV)

Matthew 28:19-20 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." (NIV)

Luke 14:21-23 "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 22 "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' 23 "Then

the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. (NIV)

Romans 10:14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? (NIV)

The text tells us who will respond to the threefold call to come:

Revelation 22:17b Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

Every person God has made alive by His Spirit (Ezekiel 37:4-14) hungers and thirsts for righteousness. (In contrast, during spiritual famine, consider Amos 8:11-12)

Matthew 5:6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. (NIV)

John 4:14 [To the woman at the well] 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." (NIV)

Acts 13:48 When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed. (NIV)

Every God-made-alive person will come and drink of the free gift of the water of life. Notice how differing translations stress that this gift is free.

Revelation 22:17 And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. (ESV, the NASU uses "without price" as "without cost," the KJV provides a single word "freely.")

An earlier scene in heaven told us God's people throughout history would drink of this water, all led their by their Lord:

Revelation 7:14-17 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. 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. 16 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." (NIV)

Consider how this fulfills these earlier words of the Psalmist and Isaiah:

Psalms 107:4-9 Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. 5 They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. 6 Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. 7 He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. 8 Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men, 9 for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. (NIV)

Isaiah 55:1-3 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. 2 Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 3 Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. (NIV)

This same imagery appeared back in chapter 21 of Revelation:

Revelation 21:6-7 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. (NIV)

The threefold final call to "come" still resonates. Returning to that call in verse 17:

Revelation 22:17a The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" (NIV)

John clearly attaches this statement (verse) to the words immediately prior (using "kai," "and" in English). Yet, rather than seeing the words of Jesus immediately prior (verses 12-17) as leading into this call to come, some look at this in a different way. They see Jesus' proclamation that He is coming soon (verse 12) and then see this later statement as the Spirit and the Bride



responding to that “come,” with an echoed “Come!” The text’s wording allows for this, making the next words, “Whoever is thirsty, let him come (Revelation 22:17b),” the start of a new thought. Greek’s lack of punctuation leaves this ambiguous (and more so for those ignoring the preceding “kai”). Unquestionably Revelation and the entire New Testament include both ideas, the church’s call for Jesus to return and the church calling the world to come.

I see the greater context showing these words are all part of one message from one source – one call to “Come!” Consider also the following words. Ignore the artificial divisions of red-letter Bibles, who typically leave verse 18 in black, even as verse 17 has Jesus speaking. It’s best to understand verses 18 and 19 as Jesus still speaking. This makes all the words from verse 16 until the “Surely I am coming soon,” in verse 20, all one continuous statement directly from Jesus. With the book almost at a close, He specifically gives a warning:

Revelation 22:18-19 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 [Greek “plege”] 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. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

In common with all Scriptures, Revelation is truth from God. God’s people will treasure (Psalms 119:11), embrace, and protect it (Colossians 3:16; Psalms 1:1-3). They understand that it did not come about by human will (2 Timothy 3:16). And human inclination cannot add to it or revise it (2 Peter 1:20-21; John 15:7; John 17:17; 1 John 2:24). In fact, believer’s love of God’s truth is in direct contrast to all those identified earlier (Revelation 22:15) “everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

**Definition**

Plege [play-gay] – A Greek word meaning “a wound” or “a blow” or “a calamity.”

It is only nonbelievers, those who do not love the truth (2 Thessalonians 2:10), who perish and never find share in the tree of life and this Holy City. They remain residents of the great city and go to its fate. The final “plague (Greek: plege)” of this book is the eternal lake of Fire.

Every person who is part of the Holy City, with a share in the tree of life, embraces God’s word because it comes from God and reveals Him. A people that love Him will love His word:

John 10:27-30 My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. 30 I and the Father are one." (NIV)

John now records Revelation's last words directly from Jesus:

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." (NIV)

Jesus repeats this message from Revelation 22:12, for emphasis, as this is an incredibly important statement that provides a great hope for God's church. And yes, the meaning of the word translated "soon" is "quickly, without delay, right away, or in a short time." Preterists resolve their understanding of this term by turning Jesus' return into something that happened back in A.D. 70, without any bodily return. And, yet, better understanding using the book's full context looks to this last-days period as "what must soon take place (Revelation 1:1)." This completed vision fulfills all John encompassed in this period, spanning from the time of Christ until the end. This is the context that defines Jesus' saying He's coming soon. His return will be in the timing Revelation reveals, following completion of every detail.

As I previously said, God did not give Revelation to enable us to figure out when Jesus' return will be. Revelation's purpose is to encourage the church to stay faithful, knowing that God has blessed them. It confirms God will punish the wicked, allowing saints to rest in the assurance that God planned everything from the beginning.

We don't know when everything will be complete. We do know that, with certainty, Jesus will return for His bride. Therefore we echo John's recorded response to Jesus' statement (whether his words or that of the bride, of which he is part): "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus." The "Amen" opens this statement with a word that expresses "God's will be done." And, to be honest, we long that Jesus' return happens sooner than later. Yes, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Revelation 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. (NIV, similar in ASV)

Revelation's last words are John's brief benediction (or blessing) on those whom God gave this book: "His servants," the church! Even as God gave this book to His people, it's only to His people He gave the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this we rest. This message of the book of Revelation is testimony to God's grace from beginning to end.

Other translations present verse 21 as...

Revelation 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. (NASU)

Revelation 22:21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen. (KJV, NKJV)

Revelation 22:21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen. (HCSB, WEB)

Is correct wording “with God’s people,” or “with you all,” or “with all the saints,” or “with all?” Manuscript variants support, to some degree, all of these wordings. Later Latin Vulgate manuscripts support the KJV and NKJV phrasing. One significant Greek manuscript (A) and some early Latin manuscripts support the NASU wording. The NIV/ASV have support of a couple early manuscripts (S and one Latin). The HCSB/WEB, by far, has the most supporting manuscripts: 046 051supp 94 1006 1611 1854 2053 Maj syr(h) syr(ph) and Coptic.

The specific context of this statement comes from the overall text; it’s a message made to those known to be recipients of God’s grace, the Bride. The call to “Come,” while widely proclaimed worldwide, belongs only to those whom God has given a hunger and thirst for righteousness (verse 17). It’s they who “continue to be holy (verse 11). “All the saints” and “God’s people” equally express John’s meaning and intent of this passage’s focus. In translations where it’s omitted, replaced with a seemingly universal “you all” or “all,” the context confines its meaning to only God’s people, all the saints. I’ll say it again; all of scriptures testify the only recipients of God’s grace are His people, the Bride.

“Amen.” God’s will be done. In a book revealing God’s plan for the ages, this theme is Revelation’s primary message – God will finish all He set out to do. The word “Amen” doesn’t end verse 21 in some translations. It is missing from some important early manuscripts (including A 1006 1841 and even some early Latin). The TEV, NEB, NET, CJB and CEV omit it. Most later manuscripts include it (for example: S 046 051 94 1611 1854 2053, most Latin Vulgate, Syriac, and Coptic). KJV, ASV, RSV, NASU, NIV and ESV include it. Many scholars feel it a more probable addition than an accidental omission. One Coptic manuscript helps their assertion as it doubly says “Amen. Amen.” If amen is originally present, it’s compatible with the whole book’s message and this section in particular. If amen was originally absent, it’s undeniably implied by the tenor of the entire book. God’s will, unquestionably, will be done.

### **Addendum**

#### **Old Testament prophecies of the Land interpreted by the New Testament**

Some Old Testament prophecies appear specific to “the land” of geographic Israel. Unquestionably some are, made certain by their fulfillment (now history). Others passages aren’t what they superficially seem. New Testament use clearly shows those texts (directly or by context) to have a fuller connotation and significance. These make “the land” equivalent to “the earth,” and “Zion” or “the City of the Lord” a reference to the finally revealed “New Jerusalem.”

A person reading or hearing the original prophecy, in the Old Testament, might naturally apply those passages to themselves and their land. They unknowingly saw only a near fulfillment of the broader truth that God would eventually make clear (through Jesus and His apostles). In these cases the New Testament clearly becomes the final basis for understanding the full intent of the Old. In God’s progressive revelation, He delivers added clarification and information over time. These past shadows have greater meaning for the church (as part of the mystery now revealed in Jesus Christ. See Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 3:2-11).

Example:

Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 "Honor your father and mother"-which is the first commandment with a promise— 3 "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth." (NIV)

God shows this promise has greater or fuller meaning. Ephesians clarifies the following passage for the whole church (beyond those living in Israel’s physical land):

Deuteronomy 5:16 "Honor your father and your mother, as the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the Lord your God is giving you. (NIV)

Even in the Old Testament, Isaiah gives a prophetic clue that spiritual Israel would be far more than just one physical nation and land. As part of a message pointing to the church’s time and, indeed, to this creation’s end, Isaiah makes this statement:

Isaiah 60:14 The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you; all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the City of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. (NIV)

While a Jew living in Israel might have immediately associated Zion and the City of the Lord with Jerusalem, Isaiah makes clear more is in view:

Isaiah 60:18-21 No longer will violence be heard in your land, nor ruin or destruction within your borders, but you will call your walls Salvation and your gates Praise. 19 The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. 20 Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end. 21 Then will all your people be righteous and they will possess the land forever. (NIV)

This is a view of the New Jerusalem, spiritual Zion! Notice how it ends... “All your people (will) be righteous” and “they will possess the land forever.” This is a message that Jesus applied as He proclaimed the beatitudes:

Matthew 5:5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. (NIV)

This was Jesus doing the same Paul did in the earlier example, showing this Old Testament promise to have a far greater meaning. Jesus’ words specifically clarified not only Isaiah’s passage but also those of David:

Psalms 37:9-11 For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. 10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace. (NIV)

Jesus’ words showed this Davidic psalm to have a far greater meaning intended for the church, spiritual Israel. This isn’t to say the church replaced Israel and the promises made to her. Rather this clarification shows God intended the greater promises for greater Israel (or spiritual Israel or believing Israel) to which He grafted in believing Gentiles. He shows these promises, though seemingly limited to the land or nation of Israel in the past, have a much broader scope when applied to the believers spread over the earth following Jesus’ first coming.

Ephesians 2:14-16 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two (Jews & Gentiles) one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in this one body to

reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. (NIV, parenthesis mine for clarification)

For God's one people; there's only one country, one city, still in view that we long for:

Hebrews 11:13-16 All these people (some living in Israel, some not) 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 (even if living in Israel). 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own (beyond geographic Israel). 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 (spiritual Israel, the new heavens and earth). Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (the Holy City, the New Jerusalem). (NIV, parenthesis mine for clarification)

## **Symbolism of Clouds**

Literal (rain) clouds:

Genesis 9:13, 14, 16 (associated with rainbows)  
1 Kings 18:44-45 (rain clouds, end of drought)  
Job 7:9; 30:15 (showing temporary)  
Job 20:6 (picturing the height of the sky)  
Job 26:8-9; 36:27-29 (rain clouds)  
Job 37:11-16; 38:9, 34, 37 (rain clouds)  
Psalms 135:7; 147:8; 148:8 (rain clouds)  
Proverbs 3:20; 8:28; 16:15; 25:14 (rain clouds)  
Ecclesiastes 11:3-4; Isaiah 18:4; 25:5 (rain clouds)  
Isaiah 44:22; 60:8; Jeremiah 10:13; 51:9, 16 (rain clouds)  
Ezekiel 1:28; Zechariah 10:1 (rain clouds)  
Luke 12:54 (rain clouds)

Literal (smoke) clouds:

Judges 20:38-39 (associated with battle)  
Isaiah 14:31 (associated with battle)  
Ezekiel 8:11 (offering incense)

Figurative clouds:

Job 3:3-6 [In contrast to a time of figurative light or celebration] "May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, 'A boy is born!' 4 That day — may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. 5 May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light. 6 That night — may thick darkness seize it; may it not be included among the days of the year nor be entered in any of the months. (NIV)

Ecclesiastes 12:1-5 [As an illustration of growing old] Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"— 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; 3 when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; 4 when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; 5 when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. (NIV)

Isaiah 5:30 [Illustrating the gloom of battle in coming judgment] In that day they will roar over it like the roaring of the sea. And if one looks at the land, he will see darkness and distress; even the light will be darkened by the clouds. (NIV)

Isaiah 45:8 "You heavens above, rain down righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness grow with it; I, the Lord, have created it. (NIV)

Lamentations 2:1 How the Lord has covered the Daughter of Zion with the cloud of his anger! (NIV)

Ezekiel 38:9 You and all your troops and the many nations with you will go up, advancing like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land. (NIV)

Ezekiel 38:16 You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land. In days to come, O Gog, I will bring you against my land, so that the nations may know me when I show myself holy through you before their eyes. (NIV)

Hebrew 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (NIV)

Jude 12 These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm — shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted — twice dead. (NIV)

Clouds announcing God's presence (literal clouds, but maybe not rain clouds):

Exodus 13:21, 22; 14:19, 20, 24 (pillar of clouds)

Exodus 19:9 The Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you." Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said. (NIV)

Exodus 19:16; 24:15, 16, 18; 33:9, 10

Exodus 34:4-7 So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the Lord had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. 5 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. 6 And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." (NIV)

Exodus 40:34-38

Leviticus 16:2 The Lord said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. (NIV)



Numbers 9:15-22; 10:11-12, 34

Numbers 11:24-25 So Moses went out and told the people what the Lord had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and had them stand around the Tent. 25 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took of the Spirit that was on him and put the Spirit on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did not do so again. (NIV)

Numbers 14:14; Deuteronomy 1:33; 4:11; 5:22; 31:15

Judges 5:4-5 [Poetic in the Song of Deborah and Barak] "O Lord, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water. 5 The mountains quaked before the Lord, the One of Sinai, before the Lord, the God of Israel. (NIV)

2 Samuel 22:10-14 [Poetic in the Song of David] He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. 11 He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. 12 He made darkness his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky. 13 Out of the brightness of his presence bolts of lightning blazed forth. 14 The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. (NIV)

Nehemiah 9:12, 19; Job 22:14; Job 35:5

Psalms 68:4 Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds — his name is the Lord — and rejoice before him. (NIV)

Psalms 77:17; 78:14; 99:7; 105:39

Jeremiah 4:11-13 At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told, "A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward my people, but not to winnow or cleanse; 12 a wind too strong for that comes from me. Now I pronounce my judgments against them." 13 Look! He advances like the clouds, his chariots come like a whirlwind, his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! We are ruined! (NIV)

Matthew 17:1-5 After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. 2 There he was transfigured

before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. 3 Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus. 4 Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." 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!" (NIV, also Mark 9:2-7; Luke 9:28-35)

1 Corinthians 10:1-2

Clouds representing God's dwelling place:

Isaiah 14:12-15 [Showing Satanic arrogance to believe that he can be equal to God] How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! 13 You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain. 14 I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High." 15 But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit. (NIV)

Daniel 7:13-14 "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. (NIV)

Clouds associated with the Lord's glory (not necessarily rain clouds, possibly clouds associated with fire):

Exodus 16:10 While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the Lord appearing in the cloud. (NIV)

1 Kings 8:10-13 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. 11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled his temple. 12 Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud; 13 I have indeed built a magnificent temple for you, a place for you to dwell forever." (NIV)

2 Chronicles 5:13b-6:1 Then the temple of the Lord was filled with a cloud, 14 and the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the temple of God. 6:1 Then Solomon said, "The Lord has said that he would dwell in a dark cloud (NIV)

Psalms 97:1-6 The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad; let the distant shores rejoice. 2 Clouds and thick darkness surround him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne. 3 Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side. 4 His lightning lights up the world; the earth sees and trembles. 5 The mountains melt like wax before the Lord, before the Lord of all the earth. 6 The heavens proclaim his righteousness, and all the peoples see his glory. (NIV)

Isaiah 4:2-6 In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel. 3 Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem. 4 The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire. 5 Then the Lord will create over all of Mount Zion and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day and a glow of flaming fire by night; over all the glory will be a canopy. 6 It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day, and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain. (NIV)

Ezekiel 1:4-6, 26-28 I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north — an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, 5 and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, 6 but each of them had four faces and four wings. ... 26 Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. 27 I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. 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. (NIV)

Ezekiel 10:3-4 Now the cherubim were standing on the south side of the temple when the man went in, and a cloud filled the inner court. 4 Then the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple, and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord. (NIV)

Clouds associated with God in judgment:

Numbers 12:4-10 At once the Lord said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. 5 Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, 6 he said, "Listen to my words: "When a prophet of the Lord is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. 7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. 8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" 9 The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them. 10 When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam — leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; (NIV)

Numbers 16:42-48 But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the Tent of Meeting, 44 and the Lord said to Moses, 45 "Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once." And they fell facedown. 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. Wrath has come out from the Lord; the plague has started." 47 So Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. 48 He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. (NIV)

Job 37:11-16 [Elihu's view of God using literal rains and clouds in judgment] He loads the clouds with moisture; he scatters his lightning through them. 12 At his direction they swirl around over the face of the whole earth to do whatever he commands them. 13 He brings the clouds to punish men, or to water his earth and show his love. 14 "Listen to this, Job; stop and consider God's wonders. 15 Do you know how God controls the clouds and makes his lightning flash? 16 Do you know how the clouds hang poised, those wonders of him who is perfect in knowledge? (NIV)

Isaiah 19:1-4 An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the Lord rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt. The idols of Egypt tremble before him, and the hearts of the Egyptians melt within them. 2 "I will stir up Egyptian against Egyptian — brother will fight against brother, neighbor against neighbor, city against city, kingdom against kingdom. 3 The

Egyptians will lose heart, and I will bring their plans to nothing; they will consult the idols and the spirits of the dead, the mediums and the spiritists. 4 I will hand the Egyptians over to the power of a cruel master, and a fierce king will rule over them," declares the Lord, the Lord Almighty. (NIV)

Isaiah 30:27-30 [In judgment on Assyria, both smoke and rain clouds]. 27 See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. 28 His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray. 29 And you will sing as on the night you celebrate a holy festival; your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes to the mountain of the Lord, to the Rock of Israel. 30 The Lord will cause men to hear his majestic voice and will make them see his arm coming down with raging anger and consuming fire, with cloudburst, thunderstorm and hail. (NIV)

Lamentations 3:44 [During Israel's time of judgment]. You have covered yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can get through. (NIV)

Ezekiel 30:1-4, 17-19 The word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, prophesy and say: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "'Wail and say, "Alas for that day!" 3 For the day is near, the day of the Lord is near — a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations. 4 A sword will come against Egypt, and anguish will come upon Cush. When the slain fall in Egypt, her wealth will be carried away and her foundations torn down. ... 30:17 The young men of Heliopolis and Bubastis will fall by the sword, and the cities themselves will go into captivity. 18 Dark will be the day at Tahpanhes when I break the yoke of Egypt; there her proud strength will come to an end. She will be covered with clouds, and her villages will go into captivity. 19 So I will inflict punishment on Egypt, and they will know that I am the Lord.'" (NIV)

Ezekiel 32:1-10 In the twelfth year, in the twelfth month on the first day, the word of the Lord came to me: 2 "Son of man, take up a lament concerning Pharaoh king of Egypt and say to him: "'You are like a lion among the nations; you are like a monster in the seas thrashing about in your streams, churning the water with your feet and muddying the streams. 3 "'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "'With a great throng of people I will cast my net over you, and they will haul you up in my net. 4 I will throw you on the land and hurl you on the open field. I will let all the birds of the air settle on you and all the beasts of the earth gorge themselves on you. 5 I will spread your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your remains. 6 I will drench the land with your

flowing blood all the way to the mountains, and the ravines will be filled with your flesh. 7 When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. 8 All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign Lord. 9 I will trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring about your destruction among the nations, among lands you have not known. 10 I will cause many peoples to be appalled at you, and their kings will shudder with horror because of you when I brandish my sword before them. On the day of your downfall each of them will tremble every moment for his life. (NIV)

Joel 2:1-11 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand — 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. 3 Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste — nothing escapes them. 4 They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. 5 With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. 6 At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. 7 They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. 8 They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. 9 They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows. 10 Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 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? (NIV)

Nahum 1:2-6 The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies. 3 The Lord is slow to anger and great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm, and clouds are the dust of his feet. 4 He rebukes the sea and dries it up; he makes all the rivers run dry. Bashan and Carmel wither and the blossoms of Lebanon fade. 5 The mountains quake before him and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at his presence, the world and all who live in it. 6 Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered before him. (NIV)

Zephaniah 1:14-18 "The great day of the Lord is near — near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. 15 That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, 16 a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. 17 I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. Their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. 18 Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth." (NIV) [The last verse can legitimately be translated "of all who live in the land." This ambiguous statement could refer to the land of Judah or the whole earth].

Revelation 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. (NIV, read to verse 6)

Revelation 14:14-16 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. (NIV)

Clouds associated with God in judgment and His protection of His people:

Psalms 18:9-17 He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet. 10 He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind. 11 He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky. 12 Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced, with hailstones and bolts of lightning. 13 The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. 14 He shot his arrows and scattered [the enemies], great bolts of lightning and routed them. 15 The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of breath from your nostrils. 16 He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. 17 He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. (NIV)

Ezekiel 34:12 As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. (NIV)

Clouds associated with God's majesty (and protection of His people):

Deuteronomy 33:26-29 [In the Blessing of Moses on Israel] "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. 27 The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, 'Destroy him!' 28 So Israel will live in safety alone; Jacob's spring is secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew. 29 Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places." (NIV)

Psalms 104:1-4 Praise the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty. 2 He wraps himself in light as with a garment; he stretches out the heavens like a tent 3 and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters. He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind. 4 He makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants. (NIV)

Based on these examples, some questions and answers:

Question: Does every passage speaking of God coming in the clouds refer to the end of the world or the rapture? Answer: No

Question: Must every passage speaking of Jesus coming in the clouds refer to the world's end or the rapture? Answer: No

Question: How can readers know specifically what's in view? Answer: Context. (And following the rules of Scriptural interpretation)

Understanding specific end-times "cloud" passages:

Revelation 1:7 Look, he [Jesus] 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. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)



Preterists and some partial Preterists (PP) claim the immediate sense and setting of this passage is before Jerusalem's destruction and focused on only God's judgment of Israel. While legitimately stressing God sent this passage in history to specific churches, they claim that *only* those people are the focus of the passage.

Historically, for most of church history, the church understood the Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation following the temple's destruction. Modern Preterists (and many PP) casually dismiss this history, as if it could never be, claiming:

- 1) An already destroyed temple would automatically have John mentioning or alluding to this significant event in his book. They stress that other period Jewish apocalyptic literature (ranging from 200 BC – 100 A.D) commonly deals with current events and assume the Book of Revelation would follow suit.

“If John had recorded his gospel after the destruction of Jerusalem and its centerpiece, the temple, he could not have failed to reference the most apocalyptic event in Jewish history.” (The Apocalypse Code, Hank Hanegraaff)

- 2) References in the Book of Revelation to the temple have to be in regards a temple still standing in Jerusalem (especially Revelation chapter 11).
- 3) Revelation's major symbolism must deal with and find understanding only through people, places, and events, already known to the immediate recipients of the letter. Revelation's “soon” statements must place those events in the immediate future of the first recipients of the letter.

“If Revelation was written before AD 70, it is reasonable to assume that the vision given to John was meant to reveal the apocalyptic events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem – events that were still in John's future but are in our past.” (The Apocalypse Code, Hank Hanegraaff)

The church's long-standing dating of Revelation commonly pointed to a statement by an early church father. Through Irenaeus, the church long held that John wrote Revelation after the fall of Jerusalem in the reign of the Roman Emperor Domitian (who ruled AD 81-96). Preterists, out of hand, dismiss Irenaeus as being “the fountain of tradition.” But, consider Irenaeus' history. He lived from 130 to 202. He was a church leader in Europe (the area that is now Lyon, France), originally from Smyrna in Asia Minor, and a disciple of Polycarp (who was originally a disciple of the Apostle John). He called his preeminent work, completed around 180, “Against Heresies.”

On this basis the church should not lightly dismiss his testimony. While Irenaeus, like any human author, could make mistakes, his goal was to find and express truth and he was reporting on the best information available to him shortly after these events. We don't find any other early writers contradicting him on this, something expected if there was widespread alternate understanding.

Preterists say that Irenaeus got it wrong; John was writing before Nero's death in 68 (and that Nero is who the number 666 or 616 refers to). They then wrap many other events in Revelation around Nero and the era's Roman Empire. This makes Revelation's major prophecy one fulfilled almost immediately (perhaps a few years after John's writing), namely Jerusalem and its temple's destruction.

Preterists also point to another document contemporary with Irenaeus, the Muratorian Fragment. This Muratorian Canon provides a list of New Testament books accepted as canonical by the church dating to around 170. In the fragment it states "Apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor John, writes by name to only seven churches." Since Paul dies around 67, calling John a predecessor to Paul meant that John had to have written before 67. Yet, contrary to Preterists, this is not conclusive. The writer may have called John Paul's predecessor not over when Paul last wrote, but over John being an Apostle before Paul.

Take note that Nero's persecution wasn't widespread outside Rome. Domitian's persecution of Christians spanned the whole empire. It's more probable John would have run afoul of Domitian than he would have Nero, John not spending much time in Rome (unlike Paul). Also, conditions at the churches John wrote to imply a passage of time since their founding. Remember Sardis was now dead with a reputation of being alive, Ephesus had lost its first love, and Laodicea was now lukewarm. In conclusion, I find no reason to reject Irenaeus' testimony or force a supposedly needed earlier date on Revelation.

Understanding Revelation 1:7...

The text addresses this passage the churches of Revelation (real churches in Asia Minor during John's day. See Revelation 1:4).

After referring to Jesus coming with the clouds, the text says...

- A. "every eye will see Him"
- B. "even those who pierced him"
- C. "all peoples of the earth will mourn because of him"

Preterists say the phrase “those who pierced him” constrains the “every eye.” This makes people alive at Jesus crucifixion, or of that generation, the only ones immediately in view. The final phrase “all peoples” then means only the people of the known world, still alive in that day, who hear of Jerusalem and the temple’s destruction.

Contrary to Preterists, the direct statements (beginning in Revelation 1:11) to individual churches needn’t be only to them. John’s words in Revelation 1:7 may also legitimately apply more broadly without violating any rule of Scriptural interpretation. It takes multiple presuppositions to dismiss the direct sense of the words in this passage.

- A. “Every eye will see him.” Unless a person claims death to be a reason someone can’t see Him, this passage allow for the possibility that all humans who ever lived will. The Preterist binds this statement to that which is naturally physically possible. They limit it only to the people in Jerusalem (when the city and temple fell), because anyone outside it would not personally see His judgment (but, perhaps, only hear about it). Most Preterists allow for a slightly broader interpretation, including those who hear about these Jerusalem events, as a need means of making it relevant to the Asian churches of Revelation. If their interpretation allows for merely hearing, it’s easier to apply John’s words to every person once alive, all who will surely know of God’s judgment in the end. Unquestionably, geography doesn’t constrain the “every eye.” The immediate context clarifies this – “all peoples of the earth.” (See more on this clarifying phrase below, in C). A few passages showing that every eye will see God (believer and lost): Job 19:26-27; 1 John 3:2; Jude 14; Revelation 20:11-15; Revelation 22:4
- B. “Even those who pierced him.” This means what it says; “every eye (A)” and “all peoples of the earth (C)” includes people who crucified Jesus. In a physically literal sense this has to include the Roman soldiers alive at the time Jesus. Some broaden these words to mean anyone involved with His crucifixion, as the Preterist do for all alive in Jesus’ day. Yet, nothing restrains it from meaning every single person, past and present, all spiritually responsible for His death. Even the apostle Peter held everyone present at Pentecost responsible for Jesus’ death (regardless if physically present at any specific event).

Acts 2:36 "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." (NIV) [See also Acts 4:10, regarding the rulers]

Unless death is a certain limiter to verse seven’s “every” and “all,” it makes this specific clause’s scope irrelevant. The text could equally point to the soldiers who pierced Jesus

himself, or every human (all responsible for Jesus' death). The rest of Revelation, the New Testament, and the Old Testament all do not make death a necessary limit to seeing God.

- C. "All peoples of the earth will mourn because of him." If the Preterist is correct, this clause belongs only to people alive near the time John wrote. Though it's possible to limit two clauses, "every eye (A)" and this "all people (C)," to the first century, the third clause (B) is a stretch. The Preterist's focus on a natural physical fulfillment, for consistency, turns the middle clause into those soldiers who directly pierced Jesus. Absence of evidence narrowly restraining the first and final clauses allows broader interpretation, especially finding unity in all three clauses. As already said, they presume the middle clause strictly limits all three clauses to only those still alive in the first century. Their continuing presuppositions somehow hold that this last clause would be relevant to the people receiving this letter. It's a major stretch claiming the "all people" to only be chiefly about Israel's inhabitants and perhaps secondarily about people then alive outside the region, those happening to hear of what took place.

In reality, how many Gentiles living in Asia Minor would care about God's judgment on Israel or Jerusalem, a city they barely know about? Believers alone might have some cause for concern. And even if concerned, would someone objectively describe their reaction as mourning or "wailing (another translation of the word "kopsontai")"?

If John merely used the word "phule (foo-lay)", translated as "peoples", someone might make a case for a limited mourning. The New Testament uses that word for Israel's "tribes" (see Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:30). It's the correct word if John's focus was Israel's tribes mourning. But the continuing clause, "all peoples of the earth," broadens his focus. Even if limiting this mentioned group to the known earth or the Roman world, again, what care does most of the Roman world have over destruction of an out-of-the-way Roman province and regional temple? Most of the people this encompasses wouldn't use the word "mourn" to speak of their reaction. Rather, the word might be "celebrate" or "rejoice", even as Rome held a celebratory parade featuring captives and bounty captured from the city and temple. This evidence, together, points to a wider meaning for our Revelation passage. It directs us to a fulfillment encompassing all the cities written to, immediately and afterwards, a fulfillment touching every person alive then and now.

In fairness, Preterists claim to use Scriptures to interpret Scriptures for Revelation 1:7. They point to Matthew 24-25 as a primary passage providing understanding for this later writing.

Matthew 24:1 Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down."

Literal fulfillment of Jesus' words took place A.D. 70. The Roman army, under Titus, leveled the temple mount after burning the temple itself.

Matthew 24:3 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?"

To the Preterist, this three-part query is one unified question. Though joined by the word "kai (and)", with the disciples perhaps thinking all three topics related, it's probable Jesus was answering three separate questions...

- #1. When will this [the temple's destruction] happen?
- #2. What will be the sign of your [Jesus'] coming?
- #3. What will be the sign of the end of the age?

The word translated age "aion" doesn't mean "world" (normally Greek "kosmos" referring to people) or "occupied earth" (Greek "oikoumene"). "Aion" focuses on a time period. It can mean a long period or elapse of time. For example:

- The time period before Christ's coming (1 Corinthians 10:11)
- Time periods after Christ's coming (Ephesians 2:7; Hebrews 6:5, 2:5; i.e. until the end of the world, eternity future)

Preterists assume the time period in view was the Old Covenant arrangement which they have ending at the temple's destruction. Yet, elsewhere in Scriptures, the end of the Old Covenant focuses on the coming of Christ (His birth) or on His death and resurrection, both completed well before the temple's physical destruction.

There's no question Jesus's response following these questions answers the first question about signs related to the temple's destruction. Yet, Jesus also answered the second (#2) and third (#3) questions. Question number two could have a twofold meaning. Specifically, the question is "which coming?" Jesus (God) came in judgment on the Jews, their city, and their temple. But there's no need to limit Jesus' answer to only that event, especially since the third

question could also imply the end of the age that began with Christ's first coming (a period already underway).

Matthew 24:4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you.

Jesus directs this warning to the disciples listening, but not, as Preterists claim, excluding those followers coming later. While Jesus unquestionably wanted the immediate listeners to be on guard, His intended application was that all future listeners be on guard as applicable. His words allow for a near and far fulfillment.

Matthew 24:5-8 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.

Nothing in Jesus' words, to this point, were unambiguous or event unique. He didn't give these as specific signs that a person could check off and know certain fulfillment (contrary to many Dispensationalists). Instead, Jesus was saying that events would continue as they had before. Wars had been happening worldwide for millennia, so too nations fighting other nations. Famines had been taking place in various locations (including Israel) since the book of Genesis. Earthquakes, small or large, were a fact of life in the region. And Jesus was saying these events would continue to happen. Even people claiming to be the Messiah had been around for years before Jesus publicly came on the scene (referenced in Acts 5:36-37). Even Jerusalem and the temple's fall didn't stop these. The Bar Kokhba revolt in 132-136 was by a figure who had Messianic ambitions: Simon Bar Kosiba. A Jewish Rabbi renamed him Bar Kokhba (and He accepted this name). It means "son of a star," the rabbi believing Simon a fulfillment of Numbers 24:17, "A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel." Again, Jesus was saying that this wouldn't change.

Matthew 24:9-13 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. 10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, 11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

Intertwining of Jesus' coming in judgment of Israel with worldwide end times leads to reasonable assumption there's a double fulfillment in view. These words would have direct

meaning and application for the immediate hearer (“you”) but also those following later during the final fulfillment.

History records that *some* false prophets came on the scene in Israel in the years that followed Jesus and before God enabled Rome to destroy the temple. “Many” doesn’t always mean a multitude; greater numbers than few is “many.” So Jesus’ statement *could* apply to that nearby time frame. Yet, take note, far more false prophets have arisen since and they have kept (and will keep) on appearing until the final return of Jesus. Many apostles (the specific “you” in Jesus words) died for their faith, but not all (notably John). Jesus’ statement is a general warning that amid continuing life filled with wars, false Messiahs and fake prophets, some of those listening would die for their faith... And that continued possibility will exist to the end (until Jesus’ final return).

Not only does the Bible allow for (and use) double fulfillment (meaning something fulfilled relatively soon that is a type or symbol of a later complete fulfillment), it also shows split fulfillment. In split fulfillment thoughts appear broken midstream with a portion fulfilled at one time, the rest at a later time – yet apart from the later fulfillment there was little way to know this for sure. Jesus himself provided a great example of split fulfillment:

Luke 4:16-21 He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 18 [Here quoting Isaiah 61:1-2a] "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." [End quote mid-sentence] 20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, 21 and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (NIV)

Now, for comparison, see what Jesus left out by stopping mid-sentence. The balance of Isaiah’s words is clearly events continuing at a future time.

Isaiah 61:1-7 The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, 3 and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a

crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. 4 They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. 5 Aliens will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. 6 And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast. 7 Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs. (NIV)

Take note that this prophecy alternates between using “they” and “you” (contrast even verses 4 and 6). Verse 6, which is looking to the future continued fulfillment, coming after Jesus’ time on earth, still uses “you.” It does so though the “you” (and “your” of verse 5) is not referencing the immediate listeners of Isaiah’s message. Preterists, that argue that “you” must always reference the immediate listeners, are on shaky ground since the evidence of prophetic Scriptures shows otherwise.

The “you” in verse 9 of our passage in Revelation can mean the immediate listeners *and* future listeners. God’s word is unique in this, because God knows and accurately reveals the future; He can make His word apply to people spanning time as if they were immediately present.

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

With twin events in view, namely the more imminent judgment on Israel and the future judgment on the world, the words “then the end will come” can have double meaning. Similarly the “gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations” has probable double meaning.

The Greek word translated “world” is “oikoumene [NT:3625].” John could have chosen other words specifically to mean the whole earth, yet contrary to our limited English substitute, John used an intentionally ambiguous word. One common use of the word referenced only the Roman world (something the Preterist’s raise, excluding all other meanings). For example:

Luke 2:1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (NIV. “Roman world” representing this one Greek word.)



Acts 17:6-7 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other brothers before the city officials, shouting: "These men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here, 7 and Jason has welcomed them into his house. They are all defying Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king, one called Jesus." (NIV)

Acts 19:27 There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited, and the goddess herself, who is worshiped throughout the province of Asia and the world, will be robbed of her divine majesty." (NIV)

Acts 11:28 One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) (NIV. "Roman world" representing this one Greek word.)

Yet, Greek writers use the same word to mean the entirety of the world, far exceeding the borders of the Roman world. For example:

Romans 10:17-18 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. 18 But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world." (NIV)

The word "world" here means the entirety of the earth, as shown by looking at the word and context of the quoted Old Testament passage:

Psalms 19:1-4 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. 2 Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. 3 There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. 4 Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world. (NIV)

Other New Testament passages also show this broader meaning:

Luke 4:5-7 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." (NIV)

If the Preterist is correct in their strict interpretation, “world” must mean “Roman world.” This makes the Devil’s offer to Jesus narrowly limited – only the Roman world. Such a narrow view would impact other passages. For example, Hebrew’s writer would claim only the Roman world is subject to Jesus...

Hebrews 2:5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. (NIV, see also Hebrew 1:6)

Again, Matthew’s chosen word is ambiguous in meaning. It’s equally able to refer to the Roman world and the world as a whole – this enables Matthew’s passage to intertwine a dual fulfillment throughout.

Matthew 24:15-20 "So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel — let the reader understand— 16 then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. 17 Let no one on the roof of his house go down to take anything out of the house. 18 Let no one in the field go back to get his cloak. 19 How dreadful it will be in those days for pregnant women and nursing mothers! 20 Pray that your flight will not take place in winter or on the Sabbath.

Jesus referred people to Daniel’s prophecy speaking of an “abomination that causes desolation”, spoken of in Daniel 9:27, Daniel 11:31 and Daniel 12:11, with the condition “let the reader understand.” In echoing Daniel, Jesus was saying the readers who needed to understand this would, not necessarily every reader. This portion of Jesus’ prophecy appears focused on those living in Judea. Christians living in Jerusalem during the siege leading to the fall of Jerusalem in 70 believed these words applied to them. A prophet in the first century church (about 67 A.D.) raised this application. All Jerusalem believers heeded his warning, afterwards fleeing into the mountain range (Mountains of Gilead) northward to Pella. God spared everyone who fled to Pella what happened at Jerusalem!

But the people of the church in Jerusalem had been commanded by a revelation, vouchsafed to approved men there before the war, to leave the city and to dwell in a certain town of Perea called Pella. And when those that believed in Christ had come thither from Jerusalem, then, as if the royal city of the Jews and the whole land of Judea were entirely destitute of holy men, the judgment of God at length overtook those who had committed such outrages against Christ and his apostles, and totally destroyed that generation of impious men. (Eusebius: Church History 3.5.3)

Such fulfillment doesn't make Preterists correct about everything. Claiming Daniel chapter 11 refer only to Nero – and that such an interpretation is clear – is untrue and misleading. Hosts of believers, modern and throughout church history, have viewed Daniel's prophecy to look towards a future Antichrist. Two commentary excerpts on Daniel 11:37 (through verse 45 for the second)...

Daniel previously had described this person (chaps. 7 and 9) and expected the reader to recognize him without an introduction. He is none other than the "little horn" of Dan 7 and "the ruler who will come" of Dan 9:26. He is known in the New Testament as "the man of lawlessness" (2 Thess 2:3-12), the "antichrist" (1 John 2:18), and the "beast" (Rev 11-20). Interpreting this passage to foretell Antichrist has been a widely accepted view since ancient times (e.g., Chrysostom, Jerome, Theodoret), and Young rightly calls this "the traditional interpretation in the Christian Church." Almost sixteen hundred years ago Jerome declared: "Those of our persuasion believe all these things are spoken prophetically of the Antichrist who is to arise in the end time." [Jerome, Daniel, 129] Today the majority of both amillennial (e.g., Young) and premillennial (e.g., Archer) scholars interpret this king to be Antichrist. In reality a description of Antichrist should not be considered surprising in a context with Antiochus IV, for both of these oppressors of God's people have previously been given a prominent place in Daniel's prophecies (cf. chaps. 7-9). Thus Gabriel had now ceased to speak of Antiochus and had begun to describe the one he closely resembled (or typified), the eschatological Antichrist. (from The New American Commentary)

11:37-38 Antiochus IV viewed himself as a god, as his nickname "Epiphanes" ("[god] manifest") and coinage made clear (see note on Dan 8:25). But it is doubtful that he fulfilled the prophecy, he shall magnify himself above all. He abandoned the gods of his fathers, including Apollo, and showed no regard for the one beloved by women, probably the god Adonis or Dionysius. Instead, he worshiped Zeus, a god who embodied military strength, but all these gods were still in the Greek pantheon and thus there is some question as to whether Antiochus IV abandoned "the gods of his fathers." Instead this person will worship the god of fortresses (i.e., of military power and might) and will spend lavishly (gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts) to support this strength.

11:39 The passage probably speaks of a future king who will be a larger and more ultimate version of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, one who will truly "do as he wills," will deal with the strongest fortresses, and will make his followers rulers over many. Many interpreters see here another prediction of the Antichrist, whom they connect to the

“little horn” of ch. 7 and the ruler of 9:26 who is to come. The NT has been taken as referring to him in various ways (“the man of lawlessness,” 2 Thess 2:3-12; “antichrist,” 1 John 2:18; “the beast,” Rev 11-20).

11:40-41 At the time of the end there will be a major battle where armies will come from the north and the south to attack this powerful ruler in the land of Israel (the glorious land). Edom and Moab and the main part of the Ammonites will escape from his hand, possibly because of their connection with Israel or because they are out of his way.

11:44-45 One striking difference between Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Antichrist lies in the events surrounding the king’s death, which do not fit what is known of the death of Antiochus IV. He met his end during a relatively minor campaign against Persia in 164 B.C., not between the sea and Jerusalem after a grand and successful assault on Egypt. When compared to the precision of fulfillment of the previous verses of ch. 11, these verses may be looking for a greater fulfillment that is yet to come at the time of the end. the glorious holy mountain. This is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which perhaps here should be connected to the fall of the Antichrist in the battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev 16:13-16). (from ESV Study Bible, English Standard Version®)

Daniel’s words, in part, fit some now historical figures. I believe this was intentional, allowing for nearer partial fulfillment and a final far fulfillment, one Jesus now reveals more fully.

Most of the Book of Daniel focused on what awaited Israel – as Daniel wrote this book to Israelites specifically. Yet a portion concerned Israel’s end, the day when there’s only one true Israel of God (Jew and Gentile). In contrast, John wrote the Book of Revelation chiefly to the Gentile church (though, in reality, one church comprised of Jew and Gentile). It’s mostly focused on what’s coming for the entire church until the end.

Matthew 24:21-22 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now — and never to be equaled again. 22 If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.

Verses 21 and 22 continue referencing the Book of Daniel...

Daniel 12:1-3 "At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of

nations until then. But at that time your people — everyone whose name is found written in the book — will be delivered. 2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. (NIV)

Preterists dismiss what appears a clear statement about a general final resurrection, claiming it can't be, based on their understanding of Matthew 24. Regardless of their semantic games, Daniel 12's clear wording looks to a final judgment. This too implies that Jesus has a double meaning in view as He spoke the predictions of Matthew 24. Preterists' interpretation may be correct on one issue arising from this passage. Jesus' words showing intensity, "great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now — and never to be equaled again," could be hyperbole.

Joel 2:1-2 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand — 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. (NIV)

Ezekiel 5:9-12 Because of all your detestable idols, I will do to you what I have never done before and will never do again. 10 Therefore in your midst fathers will eat their children, and children will eat their fathers. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds. 11 Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, because you have defiled my sanctuary with all your vile images and detestable practices, I myself will withdraw my favor; I will not look on you with pity or spare you. 12 A third of your people will die of the plague or perish by famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with drawn sword. (NIV)

Zechariah 13:7-9 "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me!" declares the Lord Almighty. "Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones. 8 In the whole land," declares the Lord, "two-thirds will be struck down and perish; yet one-third will be left in it. 9 This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'" (NIV)

Continuing in Matthew 24...

Matthew 24:23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it.

“At that time” or “then” (both valid translations of the Greek word “tote”); meaning at the mentioned time of great distress spoken of in the previous verses. The Preterist claims these events all occurred before A.D. 70. The futurist moves them all to the future. Yet considering the dual fulfillment of this intertwined passage, both near future (for the original readers) and far future are in view. Did false Christ’s arise before A.D. 70? As already mentioned, there were some false Messiahs. There’s unquestionably been far more since, so Jesus’ warning has long-term application, with a yet final application associated with the still coming end.

Sadly, even now, people still ignore Jesus’ warning and are ripe for following false Christ’s – and I’m not talking only about people outside the church. Most people outside the Christian church have no concern about any Christ. Within the church, hosts of people rush off around the world to find a Christ experience. They hear that there’s special revival or possible (or advertised) outpouring of God’s spirit somewhere in the world and they have to go – because, of course, Jesus is there. (The “Toronto Blessing” and the Laughing Revival at the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church or the Brownsville Revival in Florida are prime examples). They offer the “miracles” or spectacles associated with such events as proof they’re from God. Jesus is not a geographic sensation – He meets us where we are. Revival comes to whomever God chooses regardless of where they are. In fact, even at Jesus’ final physical return there’s no command for believers to gather in one spot in one country or place in the world. It’s Jesus who will gather His people from wherever we are.

Jesus now further clarifies the “false prophets” of verse 11:

Matthew 24:24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect — if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time.

Not every false prophet is a false Christ, but every false Christ is a false prophet. As already mentioned, people falsely claiming to be the Messiah came on the scene even in Jesus’ day – and have been coming on the scene with irritating regularity in the two millennia since. The false prophet not claiming himself Messiah, or Jesus, or God, distorts the truth or presents lies as truth to lead people to a Messiah, or God, or Jesus, they have created. Declared miracles and supernatural signs are a frequent hallmark of their claimed proof they speak for God. And

people clamor after these experience and spectacles: “How can someone who does miracles not be from God?”

In our western thinking it’s easy to dismiss all such self-proclaimed miracle workers as mere charlatans who have faked their supernatural-appearing events – and unquestionably many have. But, this passage of Scriptures implies the best (or should I say, the worst) of them may do supernaturally enabled actions beyond human explanation. Regardless – and this warning belongs to God’s church – believers mustn’t fall to this deception. Even the apostles never said “follow me because of my miracles” – they said “search Scriptures” and follow the One who fulfilled them. The final test for any prophet of God is God’s word. Saints are to test, by God’s word, the message any claimed prophet brings.

I’ve adapted the following section from my Bibleistrue.com article, on prophets and other sign givers, called “If I only had a sign!” (Originally at [www.bibleistrue.com/qna/qna54.htm](http://www.bibleistrue.com/qna/qna54.htm))

Since God gives a prophet the incredible task of revealing Him, several points became important:

1. God had to call or send the prophet.

Jeremiah 1:4-5 The word of the LORD came to me, saying, 5 "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (NIV)

2. If the message wasn’t perfectly true (God’s word without error) it could never reveal the one true God.

Jeremiah 1:6-7 "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." 7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. (NIV)

3. The prophet’s words were a message from God, making the people responsible to obey it.

Deuteronomy 18:19 If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. (NIV)

4. Since prophets weren't part of an office or institution (for example, the priesthood), appearing only as needed, God had to provide a means to know that they were His prophets.

We need to further define point four. Not surprisingly, early in Israel's history, God set up a means of testing a prophet, to prove if he or she was a prophet of God. (And yes, Biblically speaking, though rarer, there were prophets who were female as well. Consider: Exodus 15:20, Judges 4:4, 2 Kings 22:14, Nehemiah 6:14, Luke 2:36)

Deuteronomy 13:1-5 If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, 2 and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," 3 you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. 4 It is the LORD your God you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commands and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. 5 That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery; he has tried to turn you from the way the LORD your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you. (NIV)

### Thoughts

- The test of a prophet must his message (doctrine), not the sign or wonder. God allows false signs and wonders to test us.
- A false prophet wasn't to get a "second chance." During the time of the Mosaic law God assured this by having the false prophet put to death. Even when God's people couldn't carry out this death sentence He held them responsible to never again listen to such an individual. In New Testament times, where the church no longer has the civil authority for such punishment, the same admonition to count as dead such a false teacher still applies. (Though the church isn't under Mosaic Law, God restates or alludes to portions of it in the New Testament. On prophecy, the New Testament implies continuing the Old Testament tests already in place since God assigns no new test or standard when He warns the church to beware of false prophets.)

Immediately following a verse which stresses that it is important we listen to true prophets of God, He gives more of a prophet's test.



Deuteronomy 18:19-22 If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. 20 But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death." 21 You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" 22 If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him. (NIV)

### Thoughts

- Some prophets presume to speak in God's name, though they aren't (whether intentionally or through self-deception).
- There are no second chances for false prophets
- Along the God-given earlier test to judge the prophets' doctrine, the prophecy's result is also in view. If the prophecy does not happen or come true, the person is a false prophet.

Specific prophecies were the norm in the Biblical example. Even when God gave prophecies with far future fulfillment, they had very specific fulfillment. If a prophet or prophetess only gave far future prophecies their hearers could only test them by their teaching without the second test, the result of the prophecy. Since God put these Biblical tests in place, knowing how easily false-prophets could misled by using only far-future prophecies, He also provided His prophets more immediate signs (or short-term prophecies) that would be testable.

It makes sense that God would want the twin test applied, making the prophet subject to the testimony of two or more witnesses. Believers only accept the prophet's word when the testimony of both witnesses is true.

Deuteronomy 19:15b A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. (NIV)

Of course, Jesus will never say or proclaim anything that is against His revealed word (He's the perfect Prophet!). This is clear test for any pretended Messiah as well. And the text implies further test for self-proclaimed Messiahs. Continue with the next few verses:

Matthew 24:26 "So if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. 27 For as lightning that comes from

the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 28  
Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.

Matthew's text joins warning to not follow false Christ's with Jesus' statement that says there will be no need to go anywhere to see Jesus on His return. He will make himself seen, even as lightning appears across the sky's entirety. The Preterist says that Jesus' return in judgment on Israel fulfilled this (with God's destruction of Jerusalem and temple in A.D. 70). And we could view that past event in type, or partial fulfillment. Yet, for the believer living in a remote part of Europe or Asia in those days wouldn't this imply the exact opposite of the statement previously made. For those believers scattered around the Roman world, this wouldn't be saying "don't go to such-and-such a place." A localized fulfillment in Judea would be saying to the far-removed elect, you must go to Judea or Jerusalem to see fulfillment of Jesus' return.

While A.D. 70 events may have been partial fulfillment, I believe the intertwined response Jesus gave had a final – and universal – fulfillment also in view.

Matthew 24:29 "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.'

Other passages in Scriptures use language similar to Matthew:

Isaiah 13:1-17 An oracle concerning Babylon that Isaiah son of Amoz saw: 2 Raise a banner on a bare hilltop, shout to them; beckon to them to enter the gates of the nobles. 3 I have commanded my holy ones; I have summoned my warriors to carry out my wrath — those who rejoice in my triumph. 4 Listen, a noise on the mountains, like that of a great multitude! Listen, an uproar among the kingdoms, like nations massing together! The Lord Almighty is mustering an army for war. 5 They come from faraway lands, from the ends of the heavens — the Lord and the weapons of his wrath — to destroy the whole country. 6 Wail, for the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty. 7 Because of this, all hands will go limp, every man's heart will melt. 8 Terror will seize them, pain and anguish will grip them; they will writhe like a woman in labor. They will look aghast at each other, their faces aflame. 9 See, the day of the Lord is coming— a cruel day, with wrath and fierce anger — to make the land desolate and destroy the sinners within it. 10 The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light. 11 I will punish the world for its evil, the wicked for their sins. I will put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and will humble the pride of the ruthless. 12

I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. 13 Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger. 14 Like a hunted gazelle, like sheep without a shepherd, each will return to his own people, each will flee to his native land. 15 Whoever is captured will be thrust through; all who are caught will fall by the sword. 16 Their infants will be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses will be looted and their wives ravished. 17 See, I will stir up against them the Medes, who do not care for silver and have no delight in gold. (NIV)

This passage is unquestionably, immediately, about God pronouncing soon coming judgment on Babylon in Isaiah's day. In similar style to Jesus' words in Matthew 24 & 25, there are portions of Isaiah worded in such a way they could (and likely do) apply to a far future day of judgment. This final event is a more universal judgment. (See especially verses 9-11, and the use of the word "world" (OT:8398) in the latter verse. This word appears 36 times in the Old Testament, almost always referencing the whole world [see Psalms 9:8; Jeremiah 10:12]. It's arguably occasionally speaking of the inhabited world [see Proverbs 8:31 in KJV or NKJV]).

A few chapters later, Isaiah returns to pronouncing God's coming judgment on the whole earth (again using the same word for "world" use in 24:4)...

Isaiah 24:1-23 See, the Lord is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants — 2 it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor. 3 The earth will be completely laid waste and totally plundered. The Lord has spoken this word. 4 The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the exalted of the earth languish. 5 The earth is defiled by its people; they have disobeyed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. 6 Therefore a curse consumes the earth; its people must bear their guilt. Therefore earth's inhabitants are burned up, and very few are left. 7 The new wine dries up and the vine withers; all the merrymakers groan. 8 The gaiety of the tambourines is stilled, the noise of the revelers has stopped, the joyful harp is silent. 9 No longer do they drink wine with a song; the beer is bitter to its drinkers. 10 The ruined city lies desolate; the entrance to every house is barred. 11 In the streets they cry out for wine; all joy turns to gloom, all gaiety is banished from the earth. 12 The city is left in ruins, its gate is battered to pieces. 13 So will it be on the earth and among the nations, as when an olive tree is beaten, or as when gleanings are left after the grape harvest.

14 They raise their voices, they shout for joy; from the west they acclaim the Lord's majesty. 15 Therefore in the east give glory to the Lord; exalt the name of the Lord, the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea. 16 From the ends of the earth we hear singing: "Glory to the Righteous One." But I said, "I waste away, I waste away! Woe to me! The treacherous betray! With treachery the treacherous betray!" 17 Terror and pit and snare await you, O people of the earth. 18 Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit; whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare. The floodgates of the heavens are opened, the foundations of the earth shake. 19 The earth is broken up, the earth is split asunder, the earth is thoroughly shaken. 20 The earth reels like a drunkard, it sways like a hut in the wind; so heavy upon it is the guilt of its rebellion that it falls — never to rise again.

21 In that day the Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above and the kings on the earth below. 22 They will be herded together like prisoners bound in a dungeon; they will be shut up in prison and be punished after many days. 23 The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously. (NIV)

In Ezekiel, similar language appears over a specific and immediately coming judgment (by the Babylonians, see Ezekiel 32:11):

Ezekiel 32:3-11 "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: "With a great throng of people I will cast my net over you, and they will haul you up in my net. 4 I will throw you on the land and hurl you on the open field. I will let all the birds of the air settle on you and all the beasts of the earth gorge themselves on you. 5 I will spread your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your remains. 6 I will drench the land with your flowing blood all the way to the mountains, and the ravines will be filled with your flesh. 7 When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light. 8 All the shining lights in the heavens I will darken over you; I will bring darkness over your land, declares the Sovereign Lord. 9 I will trouble the hearts of many peoples when I bring about your destruction among the nations, among lands you have not known. 10 I will cause many peoples to be appalled at you, and their kings will shudder with horror because of you when I brandish my sword before them. On the day of your downfall each of them will tremble every moment for his life. 11 "For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "The sword of the king of Babylon will come against you. (NIV)

In Joel, a warning for a relatively immediate event uses similar language, but shortly afterward in the passage, so too does a passage which concerns a later time.

Joel 2:1-11 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand — 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. 3 Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste — nothing escapes them. 4 They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. 5 With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. 6 At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. 7 They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. 8 They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. 9 They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows. 10 Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 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? (NIV)

Joel 2:28-3:21 'And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. 29 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. 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. 32 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.

3 'In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, 2 I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. 3 They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink. 4 'Now what have you against me, O Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done. 5 For you took my silver and

my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples. 6 You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland. 7 'See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your own heads what you have done. 8 I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away.' The Lord has spoken.

9 Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. 10 Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, 'I am strong!' 11 Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord! 12 'Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, 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!' 14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. 15 The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 16 The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. 17 'Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her. 18 'In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias. 19 But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood. 20 Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations. 21 Their bloodguilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon.' The Lord dwells in Zion! (NIV)

A portion of this latter passage of Joel referred to the days following Jesus' death and resurrection (see Peter's words at Pentecost: Acts 2:17-21). Yet, there's more to the passage which follows (which Peter did not include in his day) which still awaits fulfillment. "In those days and at that time (verse 3)" (or verse 18's "In that day") must belong to a later time frame.

Minor prophet, Amos, warns those who long for "the day of the Lord." His warning may concern more immediate judgment on Israel, but it also equally applies to the final day of the Lord (especially for those who trust in self-righteousness, as was Israel in his day).

Amos 5:18-20 Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light. 19 It will be as though a man fled

from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. 20 Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light — pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness? (NIV)

Amos 8:9-12 "In that day," declares the Sovereign Lord, "I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight. 10 I will turn your religious feasts into mourning and all your singing into weeping. I will make all of you wear sackcloth and shave your heads. I will make that time like mourning for an only son and the end of it like a bitter day. 11 "The days are coming," declares the Sovereign Lord, "when I will send a famine through the land — not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord. 12 Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the Lord, but they will not find it. (NIV)

Amos' indistinct "In that day (8:9)" allows this latter passage to apply to any "day of the Lord," whether one immediately imminent or much farther off.

Zephaniah, while earnestly calling Judah to repentance, warned of a soon coming "day of the Lord." As with Amos, he described it as a dark day. While it could apply to a coming judgment specifically on the remnant of Israel, the passage ends with wording invoking a far greater and final "day of the Lord." If applied only to the former people, Zephaniah's words would be a great hyperbole. Yet, for the worldwide nature of Revelation events (see Revelation 6:12-17), it's far more likely God intended Zephaniah's words to also have a far future final fulfillment as well.

Zephaniah 1:14-18 "The great day of the Lord is near — near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. 15 That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness, 16 a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers. 17 I will bring distress on the people and they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord. their blood will be poured out like dust and their entrails like filth. 18 Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to save them on the day of the Lord's wrath. In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden end of all who live in the earth." (NIV)

In summary, considering all the similar use of cloud and judgment imagery, it serves to show the wording itself is intentionally ambiguous. Jesus intentionally drew on past wording that

could have immediate connotation as well as a secondary and more future meaning. This allowed His words to have direct meaning for those listening (especially about the temple) and yet still answer the added question applying to the end.

Matthew 24:30-31 "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.

Yes, Jesus coming "on the clouds" is language that means He is coming in judgment (in heavenly authority, as in the book of Daniel 7:13). But must we limit His words to only God's judgment in A.D. 70? The "at that time," in verse 30, refers readers to statements made previously, meaning when God fulfills those earlier words. If there's dual fulfillment in view in the preceding words there's potentially dual fulfillment in these words too. It's fair to recognize partial fulfillment leading up to 70, with God's rescue of the early church from Jerusalem and the following destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. It's a stretch to accept full fulfillment of these words in that localized event.

Consider these statements:

- "all the nations of the earth will mourn" (verse 30)
- "they will see the Son of Man coming" (verse 30)
- "gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heaven to the other" (verse 31)

Claiming "all nations of the earth" mourned in 70 is a stretch. Yes, some lamented the destruction, even outside Israel most in the Roman world celebrated and commemorated the fall of Jerusalem and the Jew's defeat.

Some point to professed supernatural signs witnessed in Jerusalem and Judea (as reported by first century historian Josephus) as proof the AD 70 events fulfill this prophecy. Yet, the "nations" didn't see these signs, unless counting the few represented by Roman armies surrounding the city. "They will see the Son of Man coming" refers to the "all the nations" in the words immediately preceding. Did all the nations "see" what happened in Jerusalem? Again, apart from nations represented by the Roman legions, most of the Roman world, at best, heard about it but didn't directly see. The primary sense of the Greek word translated "see" ("optanomai") is physically to see, to have appeared, or to witness with one's own eyes. For



comparison, we have more than fifty New Testament examples to pick from. Consider meaning in the same book:

Matthew 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. (NIV)

Matthew 28:7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." (NIV)

If this word becomes merely hearing about events or people, other promises in Matthew would sound hollow. In the beatitudes Jesus would be assuring the pure in heart they heard about God. In the second example, the angel was sending a message to the disciples that they would hear about Jesus rather than see Him. Preterists don't go that far. In practice they only allow general meaning for end-times prophetic use and this without any reason other than their belief the passage must read this way.

Preterists point to later statements of Jesus to confirm their belief that Matthew chapter 24 must only have an immediate fulfillment.

Mark 14:62 "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (NIV)

Matthew 26:64-65 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (NIV)

Again, all these statements can have dual fulfillment, applying a more immediate coming in judgment and end of times fulfillment. This is no different in Revelation 1:7, which they also try to limit to A.D. 70...

Revelation 1:7 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. (NIV)

Unquestionably, every eye, including those who sat in judgment on Jesus in Mark 14 and Matthew 26, will behold Jesus in that final Day of Judgment. The "you will see" doesn't mean that they have to still be alive (as Preterists assert), for alive or dead all will see! Preterists make the word "soon," or statements of "you will see," the most important phrases in all eschatological (end-times) passages. Their appearance then forces reinterpretation of all other

surrounding words. This reinterpretation comes in various forms, sometimes turning other words to allegory or glossing over them to force phrases to only mean being close in time.

This brings us to God gathering His elect from the four winds, from “one end of heaven to another.”

Matthew 24:31 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. (NIV)

This passage has nothing to do with a rapture or Jesus’ return in Preterist understanding. But, figuratively, they concede a future or continuing fulfillment, not relegating it to full fulfillment around A.D. 70. One Preterist summary exposition of this passage:

Now Jesus tells us that following the destruction of Jerusalem, the messengers or "angels" or the gospel will take that gospel *worldwide*, to gather his elect, the body of Christ, the "people of God" (1 Peter 2:9-10). (“Matthew 24:31,” Tekton: The Olivet Discourse: Preterist Exegesis)

Here the angels are merely human messengers of the gospel; the trumpet call is symbolic of trumpet calls used in the Old Testament to gather God’s people. They allow natural meaning for “four winds” and “one end of the heavens to the other,” representing the whole world. The word “gather” is symbolic in their view, merely meaning that all believers are “gathered” into the Messianic kingdom not literally and physically brought together.

A simpler and straightforward understanding of this passage allows it to be part of Jesus’ answer speaking of the end. Here God’s angels gather all of God’s elect (meaning the entirety of the church, Jew and Gentile) to be forever physically with the Lord.

John 14:1-4 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going." (NIV)

1 Thessalonian 4:15-18 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. 18 Therefore encourage each other with these words. (NIV)

Revelation 21:3 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. (NIV)

Earlier in Matthew, Jesus explained one of His parables which had God gathering His church at the end of the age. If only a first century event, human messengers are harvesters and those separating the good from the bad. (This sounds like a Roman Catholic view of the authority of the church which they used to justify tormenting and killing those they called heretics).

Matthew 13:36-43 Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field." 37 He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. 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. 40 "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. 41 The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. 42 They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (NIV)

There's a far more direct and natural understanding of this passage: The angels are God's supernatural servants, the end of the age is the end of time, and separating and judging the righteous and wicked is the final judgment (see Revelation 20:11-15). And, if so here in Matthew, we presume similar use later in the book, unless more immediate context proves otherwise (which it doesn't).

"Why would Jesus give a potentially ambiguous and hard to understand answer to the disciples in Matthew 24?" Before moving on, into the next (and related) chapter in Matthew, we must consider the whole idea of Jesus using parables. Jesus' answer to His disciples is in keeping with a continuing practice, His constant use of speaking in parables.

Matthew 13:34-35 Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable. 35 So was fulfilled what was spoken through

the prophet: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world." (NIV)

Mark 4:33-34 With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. 34 He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything. (NIV)

Jesus didn't use parables to make clear what He was saying. So often I've heard people say that Jesus used parables, "word pictures," to make ideas easy to understand. According to Scriptures this isn't so. Jesus used parables, that were superficially common and understandable, to teach deep and hard to understand ideas. That's why Jesus needed to explain them to even His disciples. In fact, Jesus used parables so only those supposed to understand would (as enabled and taught by God). In using a dual fulfillment answer, one intertwined with answers to all three of the disciple's questions that began chapter 24, Jesus spoke to them and us in a parable. God then reveals the answer, the parable's meaning, to His appointed people (those He intends to understand the message). Believers leading around A.D. 70 understood their part, we can look back and see this too, but the greater fulfillment still waits. To those who live in the final days as this last fulfillment approaches, I believe God will give an even greater understanding to how it applies directly them.

This brings us to an often controversial passage:

Matthew 24:32-35 "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.

Dispensationalists use this passage to claim that they can predict the generation of the Lord's return as soon as they have enough signs in place. When Israel became a nation again in 1948, they widely held this as the start date for the generation that would see fulfillment of Jesus' return. In fact, many then claimed a Biblical generation was 40 years, having Jesus return by 1988. These false prophets (or, in the least, bad interpreters of Scriptures) have been proven wrong and many updated parts of their claim. The 1948 date was sacrosanct so it was easy to alter a generation's length. Some now hold it means 70 years. Since this date is close, as I write, I'm sure (if the Lord hasn't yet returned) this will likely become "until the last person is alive from 1948." About 120 years after 1948 they will need to revise, or explain away, this

entire hallmark of Dispensationalism. (I'm won't live to see this... but if the Lord comes back before then I'll be happy to say that I'm wrong).

Opposite date-setting Dispensationalists, we have date-setting Preterists. Their date was A.D. 70. They claim that if Jesus didn't come back in A.D. 70, while those of the generation who heard Jesus speak these words was still alive, then Jesus was a false prophet. We must answer this question: What generation was Jesus speaking about?

The word translated generation is worth considering. The Greek word is "genea." It's modified by the Greek word "houtos", translated as "this generation" or "the same generation." The word "genea" literally means "a space of time", a very broad word. It's used of a defined generation. This was typically 100 years by Old Testament Jewish use (contrast Genesis 15:16 with Exodus 12:40, 41) or 3 generations in a hundred year period (loosely 33-year generations) by common Greek use. It's further used of genealogical lines of descendants or ancestors (some would say "race").

Was Jesus saying the Jewish race wouldn't disappear until God fulfilled this prophecy? Some Dispensationalists speculation has this view as the correct interpretation.

The Preterist, again, says it's only the literal 1<sup>st</sup> generation that Jesus was speaking to. Yet, in loose terms, they believe it possibly could mean the posterity (or spiritual descendants) of the disciples, in other words, the church.

There's a more direct understanding of this text. Jesus was answering the disciple's questions which, no matter what the disciples thought, were different questions. This gave Jesus opportunity to provide both a near and far fulfillment. With Jesus' immediately following words, He's saying this "period of time" would not end until God fulfilled everything. What period of time? Both periods of time. For His statements that would have fulfillment in A.D. 70, the signs came and they recognized and acted on them. For the greater fulfillment, the true end, Jesus is still saying the signs will come and the church will recognize them as imminent. For both generations, God will fulfill all of Jesus' words.

Matthew 24:36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Jesus here expresses a detail of His voluntary limitation in His incarnation. In becoming fully man, He set aside some of His glory (Philippians 2:6-11) and, for a time, limited Himself in His omnipresence and omniscience.

After giving generalized answers to the disciple's questions, Jesus then adds this caution. He wasn't going to give them a specific answer, or an answer identifying a specific time, because only the Father knows that specific time. If even angels surrounding God's throne aren't privy to this information, how much more should we ignore the date setters who claim to have special insight and information about this. Those Dispensationalists who claim limits on the day and hour mean they can pinpoint the year are ignorant of the style of wording used here. It reflects the eschatological use of the word "Day of the Lord" and the "hour of His coming" both as general terms, not specific. The Preterist essentially dismisses this whole statement as irrelevant for two thousand years of the church, believing we now know the date – 70 A.D. – now a relic of the past.

The Greek word translated "that" before the words "day or hour" again points back to the earlier answers. It allows for Jesus referring to both the near and far fulfillment earlier referenced. For those who might accuse me of somehow disparaging the Deity of Christ, in say that Jesus didn't know the specifics of perhaps two events, I would caution against such an assertion. Whether one event, or two, it's difficult for us to understand exactly how Jesus becoming full human worked for specifics. To deny that Jesus was in any way limited by His humanity, on the other side, risks embracing the ancient heresy of Docetism which didn't accept the full humanity of Jesus.

Matthew 24:37-41 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.

Again (in form repeating Matthew 24:4-8), Jesus stresses that life will continue to, well, look like life as normal, leading up to judgment. This was true about the Jewish judgment of A.D. 70 and it'll remain true for the final judgment. Jesus was warning that even as people ignored warnings in Noah's day, people will still be ignoring warnings and judgment will overtake them. Whether eating, drinking, marrying, giving in marriage, or carrying out daily business (in fields or kitchen), some will be so preoccupied with life that they will remain unprepared for eternity.

Matthew 24:42 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Here's the heart of Jesus' warning. Whether immediate hearers of Jesus' day or someone living when the end of the world finally comes, the warning remains the same. We need to be living for the Lord and watching for His return.

For the one living before A.D. 70, this meant heeding the warning God gave His church before that judgment. For everyone else waiting for Jesus' final coming, it means be ready for His return without notice.

Matthew 24:43-44 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.

Throughout history many compiled lists of signs trying to discover when Jesus is coming back. Many Dispensationalists still do. Those thinking or teaching they can compile enough signs to know when Jesus is coming back distract from what He's saying here: Be ready all the time because that Day of Judgment is going to come when you least expect it. And, if you're ready for the least expected time, it means you're always ready.

And this brings us to Jesus' parable of the faithful and wise servant. It's a specific reminder that we have a task do. A reminder first to the disciples Jesus was speaking directly too plus all believers who would come before the day of final judgment.

Matthew 24:45-47 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? 46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. 47 I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

Anyone thinking himself to be God's servant and doing His work needs to make specific note of what Jesus said here. The true servant is faithful, meaning believing (and living this out). He says they are wise, not because they trust in human wisdom but embrace and know the wisdom that comes from God (1 Corinthians 2:13).

Notice what they are doing: "giving food at the proper time." Believers are to be sharing God's word at His appointed times, whether to a spouse, a child, other family, friends, neighbors, or a gathering of the church. Our God-given reason to exist, and to bring glory to God (our Master), is to share.

The one placed in charge of the Master's possessions, who also inherits, also perseveres (and continues serving Him). Indeed, as shown throughout Scriptures, it is the Master who enables and energizes His true servants to persevere. Those not persevering have shown themselves not faithful servants, rather a fake or fraud. And here's where the rest of Jesus' words in this parable come into play:

Matthew 24:48-51 But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' 49 and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. 50 The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. 51 He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Whether the unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day (who held themselves God's faithful servants) or the godless and faithless church of our day (who also claim to be God's faithful servant), God gives warning to both. When the Day of Judgment comes, they won't stand; God will cast them out.

Some Christian teachers have focused too much on the word "servant" in this parable, claiming the text wouldn't call them a servant unless they were a believer (saved). They then claim the wicked servant is merely a messed up believer who will have a lesser place in the new heaven and earth. Some say it's a place of sorrow, at least for a time – which sounds to me like a Protestant version on purgatory. This fiction is clearly not the parable's focus. God uses the term "servant" broadly in that He uses every person for His purposes (2 Timothy 2:20; Romans 8:28, 9:21). Jesus clearly calls this judged servant "wicked (Greek 'kakos,' also translated 'evil,'" an expression nowhere directly applied to believers (saved) throughout the Bible but consistently of the lost. In keeping with this, Jesus also uses the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth", a phrase that Jesus commonly used to describe the state of the lost (Luke 13:28; Matthew 25:30; 22:13; 13:50; 13:42; 8:12).

Jesus continues to give more examples (in the form of parables) to contrast those prepared for His coming with those who aren't. Each of these examples can apply to God's more immediate coming in judgment on Israel and Jesus' final coming. If Jesus only used the first example, the virgins (25:1-13), Preterists would possibly have greater grounds for claiming it applied to only application Israel's A.D. 70 judgment. Yet Jesus followed with the parable of the talents (25:14-30) which continues immediately into a description of heavenly (or end times) judgment (25:31-46).



Matthew 25:1-46 "At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. 5 The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. 6 "At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' 7 "Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' 9 "'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. 11 "Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!' 12 "But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.' 13 "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

14 "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. 15 To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. 16 The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. 17 So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. 18 But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. 19 "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. 20 The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.' 21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' 22 "The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' 23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' 24 "Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. 25 So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' 26 "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? 27 Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. 28 "'Take the talent from

him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. 29 For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. 30 And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' 41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (NIV)

In summary, the text shows Jesus' words in Matthew 24 and 25 to encompass two ideas of His coming, an immediate and limited judgment on Israel plus an end-of-times final and universal judgment.

Since Preterists also point to a passage coming shortly after as added proof Jesus is speaking of only a first century judgment, we'll also consider this passage:

Matthew 26:63b-64 The high priest said to him [Jesus], "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." 64 "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus

replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." (NIV)

Preterist looks at Jesus words "But I say to all of you" with a focused emphasis on the word "you." They say it has to mean every person directly listening to Jesus had to see Him coming in judgment, so the event must be a first century judgment. In reality, this doesn't hold up. If all standing there had physically to witness God's judgment of A.D. 70, why does history record the high priest, Caiaphas, obviously one of the "all of you" standing there, deceased in A.D. 36!

The text's wording and these historical facts allow for a general understanding of Jesus words. Unquestionably some standing there witnessed Jerusalem's destruction in 70 (though this number was probably a small percentage). Among the apostles, only John was still alive and he likely wasn't in Judea at the time. As for the chief priests and rulers, they were mostly old men and this judgment was over three decades later. John Lightfoot (lived 1602-1675 A.D.), in his "Talmud and Hebraica" records four Rabbis by name known to have lived until that time according to Jewish sources. I briefly researched them and found little. Yet, I discovered the birth of one, Jochanan [alt. Yohanan] Ben Zaccai, occurred in A.D. 30. He was only a young child when Jesus spoke and it's doubtful he was present, only merely alive then. Complete fulfillment of Jesus' words comes from understanding every single person standing there will one day see Jesus as judge in all of His heavenly glory!

Daniel 7:13-14 "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. (NIV)

Revelation 1:7 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. (NIV)

Acts 10:42 [Peter speaking:] He [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. (NIV)

2 Timothy 4:1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: (NIV)

1 Peter 4:5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. (NIV)

Revelation 20:11-15 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. (NIV)

A few verses after Peter speaks about Jesus judging the living and the dead (see 1 Peter 4:5 above); Peter said “the end of all things is near (1 Peter 4:7).” It would belittle all Peter spoke to reduce his words to only belong to a geographically and culturally specific judgment in A.D. 70. His words, rather, focus on the end. It’s a time which began in his day, and will end at a time of the Father’s choosing. Yes, the end is near and every day that God delays (by our perspective, because there is no delay in God’s plan) it’s nearer still.

### **What does it mean “to reign?”**

reign /rein/

noun

1. the period during which a sovereign or monarch occupies the throne or is ruler of a territory.
2. royal rule or authority or power.
3. a period during which an individual or thing is the dominating power or influence: the reign of law or the reign of a king.

verb

4. to possess or exercise sovereign power or authority.
5. to have control, rule, or influence.
6. to predominate; to be prevalent.

Word Origin and History for reign

n.

early 13c., “kingdom,” from the Old French *reigne* “kingdom, land, country” (Modern French *règne*), from the Latin *regnum* “kingship, dominion, rule, realm.” Meaning “period of rule” first recorded mid 14c.

v.

late 13c., “to hold or exercise sovereign power,” from the Old French *regner* “rule, reign (12c.),” from the Latin *regnare* “have royal power, be king, rule, reign,” from *regnum*.

In Hebrew the word for reign is “Malak,” a verb meaning to be king, to rule – to have sway, power, and dominion over nations and people. It means “to exercise roles of a monarch.”

Exodus 15:18 The Lord will reign [malak] for ever and ever." (NIV)

Psalms 146:10 The Lord reigns [malak] forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord. (NIV)

Psalms 93:1-2 The Lord reigns [malak], he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. 2 Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity. (NIV)

Isaiah 24:23 The moon will be abashed, the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign [malak] on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before its elders, gloriously. (NIV)

The Bible uses this word “malak” of God for eternity past, the present, and the future. God is King from before creation and remains King for eternity. Of course, for His creation, He exercises all roles of being King.

In Greek, the word in view is “*basileuo* (bas-il-yoo-o),” a word drawn from the word “*basileus*,” which means “a king.” *Basileuo* represents the exercise of kingly power, similar to the Hebrew word “malak.” This specific word appears 7 times in Revelation (Revelation 5:10; 11:15; 11:17; 19:6; 20:4; 20:6; 22:5). Two examples:

Revelation 11:15 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." (NIV, see also Luke 1:33)

Revelation 22:5 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. (NIV)

In these verses we see that God will reign forever and saints will reign forever. Of course, since God exists from eternity past, His forever is more expansive than that of the saints, which began at a particular time and now continues forever. How do saints rule with Christ? The apostle Paul gives us a key verse:

Romans 5:17 For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (NIV)

Romans 5:17 For if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. (NASU)

Saints "reign in life" through Jesus Christ! On earth this applies to the believers spiritually and more directly when we enter the throne room of heaven at our death. There God seats us on thrones with Him (Revelation 4:4; 20:4) and yet we still reign through Jesus Christ.

2 Timothy 2:11-12a 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. (NIV)

Revelation 3:21 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. (NIV)

As we reign with Christ, we exercise authority and regal roles with Him. This fits with the Bible saying all judgment belongs to the Son and yet saints sit with Christ also having authority to judge on His behalf.

John 5:22 Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (NIV)

Revelation 20:4-6 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. (NIV)

The apostle Paul made clear that this authority to judge includes judging angels:

1 Corinthians 6:3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! (NIV)

Some claimed believers cannot “reign” for eternity unless they continue to have someone to rule over. To deal with this they claim speculated future possibilities:

#1. God will create other humans or intelligent beings for the church to rule over. Or some believers will enter eternity following the Millennium (Dispensationalist style), remaining in regular physical bodies to repopulate the world for the resurrected saints to now rule over.

Another possibility is that God will create human beings to live on the new earth just as He created Adam and Eve—sinless people whose status and condition will be similar to Adam and Eve’s before the Fall (see comments on Rev 22:2). More likely, believers who are alive on earth at the end of the Millennium will be brought into the new heavens and earth in their unresurrected bodies to populate it. These bodies will be transformed into sinless bodies, but will not have been resurrected. They will be like Adam and Eve before they sinned, but without the ability to sin. As such, they will procreate and populate the new heavens and the new earth, and so they will form the nations. (From section on Revelation 21:24-25, *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, Copyright © 2010 by Grace Evangelical Society. All rights reserved.)

This first possibility is fanciful speculation. It rests in assertions there must be someone to reign over to provide necessary conditions for reigning saints. It often violates the entire idea of God making everything new, by trying to keep portions of the old creation. And, if the new people’s “condition will be similar to Adam and Eve’s before the Fall,” doesn’t this leave open the possibility for sin to again come into God’s new creation?

#2. Only some resurrected believers reign.

This second possibility views the privilege to reign as a reward. It’s only offered to some believers, those somehow superior to other believers (in deeds or service). And yet, God made clear statements and illustration showing that all believers will reign (see especially the last reference, Revelation 22:5, and even Paul’s earlier trustworthy statement in 2 Timothy 2:11-12a). If some believers rule or reign over other believers, we’re further told even the least believer reigns. If all reign then the supposed problem of needing someone to rule still exists – especially if someone believes the ruler has to be somehow superior to those ruled over.

A possible solution exists apart from ruling over other humans. If it's necessary for someone to rule over, consider the holy angels (who are not part of the bride) are still present for eternity. In fact, God ties their existence to the saints:

Hebrews 1:14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? (NIV)

Authority over these spirits might be one exercise of the regal authority God grants to His saints. This would allow believers to reign without needing other people. Don't forget, the Bible says God sends angels, so any direction saints would give would have to be first by God. This fits well with the idea of saints ruling through Christ...

Consider what the Bible says Jesus rules over:

Revelation 3:14b These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. (NIV)

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. (NIV)

Through Jesus and with Jesus saints will rule over all God's creation – not merely intelligent life. For eternity this means the recreation, the paradise of God, the new and perfect heaven and earth. Here the saints are in Him and He in us, in a way we can hardly understand (see Revelation 21). Since He lives in the bride (all His church) and rules from within her, then saints are now able to reign and rule, living out and correctly managing all that God wants (Revelation 22:3). As He rules for eternity, so too His church! He inseparably joins our reign to His eternal reign.

### **Understanding Crowns in Roman Culture**

Most immediately associate crowns with royalty. Images of rulers with lavish crowns adorning their heads fill our modern fairy tales. Recent history affirms that rulers had elaborate crowns during the middle ages, many passed down to current generations. Google "Imperial Crown of The Holy Roman Empire" to see a great example of these extravagant crowns. Designers modeled these loosely after more modest crowns worn by early Christian Emperors of the Byzantine Empire.

This study needs to look earlier than these examples. When studying the Bible, it's important no one superimposes later understandings onto an earlier text. This investigation concerns the Roman world in Jesus' day.

It would equally be wrong to assume earlier uses of the word are identical in Roman times. Both history and the Old Testament show that early kings wore crowns. This includes the nation



of Israel, for example Saul (2 Samuel 1:10) & Absalom (2 Samuel 14:24), and pagan nations too (2 Samuel 12:30; Esther 1:11). The earliest biblical reference had nothing to do with kings. God wanted his High Priest to wear a crown (Exodus 29:6, 39:30, Leviticus 8:9)

Jewish readers in the first century would be aware of the priestly crown and, of course, crowns used by early kings. It is possible for New Testament references to draw on the Old Testament, especially when the primary audience was Jewish. General audiences would have less biblical knowledge to draw on, leaving common Roman practice as the primary source of understanding for Gentiles.

Rome's use of crowns was unique in that far more than kings could receive and wear crowns. Some Roman uses likely originated with Greek practices and mythology. Apollo, a god worshiped by both the Greeks and Romans, wore a laurel wreath on his head.

### **Competitor's Crowns**

The ancient Greeks awarded wreaths of sacred olive leaves to victors in athletic and poetic competitions. The Greek name for these victory crowns was Kotinos. Not surprisingly, later Roman crowns first looked like these laurel wreaths. Unlike more modern crowns, most were not complete rings rather horseshoe shaped.

Competition was fierce for these coveted competitor's crowns. The epitaph of an Alexandrian boxer named Agathos Daimon, found on a funeral monument at Olympia in Greece, reads:

Here he died boxing in the stadium having prayed to Zeus for a wreath or death. Age 35.  
Farewell.

Widespread knowledge of the Greek Olympic Games assured everyone in the Roman world would have been aware of Greek practice. Traced back to 776 B.C., these games dedicated to the Olympian gods continued for nearly 12 centuries. The Emperor Theodosius banned the games with all pagan cults in 393 A.D.

The Greek word for crown, as used in the Bible, is Stephanos. Rome used both Greek and Latin, the latter especially for military purposes. The Latin equivalent to Stephanos is Corona.

Beyond competitive crowns, such as those from the Olympic Games, there was widespread public knowledge of five Roman military crowns:

### **Soldier's Crowns**

#### **Corona Civica**

The oldest and most noteworthy Roman crown is the corona civica. This civic crown commemorated someone saving the life of a fellow citizen (or saving the life of a Roman soldier

in battle). This state award included the rescued individual personally fashioning the crown for their savior out of oak leaves. Once gained, the recipient could wear this crown indefinitely. The state granted freedom from all public burdens to the recipient and his father and grandfather.

In 79 B.C. Julius Caesar, on the staff of a military legate, received the civic crown for saving the life of a citizen in battle. In 27 B.C. Octavian became Caesar Augustus and emperor of Rome. Abandoning earlier practice, Caesar Augustus granted himself this civic crown. He claimed he had saved the lives of all Romans (in 31 B.C.), through his victory in the civil war ending with the battle of Actium. Later emperors continued wearing it until diadems, or more traditional crowns, became more of the standard from Diocletian onward (around 284 A.D.).

#### Corona Obsidionalis (or Corona Graminea or Graminea Obsidionalis)

An individual rescuing an army garrison trapped under siege or blockade could receive the corona obsidionalis, or siege crown. A crown of twisted grasses, weeds, wheat, flowers and other field plants, like the corona civica it had no intrinsic value. It came with great prestige associated with a rare decoration. Pliny the Elder (lived circa 23-79 A.D.) speaks of it:

"But as for the crown of grass, it was never conferred except at a crisis of extreme desperation, never voted except by the acclamation of the whole army, and never to anyone but to him who had been its preserver. Other crowns were awarded by the generals to the soldiers, this alone by the soldiers, and to the general. This crown is known also as the "obsidional" crown, from the circumstance of a beleaguered army being delivered, and so preserved from fearful disaster. If we are to regard as a glorious and a hallowed reward the civic crown, presented for preserving the life of a single citizen, and him, perhaps, of the very humblest rank, what, pray, ought to be thought of a whole army being saved, and indebted for its preservation to the valor of a single individual?"

#### Corona Muralis

The gold corona muralis crown belonged to the first man over an enemy wall. Awarded by his commander, it recognized a dangerous act needing both courage and skill in combat. Small replicas of turrets topped this crown.

#### Corona Vallaria (sometimes Corona Castrensis)

The corona vallaris belonged to the first soldier over the enemy ramparts, the vallum, forcing entry into the enemy's camp. This golden rampart crown was similar to the corona muralis yet decorated with small replicas of palisades.

#### Corona Navalis (sometimes Corona Rostrata)

The corona navalis, the naval crown, was a gold crown topped with small replicas of the prows of ships. This award was for the first man who boarded an enemy ship during a naval engagement (and occasionally to a commander who achieved a great naval victory, such as destroying an entire naval fleet).

### **Crowns of gods, emperors and military commanders**

Emperors or military commanders wore crowns during parades in Rome. Most under Roman rule would never personally see an Emperor, let alone these spectacles in the capital city, resulting in less public awareness of these crowns.

#### Corona Radiata

This crown belonged to gods and deified heroes. Believing themselves to be gods, a few emperors wore the Corona Radiata as a token of their own divinity, an increasing practice in the second century. (They appear on the coins of Caligula, Trajan and Marcus Aurelius).

#### The (3) Triumphs

The state awarded Triumphs to great Romans as the summit of military glory. Every Roman general ambitiously wanted a Triumph. The general would wear this award during a parade in his honor in the capital city.

#### Corona Triumphalis (or Laurea Insignis or Insignis Corona Triumphalis)

The one responsible for a great military victory could receive an award of the Corona Triumphalis, a crown of laurel or bay leaves. This Triumph was the peak of military prestige and honor.

#### Provinciales (or Aurum Coronarium)

Following the decree of a Provinciales Triumph, the commander would receive a gold crown or wreath from the provinces where the battles took place. It was no longer called a Provinciales following its arrival; the formal presentation featured the same item as the Aurum Coronarium.

#### Memento Mori

A victorious general could receive a golden crown adorned with jewels. Too large to wear, a public officer held it over the head of the general during his triumphal parade. The public officer spoke the words "Memento Mori" to the recipient, which translates as "Remember that you are mortal."

### **Minor military crowns**

Those who achieved minor victories might receive an Ovation crown, inferior to a Triumph. Those wanting higher esteem and honor viewed an Ovation as a poor substitute for a Triumph.

The (2) Ovations

Corona Ovalis

The Corona Ovalis was a crown of myrtle (a shrub sacred to Venus). Only military commanders could receive this award.

Corona Oleagina

The Corona Oleagina was an olive leaf crown awarded to both soldiers and their immediate commanders. It recognized their actions in helping to secure a Triumph for their top commander.

### **Celebratory or Commemorative Crowns**

There were several crowns used to celebrate special occasions, or as an emblem of office, as opposed to being rewards for bravery and excellence.

Corona Sacerdotalis

At sacrifices, priests of the gods (sacerdotes) wore crowns of olive leaves, and occasionally gold, as a symbol of peace.

Corona Sepulchralis (or Corona Funebris)

Mourners at funerals wore crowns of leaves and flowers. On occasion, the same crowns became tomb decorations.

Corona Convivalis

Private parties were common during Roman religious festivals. Participants at these celebrations wore the Corona Convivalis, a crown of assorted flowers or shrubs including roses, myrtle, violets, ivy and even parsley.

Corona Nuptialis

The Corona Nuptialis is a bridal wreath or crown worn by both the bride and groom, made of flowers picked by the bride. The bride wore her crown under her flammeum, an enveloping deep yellow bridal veil which left her face uncovered. (The deep yellow color of the flammeum mimicked the flame of a candle).

Corona Natalitia

This crown or wreath celebrated the birth of a child. Not worn, the family suspended it over the main entrance door of the home. A crown of olive leaves represented a male baby, wool for a female.

### **Biblical Summary of Crowns**

The existence of three specific awards for spearheading assaults over enemy defenses shows how important these actions were in their warfare, and how much value the Romans placed on encouraging such deeds of bravery.

Unlike modern views associating crowns with power and authority, Roman crowns did not necessarily come with power or authority. However, some having power and authority did wear them.

As you consider New Testament passages, ask yourself what crown the New Testament readers would have likened each reference to. Beginning with the gospels:

Matthew 27:29 and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" (ESV)

Mark 15:17 And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. (ESV)

John 19:2 And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. (ESV)

John 19:5 So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold the man!" (ESV)

Pilate and the soldiers certainly mocked Jesus' claim to be a king through the robe they put on Him. Of course, the multi-language inscription nailed above Jesus on the cross did the same. Jews might have viewed the crown of thorns in similar manner, yet the crown came from Romans soldiers. It is unlikely the soldiers used a crown to represent a king.

A crown made of field-gathered items, yet an item that would harm, maliciously mimicked the highest soldier's crown, the Corona Civica, and perhaps the Corona Obsidionalis. This crown of thorns mocked Jesus' ability to save. The equivalent Roman soldier's crown commemorated saving a live or lives. Here the soldiers mocked Jesus' ability to save a life (his own). Not coincidentally, a few verses later, Matthew even records one of the ways people verbally mocked Jesus on the cross...

Matthew 27:42a "He saved others; he cannot save himself..." (ESV)

The Apostle Paul's first two references to crowns each suggest something similar to a celebratory crown.

Philippians 4:1 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?

Paul's next reference is clearly to a competitor's crown.

2 Timothy 2:5 An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules.

The next reference, later in 2 Timothy, is more ambiguous. This crown could allude to a competitor's crown or a soldier's crown. Paul's earlier context, speaking of a competitor's crown, prompts me to lean towards a similar allusion in the second instance.

2 Timothy 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up 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 loved his appearing.

Crown references in the book of Hebrews are all associated with Jesus.

Hebrews 2:7 You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor,

Hebrews 2:9 But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

Crowns of glory and honor invoke ideas common to many Roman crowns, such as the Corona Civica or even a Triumph.

James similarly refers to a crown that comes following a time of testing or trial. This crown might be equated to a soldier's crowns such as the Corona Muralis, Corona Vallaria, or the Corona Navalis.

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Peter's allusion to a fading crown matches a host of Roman crowns made from plants, including the Corona Civica. Spiritually speaking all earthly crowns will fade, including those made of gold. Crowns given by God are unfading because they come from an incorruptible source.

1 Peter 5:4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Churches in Asia Minor were the immediate recipients of the letters beginning the book of Revelation. As mainly Gentile churches, Roman understanding of crowns would be chief in their minds.

Revelation 2:10 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Revelation 3:11 I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown.

Revelation 4:4 Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads.

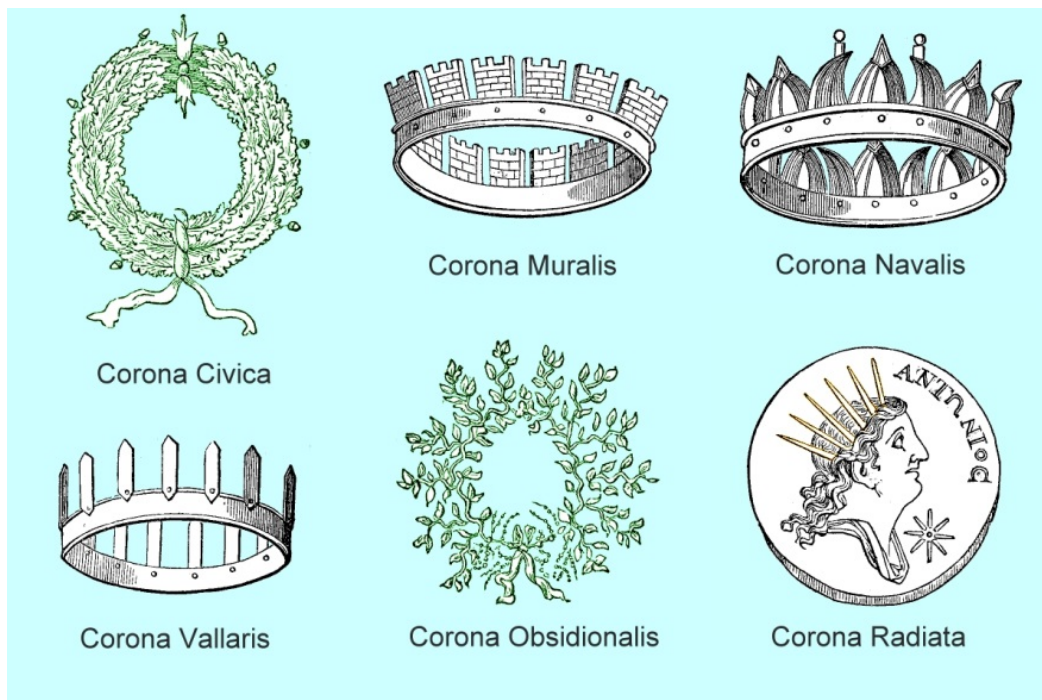
Revelation 4:10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

By context, the crowns worn by the elders in Revelation 4 are the crown of life (first mentioned in Revelation 2:10). They received this gold crown (see Revelation 4:4) for faithfulness even to death, an act of faith and bravery. The three golden soldier's crowns best fit the imagery. Military imagery remains in view to the end of the book. Descriptions of enemies and servants of Christ, plus Jesus himself, use terms suitable for military commanders. Revelation shows a spiritual battle with only two sides, where believers serve under their supreme commander and Lord. All believers would gladly cast their crowns before Him, each recognizing that their life came from Him alone.

Revelation 6:2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer.

Revelation 9:7 In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces,

Revelation 14:14 Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand.



## The Bible's presentation of the afterlife

Where does the spirit or soul of a believer go when they die? Was this location the same before Jesus' death and following His resurrection? Where do the lost and fallen angels go for eternity? Here I've provided details on Biblical terms including: Hell, Heaven, Sheol, The Abyss, Hades, Gehenna, The Lake of Fire, New Heavens & New Earth, Abraham's Bosom, Paradise, Tartarus, the Pit, The Grave, Under the Altar.

*Editor's Note: While all parts of this article help to portray a picture of the afterlife, take note the included footnotes provide important information relevant to fully understanding this subject and each specific term under examination. In this reworking of the original article, immediately following a few introductory sections, the main work is a glossary of terms featuring expanded details, interrelated words, and related questions.*

## Old Testament First, New Testament Final

While many want to jump immediately to a particular term in the New Testament, be aware God built the New Testament on the Old and presumes an understanding of the former. God, in His infinite wisdom, chose to give His written word as a progressive revelation. He did not



give it all at once, nor did He provide complete details on every subject especially in the Old Testament. Some ideas only appear as a shadow of the fullness revealed following the coming of Jesus Christ.

The church must base its complete doctrine on all of Scripture, allowing the New Testament to clarify and explain ideas found in the Old Testament. Some believers and denominations have promoted ideas seemingly rooted only in the Old Testament. Doing so in opposition or willful ignorance to further revelation (clarification) in the New Testament creates a false picture of what God's word teaches.

### **General versus Specific Terms**

Writers of God's word intended some words to have a general and broad meaning. Broad use of words occurs in the English language and the Biblical languages. For example, the Greek word translated "angel" can equally and validly be "Messenger" in English. "Messenger" is the broad meaning of the word, yet we know that sometimes the "Messenger" is a heavenly messenger versus an earthly messenger. How can a Bible translator use "angel" and "messenger" for different instances of the same original word? Simply put, context fixes which word better represents the expressed thought in any particular passage. Many Bible terms about the afterlife are similarly context sensitive; who they reference affects their meaning.

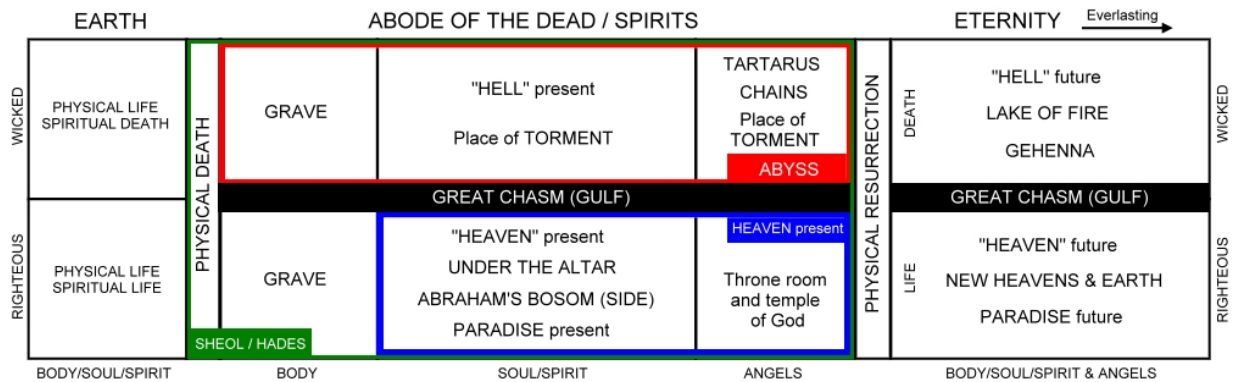
English language translators have often tried to use popular terms (for example "hell") to translate particular instances of some of these general terms. While well-meaning, it sometimes obscures exactly what the overall text is describing. All too often people interpret Scriptures by superimposing common popular ideas associated with particular English words. True understanding of the passage comes from grasping the entirety of what the writer meant by specific word choices in the original language. If the original meaning cannot appear as a single word, it's far better to use a phrase or footnote to help describe it (as some translations now do).

Before continuing, note some words can have a specific and general meaning or use. Once again, context shows whether the word's use is specific or if the author intended a broader understanding.

### **A picture is worth...**

This chart tries to summarize the differences and likenesses of each term considered within this article. <sup>NOTE 5</sup> Using borders and colors the charts visually shows specific technical terms existing

within broader general terms. It will aid you to keep this chart nearby while reading the following definitions.



### Salvation throughout human history

Understanding the end first demands knowledge of the beginning. The Bible clearly notes that following the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, every later person comes into the world born into sin and isn't righteous.

Romans 3:9b-12 We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. 10 As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." (NIV. This New Testament passage includes a direct citation from Psalms 14:1 and 53:1, plus overall is a paraphrase of Ecclesiastes 7:20)

The Bible teaches there's an everlasting difference between the wicked and the righteous. This presents a big question, "how did anyone go from wickedness to righteousness?" Another word for God declaring and making someone righteous is "salvation." Every person who's ever found salvation has done so through faith in Jesus Christ.

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." (NIV)

Before the birth of Jesus this entailed trusting in God that He would fulfill His promise and provide for salvation through the coming Messiah. While prophesied details expanded throughout Old Testament times, the simple promise of a Messiah was part of God's words, and a source of hope, from the beginning. Even as God handed down His punishment and judgment over the original rebellion in the Garden of Eden, He gave hope:

Genesis 3:14-15 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." (NIV)

In expecting God's salvation Job could confidently assert:

Job 19:25-27 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (NIV)

With the coming of Christ (the Messiah), we have the realized fulfillment of all those Old Testament hopes. Not only do we know far more about Him, we now look back and place our faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work.

How could God save any individual before Jesus actually (in time and space) died and rose again? Because God (who cannot change his mind or lie, 1 Samuel 15:29) predetermined and decreed it and, by doing so, made it a fact from before the world's creation.

Titus 1:2 ...a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time... (NIV)

God prepared the kingdom for believers from the world's creation. Consider the following words spoken before Jesus died and rose again:

Matthew 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. (NIV)

God chose believers before the world's creation (appointing all who would believe. See Acts 13:48).

Ephesians 1:4 For he [God] chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

God set apart Jesus to die as the perfect Lamb of God before the world's creation, before anyone ever sinned!

1 Peter 1:20 He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. (NIV)

Not only did God set apart Jesus before the world's creation, God counted Jesus as slain from the world's creation.

Revelation 13:8 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. (NIV)

Believers who died in Christ before Jesus' physical crucifixion in time and space didn't have to wait for the future act. God plan and promised it and credited it as finished from creation. God records the finished result of Jesus' redemptive acts as unquestionably achieved from the beginning. Take note God wrote the names of all believers, throughout all the ages, in the Lamb's Book of Life from the world's creation (see Revelation 17:8).

Acts 10:42-43 He [Jesus] commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43 All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

## **Glossary of Biblical Words on the Afterlife**

### **Sheol** [Hebrew, Old Testament]

Sheol is a general, nonspecific, term used throughout the Old Testament for the grave or the next life. Only context allows any gathered or implied specifics in any particular use of this word. Rather than leave a nonspecific term, some English translations have presented the word as grave, pit, and hell. Confusion arises because many consider the latter, of course, to be a specific and defined location. Unlike modern use of the word "hell", Bible writers don't use Sheol only and specifically to describe a place of torment or punishment for the wicked.

The following four statements show how the word Sheol employs wide use within the Old Testament.

- Good people go there:

Genesis 37:34-35 Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son [Joseph] many days. 35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to

be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave [Sheol] to my son." So his father wept for him. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

- Wicked people go there:

Numbers 16:30 But if the Lord brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them [those part of Korah's rebellion against Moses], with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave [Sheol], then you will know that these men have treated the Lord with contempt." (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

Psalms 9:17 The wicked shall be turned into hell [Sheol], and all the nations that forget God. (KJV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

- Sheol is a synonym for death:

Genesis 42:38 But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave [Sheol] in sorrow." (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

Psalms 89:48 What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave? (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

- God's spirit and presence is there:

Psalms 139:7-8 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell [Sheol], behold, thou art there. (KJV, square parenthesis ours for clarification) Again in another translation: Ps 139:7-8 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths [Sheol], you are there. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

We can imply little about Sheol's actual makeup from the Old Testament. The mere presence of the righteous and the wicked does not provide enough evidence on any specific parts or locations within Sheol. It's not until the New Testament that God clarifies and expands on many themes and allusions in the Old Testament.

Some have taken passages about Sheol and understood them too literal or made them out to be technically specific. For example: those believing in soul sleep hold the soul sleeps in the ground with the body until the resurrection. They often cite passages such as the following...

Psalms 6:5 No one remembers you [God] when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave [sheol]? (NIV, parenthesis ours)

Psalms 31:17-18 Let me not be put to shame, O Lord, for I have cried out to you; but let the wicked be put to shame and lie silent in the grave. 18 Let their lying lips be silenced, for with pride and contempt they speak arrogantly against the righteous. (NIV)

Isaiah 38:18-19 [Hezekiah speaking] For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. 19 The living, the living - they praise you, as I am doing today; fathers tell their children about your faithfulness. (NIV)

Yet, the New Testament, as we will see later, speaks of conscious actions after death. This New Testament clarification shows we cannot take all these Old Testament passages literally. Remembering Sheol is a synonym for death or the afterlife, these verses are merely stating that normal actions of the living stop at death. These statements make no specific assessment of what the dead will be doing in the afterlife let alone where. With certainty, we can agree death silences voices of the righteous and wicked in the land of the living at their deaths – both lose their ability to speak to those still living.

Since Sheol is a word that can mean grave, descriptions and imagery associated with the term often belong to a literal grave in the ground, namely ideas of darkness, decay and dust. For example:

Job 17:13-16 If the only home I hope for is the grave, if I spread out my bed in darkness, 14 if I say to corruption, 'You are my father,' and to the worm, 'My mother' or 'My sister,' 15 where then is my hope? Who can see any hope for me? 16 Will it go down to the gates of death? Will we descend together into the dust?" (NIV)

Use of such terminology neither implies there is nothing beyond the physical grave or represents a soul's specific destination in the afterlife. Similarly, referring to Sheol as a place to dig down to in no way implies the afterlife is somehow literally below us. Again, these texts use symbolism of a literal grave.

Amos 9:2 Though they dig down to the depths of the grave [Sheol], from there my hand will take them. Though they climb up to the heavens, from there I will bring them down. (NIV, square parenthesis for clarification)

If we only had Old Testament passages using the word Sheol, we would have very limited understanding of the afterlife. Indeed, some scholars claim New Testament ideas of the afterlife are a late invention of their period. Rather, they are God choosing to reveal more details only as necessary, by His timing and authority.

**Hades** [Greek, New Testament; Greek, Old Testament]

Hades is a direct synonym, or translation substitute, of the Hebrew word Sheol. When scholars translated the Hebrew Bible into Greek in the centuries before Christ, the translators uniformly used the term Hades for Sheol. Showing Divine acceptance of this equivalency, New Testament passages citing Old Testament scriptures about Sheol also use the Greek term Hades. This means that everything Bible writers said about Sheol also applies to Hades, yet Hades can (and does) have more given details than Sheol.

For the record; the Greek word Hades was the proper name of the god of the underworld in Greek mythology (see Homer) and the underworld was "the house of Hades." Even as we derive words in our language from pagan sources (including month and day names), use in Scriptures in no way implies Scriptural acceptance of the mythological Hades. The word Hades, through popular use, merely became synonymous with the afterlife or the grave. <sup>NOTE 18</sup>

Again, take note that using an equivalent term to Sheol doesn't preclude God from revealing added details about Hades in the New Testament. Progressive revelation enables the New Testament to better clarify the Old.

The New Testament portrays Hades as the between state which follows death and yet before the final judgment and the following final state. This view echoes ideas in the Old Testament and the first century historian Josephus even mentions it's a belief of the Pharisees in the time of Jesus.

They also believe that souls have an immortal rigor in them, and that under the earth there will be rewards or punishments, according as they have lived virtuously or viciously in this life; and the latter are to be detained in an everlasting prison, but that the former shall have power to revive and live again... (Josephus: Antiquities of the Jews 18.1.3)

Josephus' quote may have been summarizing a longer position. If complete; it's possible the Pharisees held to a continuous state of torment and prison, for the wicked in Hades, for all eternity. But, in Scriptures, God makes it unquestionably clear the Lake of Fire is the final destination of all wicked; the New Testament especially expanding on this detail.

How the Bible refers to Hades:

- Hades is down (similar to how Sheol symbolically equates to a physical grave):

Matthew 11:23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths [Hades]. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification. This passage obviously also shows that wicked people go to Hades. Also Luke 10:15)

- The Gates of Hades is a figurative term for ungodly powers belonging in the wicked underworld (see also the terms Tartarus and Abyss):

Matthew 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [hades] shall not prevail against it. (KJV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

- Passages closely associate Hades and Death (sometimes personified)

Revelation 1:18 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. (NIV)

Revelation 6:8 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. (NIV)

Revelation 20:13 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. (NIV)

Undeniably, most New Testament references to Hades stress the state of the lost or figuratively have association with wicked supernatural powers, leading some to believe Hades only applies to nonbelievers. This artificial restriction is dubious at best and improbable as word equivalency between Sheol and Hades shows common use and understanding in New Testament times to



be otherwise. Acts 2:27 and verse 31 refer to Hades identically to the Old Testament Sheol, as the grave or afterlife, being a general destination for both the wicked and the righteous.

As the New Testament provides more specifics about those God is saving, it's logical that He uses more precise terms or descriptions for their state within Hades. In the account of Lazarus, Jesus similarly uses Hades in a broad sense as a destination for the righteous and the wicked. Both Lazarus and the rich man had died and gone to Hades (Luke 16:22-23), yet further clarification showed the more specific state of both of them within Hades... Lazarus was with Abraham in God's presence (the present heaven) and the rich man excluded from God's presence (and everything good) in a place of torment. While both men are in Hades, they're far removed from each other over their specific destination within it (see Luke 16:23, 26).

Some claim that Revelation chapter 20 shows God later changed Hades into a place that was only for the wicked (perhaps after Jesus' resurrection).

Revelation 20:11-14a 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. (NIV)

Undoubtedly this passage does show God casting death and all of Hades into the Lake of Fire, but a seminal event took place immediately prior. That earlier event was the resurrection from the dead of everyone written in the Lamb's book of life (see Revelation 20:4-6). This meant Hades no longer had any righteous occupants when destroyed in the Lake of Fire.<sup>NOTE 12</sup> God's later removal of all righteous people doesn't lessen that Hades had been the destination for everyone throughout prior ages.

A related question about Hades (as a place for all dead, righteous and unrighteous, plus any confined wicked powers): Who rules this place? Contrary to cartoons and popular imagery, its ruler isn't the Devil.

Revelation 1:18 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. (NIV)

Jesus unconditionally says He holds the keys of Hades and death. Nowhere does it say that Jesus once didn't have them or lost them and had to gain them again. Jesus holds and controls the keys. Within His control, Jesus has the right to assign any key to whomever He wills for a time. According to Scriptures, He gives the key of the Abyss, only for a time, to the Destroyer (the Devil, see John 10:10) for His purposes of judgment (see Revelation 9:1-11). God can use even the Devil to carry out His purposes, even as He has used demons (for example 1 Kings 22:21-23) and cruel and pagan nations for the same (for example Isaiah 45:13; 7:18-20).

Simply put: biblically speaking, everybody goes to Hades.

### **The Abyss** [Greek, New Testament]

The Abyss is, at best, a partial synonym of Hades (Greek) and Sheol (Hebrew), but typically with a specific focus. Every reference to the Abyss in the scriptures, except one, focuses on a portion of Sheol or Hades where God confines supernatural beings (fallen angels). If we consider only these majority passages, the word Abyss is a direct synonym of Tartarus. While Abyss normally means the Tartarus portion of Hades, it's possible to use the Abyss in a general sense. Abyss then means "grave" or "abode of the dead" (sometimes translated as the "bottomless pit" or "the deep"). This rare use of Abyss is similar to the Hebrew word Sheol, or the Greek word Hades. It's more specific than Hades because it focuses on the place where God imprisoned the wicked within Hades in contrast to the present heaven (where righteous are in God's presence). Our only example of this later use in Scriptures comes from the apostle Paul...

Romans 10:6-7 But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?' (that is, to bring Christ down), 7 or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." (NASU)

The Complete Jewish Bible gives the word "Abyss" as "Sheol" in their translation, but this is true only in part. <sup>NOTE 15</sup>

The few other uses of Abyss in the New Testament, nine instances, show the general state of Sheol or Hades to include a holding place for demonic entities. This might be the same place existing for ungodly humans, but there's never shown to be a mingling of departed human and demonic entities. This lack of contact has led to speculation the Abyss must be a completely separate place from Sheol or Hades. This might be logical except the previously quoted passage in Romans 10 expressly represents the Abyss as an overall synonym for the destination of the unrighteous dead <sup>NOTE 16</sup>. It's safe to say there's a general portion of Hades or Sheol, called the Abyss, which God has assigned for all unrighteous. Yet, if Abyss appears in a technical sense

(the way it's most common used in Scriptures), it's specifically referencing the portion of Hades or Sheol assigned for fallen spirits awaiting final judgment. Examples of the latter...

Luke 8:30-31 Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" "Legion," he replied, because many demons had gone into him. 31 And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. (NIV) [The similar passage of Matthew 8:29, shows the demons fearing this destination as a place of torment].

Revelation 9:11 They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. (NIV)

Revelation 20:1-3 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. (NIV)

The Luke 8 account of the demons implies they rightly fear the Abyss as a place of punishment, even as Hades (Sheol) is a place of punishment for the wicked. Hades remains a place of punishment until its final destination in the Lake of Fire. That God temporarily frees Satan from the Abyss (see Revelation 20:3) doesn't in any way decrease the permanency of Hades (Sheol) for nonbelievers. God can release anyone from Hades as He wants, as Jesus always holds the keys of Hades and death. He will eventually release all unbelievers from Hades, for final judgment, before He casts them into the Lake of Fire.

### **Tartarus** [Greek, New Testament]

Tartarus is a synonym of the primary, or technical, use of the term Abyss. It invokes imagery of a dungeon for fallen angelic beings.

2 Peter 2:4-9 For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell [tartarus], putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; 5 if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; 6 if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; 7 and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men 8 (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and

heard)- 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. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

Jude also uses the same imagery, without providing the location's name; it unquestionably is referencing the same place.

Jude 6 And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home - these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. (NIV)

Similar to the origin of the name Hades; the term Tartarus comes from Greek mythology. These classical myths describe Tartarus as the lowest abyss of Hades, a place of punishment for demigods. Peter's use of the word doesn't ascribe any belief in the Greek myths; he merely used a common word to picture a God-revealed place within Hades (Sheol). Here God has bound over fallen spirit-beings for punishment while awaiting their final judgment.

### **Gehenna** [Greek, New Testament]

Gehenna always applies to the post-death state of the wicked. While symbolic in name, it's an idiom showing the condition of the lost in Hades (Sheol), yet it more properly concerns their final state. The name itself comes from a physical location referenced in the Old Testament. This valley, the Valley of Hinnom, located south of Jerusalem, was infamous for its pagan rituals and even child sacrifice (see 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 19:6). Years of ritual fires and burning humans were the image invoked on hearing the name. To use a word drawn from such a place was to give association with godlessness and constant fires.

The Bible shows the final destination for unbelievers and all wickedness to be a place of unquenched fire, also called the Lake of Fire. Jesus often employed the term Gehenna and its' associated imagery...

Mark 9:43-48 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell [Gehenna], where the fire never goes out. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell [Gehenna]. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell [Gehenna], 48 where "'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'" (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

Matthew 5:22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell [Gehenna]. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

Matthew 18:9 And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell [Gehenna]. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

The Bible distinguishes Gehenna from the general term Hades (Sheol), or even the Abyss, by its specifically noted finality. It's shown to be a final destination rather than any interim location encompassed by the term Hades. While Hades (Sheol) temporarily receives the soul (see Acts 2:27, 31), Gehenna takes both the body and the soul:

Matthew 10:28 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 [Gehenna]. (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification. See also Luke 12:5)

Jesus reserved Gehenna for one of His most severe warnings, calling the Pharisees children of Gehenna...

Matthew 23:15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell [Gehenna] as you are. (NIV, parenthesis ours)

The Old Testament mostly refers to the state of the dead using the general term Sheol, with little distinction between the wicked and righteous. Yet the nascent idea of unquenchable fire as a final destination for all people in rebellion against God also appears in the Old Testament. Against the backdrop of the future New Heavens and Earth, Isaiah clearly speaks of a place similar to Gehenna...

Isaiah 66:22-24 "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the Lord, "so will your name and descendants endure. 23 From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says the Lord. 24 "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." (NIV)

The New Testament shows Isaiah's location of unquenchable fire to be a reference to Gehenna through a direct citation incorporated into Mark 9:43-48:

Mark 9:43-48 If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell [Gehenna], where the fire never goes out. 45 And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell [Gehenna]. 47 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell [Gehenna], 48 where "'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' [...This being a quote from Isaiah 66:24] (NIV, square parenthesis ours for clarification)

### **Lake of Fire** [Greek, New Testament]

The "Lake of Fire" is a descriptive phrase, a direct synonym of Gehenna. Only the book of Revelation calls Gehenna by this term, where it's also specifically called "the Second Death," another descriptive term.

Revelation 20:14-15 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. (NIV)

Jude, without using a specific name for the place, unquestionably references it:

Jude 7 In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire. (NIV)

Jude's word choice wasn't much different from Jesus, who sometimes indirectly referred to Gehenna or the Lake of Fire also.

Matthew 25:41-46 "Then he [the King] will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 42 For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' 44 "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' 45 "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' 46 "Then they will

go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (NIV) [Square parenthesis ours for clarification. Notice this passage twice represents the fire as being "eternal", verses 41 & 46]

All references in view; the Lake of Fire is the second death, which is everlasting punishment in a place of endless fire. While many try to minimize the "eternalness" of this place, passages already cited intentionally stress the ceaselessness of this state.

## **Hell** [English]

Varied use of this word "Hell" by translators contributed to the popular meaning of this word in modern English. Translators used the word Hell for scripture passages belonging to the general words "Sheol" and "Hades," plus the more specific "Gehenna" and Lake of Fire. Hell came to mean the destination of the wicked in the afterlife (without understanding Biblical specifics). Details drawn, often randomly, from various Bible passages then provide a description of this place, commonly merging ideas of Hades (Sheol) and Gehenna.

Broad use of the word Hell isn't always wrong, in which it properly suggests a place of torment for all unbelievers. The danger though is that it may obscure ideas encompassed in Scriptures, including God's use of Hades (Sheol) for both believers and unbelievers. Also this broad use confuses the non-permanency of the interim state of Hades (Sheol) versus the final state of Gehenna or the Lake of Fire <sup>NOTE 17</sup>. When used broadly, Hell means everlasting destruction in all that it encompasses (Hades, Judgment, and Gehenna). Scripturally, experiencing "everlasting destruction" means permanent banishment from the presence of God (the Lake of Fire).

2 Thessalonians 1:8-10 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. (NIV)

## **Heaven** [Various]

- Shamayim [Hebrew]
  - The sky and all visible heavens including stars
  - The dwelling place of God
- Shamayin [Aramaic]
  - The visible sky

- The dwelling place of God
- Ouranos [Greek]
  - Everything above the earth, where birds fly, clouds float, and where the sun, moon and stars are visible
  - The dwelling place of God and where holy angels are

Standard English use of the word heaven shares one of the primary meanings found in the Bible languages - it's a term used to name the supernatural place where God lives and rules. A few scriptures referencing heaven in this manner include:

Isaiah 63:15a Look down from heaven and see from your lofty throne, holy and glorious. (NIV)

Isaiah 66:1a This is what the Lord says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. (NIV)

Psalms 14:2a The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men... (NIV)

Psalms 103:19 The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. (NIV)

Matthew 5:34 But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; (NIV)

Hebrews 8:1 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, (NIV)

Implicit in the previous passages, the Bible is clear that "heaven" includes being in God's immediate presence:

Hebrews 9:24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. (NIV)

John 8:23, 38a But he [Jesus] continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. ... 38 I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence... (NIV)

The Bible represents Sheol (Hades) as down because a grave is part of its broad meaning. Similarly it represents heaven as up due to the broader alternate meaning of this word. Only context reveals which heaven each writer intends; sky, astronomical space, or the supernatural



heaven. It's similar to using the word "celestial" in English. This broad word can refer outer space or to the supernatural heaven.

Many English speaking people, apart from those familiar with the Bible, only think of heaven for the supernatural heaven. Yet biblically, heaven is a created place also encompassed in the opening verse of the Bible:

Genesis 1:1a In the beginning God created the heavens... (NIV)

This verse and further Hebrew passages use the word heavens to reference the lower heavens, including the sky, and the astronomical heavens (both created and filled on the second, fourth, and fifth days). It's also used of the supernatural dwelling place of God. For speakers to distinguish between these three heavens, sometimes they number them in that order. Numbered heavens were an ancient practice too; the apostle Paul referred to the supernatural heaven in this manner...

2 Corinthians 12:2 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. (NIV)

Sin tainted all of creation (see Romans 8:22) and God created all three heavens. Contrary to a popular opinion that heaven is a perfect place, some sin and sinful beings have been in the present heaven (see Job 1:6, 12; 1 Kings 22:19-22). There's even been war in heaven (Revelation 12:7). This is why God makes a final New Heavens and Earth exactly that: new! This perfect everlasting destination will be a true home of righteous forever free from sin. The old heavens (1, 2 and 3) will all burn:

2 Peter 3:11-13 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. (NIV)

Hades (Sheol) includes the present heaven. When God casts Hades into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14), it's the same event Peter wrote about above affecting the heavens. Though the present heaven is a place of comfort for righteous dead, it's temporary and not what we long for. Saints throughout time have wanted more, that final heaven, the eternal perfect place where there is no more sorrow and no need for comfort. There we are still in the presence of

God but fully so, not merely as soul and spirit in the present heaven but complete in our glorified soul, spirit, and resurrected body.

Isaiah 65:17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. (NIV)

Revelation 21:1-4 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." (NIV)

In the present heaven (encompassed in the broad term Hades or Sheol), the soul and spirit is apart from the body. It appears the soul, while God's presence, can still experience pain or distress (to at least some degree). It's some of these righteous souls that cry out to God, seeking His redress for what had happened to them...

Revelation 6:9-10 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?" (NIV)

The earlier account of Lazarus implies the same. If God had already wiped away pain, why would Lazarus need comfort?

Luke 16:25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. (NIV)

Perhaps part of God's comfort in the existing heaven is the soul is separate from the body; our flesh is the source of much pain in the present fallen creation. What's certain is the resurrection reunites our soul and spirit with a new and glorified body. All who enter the final state of the new heaven and earth will do so with a fully sanctified soul and body (consider 1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 1 John 3:2). Even as Jesus has a resurrected nonperishable physical body, one day all believers will too.

It's only after the final resurrection and God destroys death at the final judgment that we hear that God has forever removed all pain and sorrow. Never again will anyone need comfort as these former events will never come to mind (see Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1-4, both referenced earlier) – this is the unchanging view of both Testaments. Another related passage from Isaiah...

Isaiah 25:8 He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. (NIV) [Compare this with Revelation 20:14 - 21:4].

### **New Heavens and Earth**

See Heaven; specifically future heaven or final heaven

### **Paradise** [Greek, New Testament]

Paradise is an imprecise Greek word with a meaning fixed by context. The Bible references three paradises; one past, one present and another future.

By New Testament times, this Greek word had an original general meaning. The translators of the Septuagint (who created the Greek Old Testament hundreds of years before Jesus) associated it with the first paradise. This Greek translation of the Old Testament specifically uses the Greek word for Paradise ("paradeisos") to refer to the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:8. Why use paradise? The word had meaning to the Greek speaking world, even hundreds of year before Jesus, including those not directly aware of the Garden of Eden as defined in Scriptures. To them, paradise simply meant "a garden, or park, or enclosure that was full of every beautiful and good thing" (as used by Xenophon, lived 430 - 354 BC). This made paradise a great word for Eden before sin.

John, who wrote for a Greek speaking audience, intentionally used this Septuagint wording for a yet future place. Everyone God grants eternal life will be one-day participants in the paradise of God, having right to eat from the tree of life found there.

Revelation 2:7 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. (NIV) [In light of 1 John 5:4-5]

As a reminder, the original tree of life was in the original paradise; the Garden of Eden. Paradise continues to be a great word for the New Earth, the final home for all believers throughout eternity. Because of Paradise's general Greek meaning, Scripture writers can

describe any enclosed location full beauty and good as "paradise". Yet, scripturally having a high view of the word "good", there are only three referenced paradises <sup>NOTE 12</sup>.

1. The original paradise; the Garden of Eden
2. The paradise that is in Sheol or Hades (the present paradise or present heaven)
3. The future and final paradise; the New Heavens and Earth

Having already examined the first and third, consider the second one. Jesus referenced it, as recorded by Luke, while He hung on the cross...

Luke 23:39-43 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." (NIV)

The apostle Paul later mentions the same (second) paradise.

2 Corinthians 12:2-4 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. (NIV)

Some have argued that Paul's paradise is a fourth location. Yet, it's unlikely it's any other place than the positive side of Hades (Sheol). Its direct association with the third heaven, the God's dwelling place, provides supporting evidence. This heaven is the temporary home for believing souls awaiting the resurrection. It's a good place of comfort, and identified as being in God's presence. But it's not our final, complete, and perfect state. This makes it the present heaven encompassed in the general term Hades (Sheol), the same place promised to the thief on the cross. Unquestionably, Paul was referring to the present paradise.

## **Purgatory**

Throughout church history, instead of a single location for the lost and another for the saved, some have tried to add extra possibilities including a temporary destination on the way to heaven. This temporary location is sometimes even referred to as hell, damaging any belief

that hell is necessarily eternal. More properly, this added invented location is purgatory. Beliefs about this place don't hold up to the scrutiny of Scriptures.

Purgatory is an imagined place of mild torment and preparation for heaven, based solely in the myths and claimed authority of the Roman Catholic Church. In defense of this teaching, they mostly appeal to their adopted additions to Scriptures, the Apocrypha (Wisdom 3:5-6, 2 Maccabees 12:43-45, Baruch 3:4). Occasionally they offer fanciful interpretations of some canonical Scriptures (see Matthew 12:32, <sup>NOTE 1</sup>).

From the clear message of the Bible alone, a host of passages show there's no between state. At death, every believer is absent their body and in-spirit present with the Lord:

2 Corinthians 5:8-9 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9 So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. (NIV)

Philippians 1:23b-24 I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (NIV)

Scriptures further paints a picture of believing souls God's presence in the present heaven. They are conscious and aware, calling on Him, before their resurrection and receipt of a new glorified body (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, 1 John 3:2).

Revelation 6:9b-11 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. (NIV)

Roman Catholics set aside all these foregoing passages or reinterpret them based on a preconceived need for purgatory. This preconception allows seeds of confusion to color more passages including Luke 16:19-31, the account of the rich man and Lazarus. Incredibly, there have been Roman Catholic claims that this passage is illustrative of purgatory. (To be fair, some Protestant Christians <sup>NOTE 2</sup> use this account as their proof-text for an extra, temporary, state for some believers too. This Protestant location or state is then simply referred to as "Abraham's Bosom," which we will examine in a later section). Before further examination of purgatory claims, a straightforward reading of the passage is necessary:

Luke 16:19-31 "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. 20 At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores 21 and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. 24 So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue<sup>NOTE 10</sup>, because I am in agony in this fire.' 25 "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' 27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, 28 for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' 29 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 30 "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' 31 "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" (NIV)

Roman Catholics, don't believe in the full sufficiency and completeness of Christ's work on the cross. They claim an interim state is necessary to allow for a person to pay for some of their sins before God allows them into heaven. This is against what Scripture says about God's finished salvation and His payment-in-full for our sins. Two passages, of many, that speak of Jesus' full salvation for all believers include:

Hebrews 7:25-27 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. 26 Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. 27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. (NIV)

Hebrews 10:10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (NIV)

Unless you believe that Jesus fully saves, your only hope is to invent a halfway solution such as purgatory. For the record, it's not Lazarus that Roman Catholics believe was in Purgatory in this passage; they legitimately hold that he was in heaven with Abraham. It's the rich man they claim to be in purgatory, placing the rich man on his way to heaven sometime in the future.

Their belief completely destroys the immediate and clear sense of the account. How do they place the rich man in purgatory? They base their entire argument on presuppositions that such a place must exist and needs to exist, followed up by assumptions about the nature of compassion. They presume that all acts of compassion must come from God and never from any natural motivation or ability. They cite the mere fact the rich man had compassion for his family as supposed proof that God was at work in him. From a Roman Catholic source:

Luke 16:19-31 - in this story, we see that the dead rich man is suffering but still feels compassion for his brothers and wants to warn them of his place of suffering. But there is no suffering in heaven or compassion in hell because compassion is a grace from God and those in hell are deprived from God's graces for all eternity. So where is the rich man? He is in purgatory. ([www.scripturecatholic.com/purgatory.html](http://www.scripturecatholic.com/purgatory.html))

They forget that acts which might pass as compassion, or appear externally as compassion, may have sinful motivations.

Romans 14:23b ... everything that does not come from faith is sin. (NIV)

God will judge these hidden thoughts and intents of the heart (see Hebrews 4:12-13). Any act done apart from faith is ultimately for a self-serving reason, to seek personal glory or personal praise, to ease guilt, or even for direct personal benefit. A true act of faith seeks only the glory of God, the praise of God, and benefit to His kingdom. Other compassionate acts are natural. Affection towards family is a natural God-given ability. Some suppress love of family because of sin (See 2 Timothy 3:3, "without natural affection [KJV]" or "without love [NIV]" - from the Greek word "astorgos" meaning "without family love". See also Romans 1:31).

There's no purgatory, no matter how much some people hope for one. While alive, Adam's race must deal with their personal sin, by the applied blood of Jesus, or those sins remain for eternity.

### **Abraham's Bosom**

As mentioned in the section on Purgatory, some Protestants have also created a specially named interim location, typically called Abraham's Bosom (using King James English). Unlike purgatory this state features no real torment nor does it serve in any way to pay for one's own sins. They do claim it's a place of some comfort but God (or specifically Jesus) isn't there. Some versions claim it's a limited part of hell. And, note this important detail, they claim it only belongs to the time before the death of Christ. In this version a believer would die

and go to Abraham's Bosom ("Abraham's side" in Luke 16:22). Later God (or specifically Jesus) freed them to go to the present heaven and then finally to the new heavens and new earth.

Their felt need for this extra interim state comes from a limited view of God and His eternal plan. They typically claim that God couldn't allow any believer into heaven until Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. They seemingly think it necessary both happened in time and space, in case Jesus didn't go through with everything. This disparages the person and deity of Christ, who is God and who cannot lie (see Titus 1:2, Hebrews 6:18). Being God, He could and did act on His promise from the beginning. In fact, all history is an unfolding of God's perfect, determined, and unalterable plan.

Isaiah 46:9b-10 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. (NIV)

Of course, if other passages existed to support Abraham's bosom as a destination separate from heaven, or a holding place before the present heaven, this would help their case. Unfortunately for the proponents of this belief, their entire doctrine of Abraham's Bosom begins and ends right here, an imagined fiction based on a single phrase. In fact, the phrase "Abraham's Bosom" is a Hebraism for heaven, the place where Abraham's soul is in the presence and comfort of God while awaiting the resurrection. God was not waiting to perhaps continue being the God of Abraham, with Abraham in some intermediate state hoping that Jesus would come through; God *is* the God of Abraham. To God, this believer is alive! Consider the words Jesus spoke even before His death and resurrection:

Matthew 22:32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living. (NIV, also consider the wording and implication of Matthew 12:24-27)

Luke 20:37-38 But in the account of the bush, even Moses showed that the dead rise, for he calls the Lord 'the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 38 He is not the God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive." (NIV)

A common claim is that Jesus had no right to take anyone from Abraham's Bosom until He took the keys of Hell and Death from the devil following His crucifixion<sup>NOTE 14</sup>. They think God somehow allowed the devil to lock up believers in this limited part of hell. Their legal fiction is that God didn't have the right to take believers from Abraham's Bosom (or, more properly, Hades or Sheol) until Jesus actually died and rose again. If true, what right would Jesus have to cause Moses and Elijah to appear with Him on the Mount of Transfiguration<sup>NOTE</sup>



<sup>13</sup>? Notice both individuals were consciously aware of and conversing with Jesus about His coming death. Their conversation implies increased knowledge and better understanding of the person of Christ, something arising from being in His presence. This fits with being in the present heaven (part of Hades or Sheol), not from being prisoner in some far-removed holding place or compartment of hell apart from His presence. This meshes well with Jesus' words about Abraham...

John 8:56 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." (NIV)

Again, Jesus' claim was before His death and resurrection. Jesus was saying that not only did Abraham look forward to the Messiah when he was alive on earth; he (present tense) had seen it and was glad. Jesus was saying Abraham had seen Him come to earth. That's not something readily seen by a person in a holding place of hell, rather easily seen if now living in God's presence <sup>NOTE 6</sup>.

The account in Luke 16, about Lazarus and the rich man, nowhere specifically claims Abraham's bosom to be a part of Hades (Sheol). If there was no other clarifying passages, an argument might exist that Abraham's Bosom was separate from Hades and Heaven. But we know from other Scripture passages that Hades (Sheol) is a destination for both lost and saved. Yet, those Scriptures distinguish and contrast both states within Hades. Verse 22 speaks of paradise (with Lazarus alongside, or with, Abraham who was with God). Then, in verse 23, it speaks of a decidedly different place within Hades (Sheol), one of torment and far removed from the former. It's merely representing the present heaven and present hell within Hades (Sheol). Using the biblical principle of interpretation that "Scriptures interprets Scriptures", I can arrive at no other conclusion. An interpreter must assume too much, or read into the passage, to make Abraham's Bosom a separate place than the present heaven, let alone part of hell in any way. Both the rich man and Abraham were in Hades (Sheol), because everybody goes to Hades (and still do).

Luke 16:22-23 "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. 23 In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. (NIV)

Some who recognize Jewish precedence in understanding Hades (Sheol) has two compartments within it often misrepresent the matter. They make the Jewish belief into a two-compartment hell with both separate from the present heaven. They do this without recognizing the Old Testament Hebrew word "Sheol" and its equivalent Greek word "Hades" are both general words used for the abode of the dead. (For those protesting the Old

Testament didn't have Greek, Hades appears in the ancient Septuagint translation for the word Sheol. New Testament writers often quote this translation). I repeated this for emphasis; you must remember that Hades (Sheol) was not a narrow word meaning Hell; rather it merely referred to the resting place of all dead. This could include a literal grave, or wherever a person was following death, specifics aside.

Ancient Jewish rabbis spoke of this state after death, specifically referring to a divided Sheol, with a place for the righteous and a place for the wicked. They were certain that God treated the unbeliever differently than the believer in death. What it appears the rabbis didn't know or fully understand was how differently for the future hell and heaven, namely the final Lake of Fire and New Heaven and Earth. This is because they didn't recognize (or have) the New Testament's later revelation.

With God's further New Testament revelation, the early church kept this same view of a two-part Hades (Sheol) as a destination for all believers and unbelievers. They understood it's a place of comfort or torment where all await the resurrection. For believers, there's no distinction whether believers before Christ or following Christ (those we call Christians) - as all are in Christ and all equally await His glorious appearing and the final resurrection <sup>NOTE 8</sup>. Lazarus and Abraham, as should every believer, both long for the final perfect state of the new heaven and earth, complete with their new bodies which they will receive at the final resurrection <sup>NOTE 11</sup>. Come quickly Lord Jesus! (Revelation 22:20; 2 Timothy 4:8)

To help explain this section, the following is a summary chart encompassing the primary views of those holding to Abraham's Bosom as a separate, pre-resurrection, destination:

	Wicked (lost)	Righteous (saved) before Christ	Righteous (saved) after Christ
When they die...	Goes to Sheol (Hades)	Goes to Sheol (Abraham's Bosom)	Goes to Paradise (Present Heaven)
Body, Soul, Spirit	The body lies in a physical grave. The Soul and Spirit is in Sheol in torment, separated from God and all that is good; this part of Sheol (Hades) we popularly call Hell - specifically	The body lies in a physical grave. The Soul and Spirit is in Sheol (Abraham's Bosom) with other righteous people but separated from God	The body lies in a physical grave. The Soul and Spirit is in Paradise (the present heaven), in God's presence and with other righteous people.

	the present Hell		
After Jesus' death...	.	Goes to Paradise (Present Heaven)	.
Body, Soul, Spirit	Now called Hades instead of Sheol and only holding spirits and souls of lost.	The body lies in a physical grave. The Soul and Spirit is in Paradise (the present heaven) in God's presence and with other righteous people.	.
At the Resurrection...	Judgment to Death	Judgment to Life	Judgment to Life
Body, Soul, Spirit	In Lake of Fire (Gehenna) for eternity (literally everything left in Sheol (Hades) following God's resurrection of the Righteous)	In New Heaven and Earth (new glorified body and fully sanctified soul and spirit) for eternity	In New Heaven and Earth (new glorified body and fully sanctified soul and spirit) for eternity

### Destroyed by Fire

Most understand the Bible teaches that in God's final judgment, something's going to burn. The already mentioned Lake of Fire of course comes to mind. Exactly what items (or entities) suffer this fate? Consider each of the following:

- The devil and his angels - The eternal fire exists first for the ones who rebelled first, namely the devil and the demons.

Matthew 25:41 "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. (NIV)

- Unsaved humans (wicked)

Matthew 25:46 "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (NIV, the context for eternal punishment being the eternal fire mentioned in 25:41)

- Death - Death came about because of sin. In the future New Heaven's and Earth where this will be no sin, death is no longer needed.

Revelation 20:14-15 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. (NIV)

- The present heaven - The presence of sin, rebellion, and even war against God, tainted this current dwelling place of God and the holy angels.

2 Peter 3:10-13 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. (NIV)

- The present earth - This creation is wearing out, and needs changing (see Hebrew 1:10-12), it groans while waiting for to make it new (see Romans 8:19-22).

2 Peter 3:10-13 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. (NIV)

Revelation 20:11 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. (NIV)

- Hades - the entirety of the current abode of the dead and spirits (including the present heaven) is no longer needed, as God's dwelling place will be with humankind (see Revelation 21:3). There's no more death and wickedness (with no need of Tartarus or the present Hell).

Revelation 20:14-15 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. (NIV)

- All sin - the wicked burn with their wickedness, but God frees believers from their sins. What of sins believers commit before their conversion? What or later intentional or unintentional sins? God has destined all this sin to burn. The Holy Spirit who works in us baptizes us with fire. Similarly God salts believers with fire (not to consume but to burn away selectively). Finally only our purified works (done in God's power and strength) remain.

Luke 3:16-17 John answered them all, "I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. 17 His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (NIV, also Matthew 3:11-12)

Mark 9:49 Everyone will be salted with fire. (NIV) <sup>NOTE 3</sup>

1 Corinthians 3:11-15 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. 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. (NIV)

Some take the line "everyone will be salted with fire" to claim God makes all believers pass through the Lake of Fire for purification. Scriptures corrects such a view, showing the Lake of Fire to be consuming not purifying. Similarly it's not evidence of another interim state, as we considered in the section on Purgatory. This salting with fire is by God who baptizes with fire - the Holy Spirit today at work in a believer's life.

- The old order - This summarizes every point above, literally every sin-tainted piece of creation. Only God and His holy angels (who remained true to Him) and those God has redeemed become part of the new order. God forever does away with everything having to do with the old order, the system corrupted by sin. This removal is necessary for our new dwelling place to be permanently a home of righteousness (see 2 Peter 3:13).

Revelation 21:3-4 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." (NIV)

### **The other Lazarus**

Where was dead Lazarus' spirit, when he was in the grave, before Jesus brought him back to life? We can ask the same of every other person raised to natural life by Jesus during His first coming or even by Old Testament prophets. The Lazarus in question is Martha and Mary's brother, of Bethany near Jerusalem. This man fell sick (John 11:1), died (John 11:14), and was dead for four days before Jesus raised him to renewed natural life <sup>NOTE 4</sup>. Don't confuse the Lazarus of this account with poor-man Lazarus of Jesus' otherworld illustration in Luke 16:19-31. For the record, a few key portions of the events surrounding Lazarus of Bethany are as follows:

John 11:17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. (NIV)

John 11:43-44 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." (NIV)

I'll avoid a dichotomous versus trichotomous debate on the makeup of man <sup>NOTE 9</sup>. The question of Lazarus' spirit is about the non-corporeal portion of a person, what some call the soul – specifically his thoughts, will and emotions. So again, the question is; where did Lazarus' spirit and soul go when his body was in the grave (tomb) for four days?

The simple and best answer is: We can't say with certainty because the Bible doesn't speak specifically of this issue in the account of Lazarus. Lazarus' premature death, his brief stay in the grave and his following resurrection were all an extraordinary event planned by God. By definition we can't judge extraordinary events by the norm. Without a doubt, in Lazarus' extraordinary circumstances, God could have done everything in an extraordinary or non-ordinary way.

Since this answer won't satisfy some, their real question should be, "normally speaking, what was destination of a believer's spirit and soul when they died before Jesus' death and resurrection?" This we can answer from Scriptures and leave them to their specific speculations

on the extraordinary case of Lazarus or any of the others Jesus raised including Jairus' daughter (see Luke 8:51-55).

An answer sent to me, for this exact question, deserves examination. If it's fundamentally correct, there's no need to write further on this subject (and why reinvent the wheel?).

So the short answer is that Lazereth's spirit went to Sheol. The Abraham's bosom side of it. Don't worry, I'm not confusing the Lazereths of the two stories, I just think that all humans, righteous and unrighteous went to Sheol before the cross. (Luke 16:25)

Before Christ all people went to hell (Sheol/Hades/the Abyss) whether they had faith in God or not. Those with faith, the righteous, went to Abraham's bosom and the unrighteous to the other side, Hades...what we would think of as hell.

After Christ death before His resurrection, He went to Sheol and brought to heaven those that had faith and left the others there to await final judgment. (1 Peter 3:18-20; Eph. 4:8-10) And currently, since Jesus' resurrection, believers when they die, their spirits are present with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23) and non-believer's spirits go to hell both of which are holding patterns, so to speak, until they get resurrected bodies. Both the righteous and the wicked will get resurrected bodies. Believers at the 2nd coming (1 Cor. 15:50-55; 1 Thes. 4:16-17) and non-believers at the great white throne judgment (Rev. 20:11-15) after the 1,000 year Millennial reign of Jesus. We often wrongly think of hell/hades as the eternal place of torment but really the lake of fire/Gehenna is where the damned will spend eternity and Sheol is just the holding place that the damned await final judgment. Actually heaven is not the end either for a believer but rather a holding place that our spirits go to until the 2nd coming when we will get glorified bodies and forever to be with the Lord on the earth in the New Jerusalem. It is amazing! We will be with Him, and some even ruling with Him! <sup>NOTE</sup>  
<sup>7</sup> (Anonymous respondent, email forward June 2009, spelling of "Lazarus" and "judgment" as in the original, parenthesis in the original)

This respondent offered a form of the "Abraham's Bosom" position that we considered earlier. Similarly it separates the present heaven from Hades and makes Hades out only to be Hell. The correct view to all this we covered in earlier sections. In summary, if Lazarus experienced the norm at his death, before Jesus raised him, the normal state for any believer or unbeliever following death would apply. Simply put, using common English wording, unbelievers go to the present hell and believers go to the present heaven (the presence of God), though neither are a final destination. The Biblical place called "Hades" or "Sheol" encompasses both of these locations.

## Summary Chart - Eternal Life and Death

While sharing some likenesses with the chart in the Abraham's Bosom section, there are fundamental differences. The following chart is a more concise and consistent view, anchored in Scriptures and confirmed by understanding of the early church. Here there is no three-part heaven (Abraham's Bosom, Paradise or Present Heaven, and New Heaven); rather there is the present heaven and future New Heaven and Earth. It rejects belief that Sheol changed into a Hades only for unbelievers. Here there's only been one present hell, always part of Hades (Sheol). The entirety of Hades (Sheol) will end in the Lake of Fire (the final hell). Which makes it an incredibly important detail that God has forever set free all His redeemed from Hades (Sheol) at the prior resurrection. This chart presents a consistent use of terminology found in Scriptures:

	Wicked (Lost)	Righteous (Saved)
Born – Body, Soul, Spirit	Objects of Wrath (Ephesians 2:3)	None Righteous (Romans 3:10-12)
In physical life...	Condemned already because they have not believed (John 3:18)	Made alive in Christ through faith by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:4-9)
When they die...	Goes to Sheol (Hades)	Goes to Sheol (Hades)
Body, Soul, Spirit	In Sheol (Hades): The body lies in a physical grave, a part of Sheol (Hades). The Soul and Spirit is in torment, separated from God and all that is good; this part of Sheol (Hades) we popularly call Hell - specifically the present Hell	In Sheol (Hades): The body lies in a physical grave, a part of Sheol (Hades). The Soul and Spirit finds comfort in the presence of God and other righteous; this part of Sheol (Hades) we popularly and scripturally call Heaven - specifically the present Heaven
At the Resurrection...	Judgment to Death	Judgment to Life
Body, Soul, Spirit	In Lake of Fire (Gehenna) for eternity. Includes everything left in Sheol (Hades) following God's resurrection of the Righteous	In New Heaven and Earth. With a new glorified body and fully sanctified soul and spirit for eternity

## The Afterlife End Notes



1. One example of a fanciful interpretation of canonical Scriptures to justify their doctrine of purgatory will satisfy. The following is from a Roman Catholic website:

Matt. 5:26,18:34; Luke 12:58-59 - Jesus teaches us, "Come to terms with your opponent or you will be handed over to the judge and thrown into prison. You will not get out until you have paid the last penny." The word "opponent" (antidiko) is likely a reference to the devil (see the same word for devil in 1 Pet. 5:8) who is an accuser against man (c.f. Job 1.6-12; Zech. 3.1; Rev. 12.10), and God is the judge. If we have not adequately dealt with Satan and sin in this life, we will be held in a temporary state called a prison, and we won't get out until we have satisfied our entire debt to God. This "prison" is purgatory where we will not get out until the last penny is paid. (<http://www.scripturecatholic.com/purgatory.html>)

The logical "need" for a purgatory stems from the overall Roman Catholic belief system. Their doctrine of salvation does not understand nor express the completeness of what Christ performed on the cross. It needs the one God is saving to somehow cooperate and share in his or her own salvation. Such a system sets every individual up for failure and afterwards no assurance of salvation in this life. Having purgatory then allows the person to somehow work out this problem in the next life.

2. The idea of "Abraham's Bosom" as an interim state for believers arose within the relatively new system of belief called "Dispensationalism." This organized belief system arose within the Brethren Movement and popularized mostly through the efforts of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a Brethren minister. It's sometimes referred to as Darbyism. Second only to Darby, C.I. Scofield was another great champion of this belief system, which he advanced through adding Dispensational notes to his widely used Reference Bible.

3. Some believe "Everyone will be salted with fire (Mark 9:49)" to mean God only salts the wicked with fire. They see this line as an extension of preceding verses referencing punishment in Gehenna. I'll concede this possibility. If so, it implies that a God preserves a person's flesh (using the image of salt as a preservative) while undergoing eternal punishment in the fire. "Everyone," in this interpretation, would be all who go to Gehenna. While possible, it's more probable the topic of Gehenna and the lost ended with the verse prior. Here the focus broadens. Verse 49 references "everyone" else. These are individuals beyond those destined for the Fiery Lake, namely believers. The salt allusion here isn't to a preservative, where you cover the item in salt. This a sprinkled salt, affecting specifically where it lands. This fire selectively purifies rather than consumes. The verses which follow clearly continue to reference believers, now calling them the salt of the earth. It's a natural continuation based on salt (but now drawing in the second image of salt as a preservative).

4. We must distinguish those Jesus raised to life during his earthly ministry from those raised in the final resurrection of the dead. Every person miraculously raised to renewed natural life still had to die again. Believers raised in the final resurrection never die again (see Revelation 21:4, Revelation 20:6, 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54-58).

5. I say this chart "attempts" to visually encompass all terms considered. It's possible to portray some ideas in other ways. For example, the "grave" doesn't need the great chasm (gulf) between the location for the righteous and the lost. Indeed, righteous and wicked share the same earthly pit as their grave. I chose to have the chasm visual extend through this physical portion mostly to allow proper visual representation of the general use of the "Abyss." I don't think it improper to have the chasm there. It shows that though righteous and wicked bodies both rest in a grave, God has unchangeably destined them to far different destinations at the resurrection. I welcome any comments and suggested revisions to this chart.

6. Though the rich man, in Lazarus' account, knew (past tense) the condition of his brothers, the only Scriptural references we find of deceased being currently aware of events on earth is about the righteous. God only allows the tormented lost their memories of the life they once had and squandered. Saints in the present heaven see the continuation, or outworking, of God's plan and only believers could appreciate and rejoice in this. Saints awareness might underlie Hebrews 12:1. It implies saints who died before us are part of our present "cloud of witnesses."

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...  
(NIV, in context of Chapter 11)

7. I must stress there's no "some" over which believers will reign with Jesus. Even as God has blessed every believer in Christ, all His children will reign with Him.

Revelation 5:9-10 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." (NIV)

Revelation 22:3-5 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. (NIV)

2 Timothy 2:11-12 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. (NIV)

8. The early church father Hippolytus of Rome (lived 170-235 A.D.), a Greek writer, understood that Hades (as a direct equivalent to Sheol) was a place for departed believers and unbelievers. Of course, he too held there's a separation between how God treats believers and unbelievers there. Unlike those who speculate that God emptied "Abraham's Bosom" after Jesus' death, he rightly understood it to be the present heaven where the righteous await the resurrection and the new heavens and earth.

But now we must speak of Hades, in which the souls both of the righteous and the unrighteous are detained. Hades is a place in the created system... And there the righteous from the beginning dwell, not ruled by necessity, but enjoying always the contemplation of the blessings which are in their view, and delighting themselves with the expectation of others ever new, and deeming those ever better than these. And that place brings no toils to them. There, there is neither fierce heat, nor cold, nor thorn; but the face of the fathers and the righteous is seen to be always smiling, as they wait for the rest and eternal revival in [new] heaven which succeed this location. And we call it by the name Abraham's bosom. ("Against Plato, On the Cause of the Universe", section 1, Hippolytus of Rome; square parenthesis ours for clarity)

Another, Justin Martyr (lived 100-165), also knew the fate of the righteous and the wicked were far different, even though both went to Hades:

There are two roads to Hades, well we know; By this the righteous, and by that the bad, On to their separate fates shall tend... ("On the Sole Government of God", Chapter 3 - Testimonies to a Future Judgment, Justin Martyr)

Later still, Tertullian (lived 160-225) described the bosom of Abraham as a section of Hades in which the righteous dead await the final resurrection...

Therefore, whatever amount of punishment or refreshment the soul tastes in Hades, in its prison or lodging, in the fire or in Abraham's bosom, it gives proof... ("A Treatise on the Soul", Chapter 7, Tertullian)

All souls, therefore; are shut up within Hades: do you admit this? (It is true, whether you say yes or no: moreover, there are already experienced there punishments and consolations; and there you have a poor man and a rich. And now, having postponed some stray questions for this part of my work, I will notice them in this suitable place,

and then come to a close. Why, then, cannot you suppose that the soul undergoes punishment and consolation in Hades in the interval, while it awaits its alternative of judgment, in a certain anticipation either of gloom or of glory? ("A Treatise on the Soul", Chapter 58, Tertullian; parenthesis his)

9. Some hold that a person exists only in two parts: body and soul or spirit, holding that soul and spirit are identical and synonymous terms. This two-part man is a dichotomous view. Others embrace, especially based on passages such as Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23, that a person has three parts: body, soul and spirit. This three-part man is a trichotomous view.

10. Throughout church history, some have claimed that since Lazarus sought water to cool his tongue this was evidence the body was with soul and spirit in hell. It's true to say the body and soul and spirit are fully in Hades (Sheol), the former in a physical grave and the latter in a place of torment. Yet no other passages claim the body is physically and immediately present for that expressed torment. Consider the mind of someone who loses a limb can still suffer pain, supposedly in the missing limb. So too minds suffering Hades' torment can want for relief, when no physical cure is possible. The rest of the account makes it clear there was no possible comfort; yet the text doesn't speak to why.

Unquestionably, for the righteous in Hades (Sheol), there are verses that refer to the soul and spirit apart from the body, giving support that the body is not immediately present. Only after the final resurrection do we see the body and soul and spirit all present together. Then the entire person, wicked or righteous, is in the Lake of Fire (Gehenna) or the New Heaven and Earth (the latter being a newly raised and perfected body).

11. Consider that perhaps the oldest book in the Bible, the book of Job, has a believer who longs for that final resurrection. Job knew with certainty that God would resurrect him, with a new body, and in this resurrected state get to see God!

Job 19:25-27 I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes - I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (NIV)

12. Hades is empty when God destroys it in the Lake of Fire. He previously raised both the righteous and wicked to stand before His judgment seat. The righteous enter into everlasting life; the wicked enter into everlasting death, namely the Lake of Fire. God released all fallen angels from Tartarus, for judgment (1 Corinthians 6:3), all also landing in the Lake of Fire. The empty former domain of the afterlife now follows the wicked and rebellious (including the devil

and his angels, Matthew 25:41) into the Lake of Fire. Hades (Sheol) is no longer needed, it's part of the former sin corrupted universe.

13. If Jesus didn't hold the keys of hell and death throughout history (see Revelation 1:18), and during his earthly ministry, what grounds would He have to raise someone from the dead. For example, Lazarus (John 11:17-44) or Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35-42). Believing that Jesus could selectively do this whenever He wanted makes the keys irrelevant, if they're held by the devil. Also, if the devil held the keys throughout Old Testament history, by what grounds could God have His prophets raise the dead throughout the time before the coming of Christ? Perhaps the best example here is that of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kings 17:19-23).

14. This following passage is a sometimes proof-text for those who claim that Jesus went and freed the souls in Abraham's Bosom and then took them to heaven following His death.

Ephesians 4:7-10 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men." 9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) (NIV, parenthesis theirs)

The same verses from the New American Standard Bible for comparison:

Ephesians 4:8-10 Therefore it says, "WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN." 9 (Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) (NASU, parenthesis theirs)

Again, from the NET Bible (New English Translation) for further comparison:

Ephesians 4:8-10 Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he captured captives; he gave gifts to men." 9 Now what is the meaning of "he ascended," except that he also descended to the lower regions, namely, the earth? 10 He, the very one who descended, is also the one who ascended above all the heavens, in order to fill all things. (The NET Bible®)

The overall context is that Jesus (God's Son from eternity) descended to earth and then ascended above all the heavens. The latter either means "above all the earthly heavens" or it's

hyperbole, showing the greatness of Jesus ascension into heaven. The first part, in verse 8, is a divinely inspired rephrasing of a passage from Psalms. It's a visual word picture, showing the triumphal procession that a conquering king would typically have. Jesus, who conquered sin and death and owns everything – they're all His captives, His slaves - gives gifts to mankind, as was common with earthly conquering kings and Roman emperors. What gifts? The verses which follow show it's His specific servants (literally "slaves") that He gives to bless, build, and strengthen His church.

There's no need to read more into the passage. Including Dispensational favorites such as Jesus descending into a devil-run hell and taking the keys from the devil and then bringing Old Testament saints with Him to heaven as literal captives,

Another of Paul's passages helps us understand Paul's words in Ephesians (using Scriptures to interpret Scriptures). Jesus' descent to the earth, was also a descent into humility, His ascent was again to place Him in the "highest place." Consider Paul's letter to the Philippians:

Philippians 2:5-11 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 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! 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. (NIV)

Another passage often drawn into the belief that Jesus had to go rescue believing souls locked away in Abraham's Bosom, or go and defeat the devil, appears in 1 Peter...

1 Peter 3:18-20 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, 19 through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison 20 who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, (NIV)

Teachers offer various conclusions from this passage – admittedly a passage that is hard to understand as many translators have wrestled over it. Some popular understandings include:

- Jesus went and preached the gospel to (choose one):
  - The lost in hell

- The saved in Abraham's Bosom
- Both the first and second alternatives
- Only after Jesus died did God finally expect people to choose to believe in Him or not (God then took those believing people to heaven)

In reality, the statement that Jesus went and preached is not enough to prove that Jesus descended into hell (or Abraham's Bosom) after His death. Overall evidence for this is lacking in Scriptures. So what can we justly infer?

1. "He went and preached" - the statement does not anywhere say what Jesus preached. Simply put, He spoke something and it's tantamount to adding to Scriptures to say that it was the gospel. It's more fitting, based on this passage and many other passages, to infer that Jesus proclaimed victory over His enemies. The passage nowhere implies any conversion of disobedient spirits.
2. "To the spirits in prison" - Some claim this means Old Testament saints imprisoned in Abraham's Bosom. Yet nowhere does God portray the state of deceased saints as being in prison. On the spiritual realm, Scripture only uses prison imagery for Satan and demons (Revelation 20:1-7; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). This makes it unlikely these are spirits of wicked humans. In fact, the wording used doesn't say "the spirits of those (people) who disobeyed" rather it says "the spirits... who disobeyed." The passage implies the ones Christ preached to were rebellious spirits imprisoned before the flood of Noah's day. This uses similar wording found elsewhere in Scriptures about demons, also called "evil spirits" in Mark 1:27, 3:11, 5:13, etc.

It aligns better with Scriptures to infer that Jesus went and proclaimed victory to the evil spirits imprisoned in the Abyss (Tartarus). His goal wasn't to convert them, merely as a victor proclaiming His victory! I'm not certain keys are in view here, but let's assume so. For those claiming Jesus had to regain the keys of hell and death from Satan, there's only event. Jesus showed the forces of Hell that He holds the keys and always has!

15. Romans 10:6-7 portray the present "heaven" portion of Hades (Sheol) separately from the Abyss, in opposing contrast. This, by default, makes the Abyss a reference to the portion of Hades (Sheol) occupied by the wicked.

16. We don't expect Scriptures to use "the Abyss" about Christ (see Romans 10:7). All other mentions of this destination have fallen or wicked spiritual (angelic) beings in view. Some find it easy to dismiss this isolated instance by recognizing the Greek word has occasional use for

the abode of the dead. Yet this verse still raises question, why use a term that in all other instances associates with evil?

Using Paul to interpret Paul, consider this verse:

2 Corinthians 5:21 God made him [Jesus] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (NIV, parenthesis ours for clarification)

What Jesus bore on the cross of Calvary justly warranted the worst, most severe, punishment available - as He bore all our sins. It's likely Paul had this in view when writing Romans 10:7. If so, he meant "the abyss" as the specific prison-destination normally reserved for the worst of wicked spiritual beings. His use was intentional rather than broadening the Abyss' meaning into another general name for Sheol (Hades).

17. Roman Catholics don't limit their use of "hell" to the usual view of it being a place of punishment for the lost. In their theology, which further confuses any popular view, "hell" applies to each of four differing locations:

Hell (infernus) in theological usage is a place of punishment after death. Theologians distinguish four meanings of the term hell: hell in the strict sense, or the place of punishment for the damned, be they demons or men; the limbo of infants (limbus parvulorum), where those who die in original sin alone, and without personal mortal sin, are confined and undergo some kind of punishment; the limbo of the Fathers (limbus patrum), in which the souls of the just who died before Christ awaited their admission to heaven; for in the meantime heaven was closed against them in punishment for the sin of Adam; purgatory, where the just, who die in venial sin or who still owe a debt of temporal punishment for sin, are cleansed by suffering before their admission to heaven. (New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia, [www.newadvent.org/cathen/07207a.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07207a.htm))

In practical use, most Catholics try to separate Hell from purgatory or limbo:

[The Bible] speaks plainly of a third condition, commonly called the limbo of the Fathers, where the just who had died before the redemption were waiting for heaven to be opened to them. After his death and before his resurrection, Christ visited those experiencing the limbo of the Fathers and preached to them the good news that heaven would now be opened to them (1 Pet. 3:19). These people thus were not in heaven, but neither were they experiencing the torments of hell. Some have speculated that the limbo of the Fathers is the same as purgatory. This may or may not be the case. However, even if the limbo of the Fathers is not purgatory, its existence shows that a temporary, intermediate state is not contrary to Scripture. Look at it this way. If the



limbo of the Fathers was purgatory, then this one verse directly teaches the existence of purgatory. If the limbo of the Fathers was a different temporary state, then the Bible at least says such a state can exist. It proves there can be more than just heaven and hell. (Purgatory Described in Full, <http://catholicsay.com/purgatory-explained/>, October 20, 2015)

Even as we briefly examined "purgatory" and showed it a non-scriptural idea, the same applies to "limbo of infants" and "limbo of the Fathers." The latter is mostly the already examined and dismissed view of Abraham's Bosom as a separate holding place before Christ.

18. Origins of the word "hell" are obscure, perhaps drawn from the Anglo-Saxon term "helan" or "behelian", meaning "to hide". It's related to earlier Latin and Greek words standing for dark and hidden places. Others tie the word directly to paganism, noting that Hel is the goddess of the underworld in ancient Norse mythology. In this mythological view, only those dying in battle can enter Valhalla. All other dead descend to Hel in the underworld (where there's a separate place of punishment for criminals).

Joshua 23:7 Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. (NIV)

Some claim using the term Hell is invoking the name of a false god (consider Joshua 23:7). We must grant that Scriptures sanction this cross-use of names because of sacred inclusion of the term Hades (100% a false god) by merely using it as a representative term for an actual place. Obviously this use of names doesn't equal "invoking the names" of pagan gods – something that's only done when you use them in their original meaning and intent, giving them authority and power.

We further use the names of false god's when we cite many days of the week and months of the year, or use names applied to the planets in our solar system. None of this general use is invoking the names of pagan gods. Even using general designators, for days like Easter and Christmas, in no way bind the user to accepting the false idea (or deity) behind the name. Easter, of course, was a pagan deity; Christmas represents Christ's Mass a non-scriptural celebration and misuse of the Lord's Supper.

### **Does Islam have anything to do with End Times?**

A frequent question I've received, directly or indirectly, is what role Islam might have in any Biblical end-times possibilities. I'm certain Dispensational influence prompted many of these

queries, since events drive so much of their theology. Regardless, it's a valid question deserving an answer.

I didn't include this subject as part of my primary study of Revelation because it's less a study of the text than a tentative application of the text. If history has taught the church anything, we best understand in hindsight application of future prophecy. We recognize the beasts of Daniel (chapter 7) and portions of the statute (Daniel 2:31-45) in hindsight. It's unlikely people living during those empires would have. At best, some believers may have recognized their present circumstances as possible fulfillment. I base my understanding, right now, on knowledge of some history and the present. Yet, my future awareness is, at best, a calculated guess or speculation. I may identify peoples and places that now seemingly match features of the scriptural text, but we may later find this a coincidence, or casual association, or shadow of something that is still to come.

Why try to identify possible significant characters at all? Something John makes clear throughout Revelation is the church must focus on remaining faithful in the face of all that comes, even persecution leading to death. Lesser beasts (empires), rulers, and nations may share qualities with the final beasts of Revelation and our ability to recognize them (and their satanic origin and goals), on any scale, is important. If existing empires meet characteristics of either Revelation beast, the church must be on guard against them. If we later see they're not the beasts of Revelation, that one not yet seen or recognized is the true fulfillment, standing guard against the former remains good training for what may come. We're always to be on guard (Mark 13:33; Matthew 24:42; 25:13) and "understanding the present time (Romans 13:11; 1 Chronicles 12:32)."

In our study of Revelation we found the beasts aren't individuals, rather kingdoms or empires that will cast a wide shadow over the nations of the earth. Specifically, there's a beast that comes on the scene from the ruins of the Roman Empire. It's shown by John's allusion to Daniel and his correlation between the beasts and the "enormous, dazzling statute (Daniel 2:31)." This is a fragmented multi-headed beast (Revelation 13) and this beast remains until the end (namely the return of Jesus and the outpouring of the wrath of God).

Consider what we know of this first beast of Revelation (or final beast of Daniel):

- It has long tenure (existing from the Roman Empire's ruin until the end: Revelation 13; 17:15-17; 19:20; Daniel 2:40-45; 7:19-22).
- Many powers, nations, and governments or rulers (heads, horns, crowns) comprise it (Revelation 13:1).
- It has satanic authority. People worship the beast even as they worship the devil, whether recognized or not. (Revelation 13:4).

- It has a primary feature (head) that looked like it had a fatal wound but it fully recovered (Revelation 13:3)
- It blasphemes God (Revelation 13:6)
- It causes deceit to prosper (Daniel 8:25)
- It utters proud words, it considers itself superior (Revelation 13:5)
- Everyone considers it undefeatable (“Who can make war against him?” Revelation 13:4)
- It slanders God’s name (Revelation 13:6)
- It slanders God’s dwelling place (Revelation 13:6)
- It slanders those who live in heaven, God’s church (Revelation 13:6)
- It makes war against the saints and conquers them (Revelation 13:7; Daniel 7:21)
- It will destroy God’s holy people (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 11:7)
- It has satanic authority over “every tribe, people, language and nation (Revelation 13:7; Daniel 7:23).” [Not meaning God’s people, called out of the nation, who He has scattered among these peoples.]
- It’s a fragmented empire, unlike those which came before it (it’s iron mixed with baked clay. Daniel 2:41-43).

What does a fragmented yet ruthless empire look like, an empire with many heads and many rulers and many nations, yet all one purpose (Revelation 17:13)? It’ll never look like the empires before it (“it will be different from all other kingdoms” Daniel 7:23b). Consider Babylon, the Medes and Persians, the (Greek) Empire of Alexander the Great, and even how the Roman Empire first looked. Those beasts (and matching portions of the statue) of Daniel all looked similar in that they had typically one primary ruler over many nations. During these earlier beasts’ control, many rulers came and went. Each potentate had a common purpose, to advance their authority and to expand or preserve their control over the nations and peoples they ruled.

All empires are more a unifying idea than they are a static geographic and physical entity. That’s why an empire can exist through growth or shrinkage (encompassing more or less geographic area or peoples). It’s also why empires can survive and continue when its ruler dies or when someone replaces the ruler. Empires can survive an outside dynasty exerting control over it. (For example, the Egyptian empire was still the Egyptian empire whether ruled by the outsider Hyksos, an internal dynasty, or even a Nubian foreigner, complete with extra territory).

So what idea (empire) continued from the Roman Empire? Daniel’s statute well pictured the Roman Empire’s division by using two legs. That once monolithic empire functionally split into two, the east and the west, with neither side dying out, only changing in form. The west gained new leadership when it fell to a Germanic (Barbarian) ruler in 476 A.D. but it continued to view itself as the successor of Rome, not a new empire. In fact, because of the influence of Rome

(specifically the Roman Catholic Church) it continued to use the titles and symbols of the Roman Empire. At times it exercised authority as if the Roman world had merely continued without a change of rulers (consider the title “Holy Roman Empire” used throughout Europe from at least 962 to 1806). This western empire, though extensively fragmented, continued to rule over the peoples of Europe and even expanded its territory. All North America is part of this empire, founded by conquest through the efforts of peoples representing the original in Europe (Spanish, French, and English). The United States is one horn that displaced those three founding nations, a nation that replaced their power and authority in the western empire. It’s a “little horn” in that it’s younger (versus big horns that are older). The rest of the world unquestionably views the U.S. as a power which speaks boastfully (Daniel 7:20). Does this mean the USA is the little horn mentioned in Daniel 7:8, 20-21, 24? Perhaps! We can describe America this way, but only history will answer this question with certainty. Some will protest the U.S. cannot be this entity because it’ll never “oppress (God’s) saints (Daniel 7:25). The news says otherwise. Consider how soon such oppression may come. It may be against believers who try to remain faithful to the Bible on subjects including homosexuality, or creation (versus evolution), or insist on publicly speaking the truth about false religions such as Islam.

If we can view the USA and other nations of the west (including Europe) as an empire, though fragmented, what idea (or unifying goal) drives this empire? Unquestionably the west views itself as an arbiter of truth and “rightness” to the world – the standard of “civilization.” This remains unchanged from its beginning to the present – the west works to impose its standards on the entire world. Only methods for spreading these standards have changed. Whether military conquest, crusades, or economic pressure, the result remains; the west wishes to shape all government, culture, and morality into its own image. The west’s greatest worldwide export has been its culture and morality. Beyond flexing military might, it’s used institutions it spawned, from the Roman Catholic Church to the United Nations, even Hollywood, to enforce or impose its power and to market its ideals. Democracy is one such western institution or idea. As well-meaning as Democracy appears, and as good as it could work if all its subjects were believers (embracing laws rooted in a higher authority), in practice it’s far different. It markets the masses as the highest authority, making mere majority the arbiter and judge of all that is right. When Christianity is the minority (as expected based on Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-14), this makes fallen man to be the highest authority and lawmaker. The west markets an agnostic democracy as being the best standard and authority by which all men shall live. The majority then silences Christians as an irrelevant minority.

Revelation notes the original beast had a wound which appeared fatal but later healed (Revelation 13:3). Consider what a wound might look like on a figurative beast. Their revealed nature shows the wickedness of these representative beasts, so a metaphorical wound probably is something good. What better represents good than Christianity’s spread in the

Roman world and the fragmented empire which followed? Notice the wound come from a sword (Revelation 13:14). God uses this weapon to represent the word of God five more times in the book of Revelation and it's the likely association here too. The church's spread unquestionably looked fatal to the purpose, mission, and goals of this beast, indeed the beast itself. The church positively affected whole nations, if not most nations, within this fragmented empire. Left unchecked, Christianity might have been fatal to the beast. Yes, the east's fall with its following decline and death of the church in those lands, slowed its wound. But this delay wasn't for long. The resurgence of the church in the west, through Reformation influence, showed how severe the beast's wound was. Yet time and determination saw its wound healed little by little. The wound is long since healed. At best the small remnants of the formerly great (Christian) wound are but a small irritant (or scar) to the now thriving beast.

The western deification of the majority and its closely associated widespread marketing of materialism became the twin ideals the western empire has shown itself to now rest in. It doesn't matter how many countries, rulers, or powers, compose this entity. It doesn't matter what degree all member nations work together. All member governments don't have to agree on every detail. They're still one empire with one purpose. And should one individual come on the scene that appeals to them all, they will easily follow or revel in such an individual. Many antichrists will come and go throughout this empire (1 John 2:18). It's almost irrelevant that a final man of lawlessness shall come (2 Thessalonians 2:3) other than it perhaps shows just how unified in purpose and ideology this fragmented kingdom is.

That people will follow an individual who sets himself up as God isn't a stretch (2 Thessalonians 2:4); through western ideals we have already created a system that promotes humankind – the majority – as being God. This majority is sole lawgiver. It defines what everyone must embrace as right and good. There's no place for God. When an individual comes on the scene and embodies this religion of the majority, the praises and adoration of the public is a natural worship that is sure to follow. How many times have we already seen this political cult of personality on a smaller scale? These prime and make ready the west for a man-made messiah.

Daniel's final beast, and the legs and feet of the statue, don't have all the details God finally gives in Revelation. A later beast, not referenced at all by Daniel, arises in support of the final beast (Revelation 13:11 onward). It is legitimate to call the fourth beast of Daniel, or the first beast of Revelation, the last beast. It's last because it remains until the end. The extra that arises does not replace it; it aids and brings glory to the former. The clear implication is that there's a passage of time before this second beast comes along. The text closely ties its appearing (or taking authority) to the healing of the seemingly fatal wound suffered by the first beast (Revelation 13:12). John is silent on how long this second beast aids and supports the previous, but when it has appears it remains to the end (Revelation 19:20).

Consider what we know of this second beast of Revelation:

- It's distinguished from the first beast ("another" Revelation 13:11)
- It has two authorities (called "horns." Revelation 13:11)
- It masquerades as a savior ("like a lamb." Revelation 13:11)
- Its words are from the Devil ("like a dragon." Revelation 13:11)
- It exercises authority of the first beast. (Revelation 13:12)
- It performs great and miraculous signs (Revelation 13:13)
- It honors the first beast (Revelation 13:12-14)
- It controls commerce and economics (Revelation 13:16-17)
- It kills those who oppose it (Revelation 13:15)
- It deceives the inhabitants of the earth (Revelation 13:14)
- It is a false prophet (Revelation 16:13; 19:20)

So far I've focused on the western portion of the divided Roman Empire. Now we must look to the eastern part of the Roman Empire. To a degree, its history paralleled the west. The rulers who took over the east didn't see themselves replacing the eastern empire, rather they saw themselves as continuing it (but now under their authority).

In 1453 A.D., the rulers of the eastern empire fell to their newest line of rulers, the Ottoman Turks, in the name of Islam. Islam arose apart from the Roman Empire and is distinct from it, yet it's working slowly to take over the former Roman Empire (beginning in the east). Some believe Islam can't be the second beast because they see it in opposition to the west, yet nowhere does the Bible claim the two need to agree with each other. The second beast only needs to serve the same purpose as the original (namely the Devil's purposes) and exercises the authority of the former.

Russia, backed by its national Russian Orthodox Church, declared itself protector and successor of the Roman Empire with the fall of Constantinople. While many see Russia as external to the Roman Empire, it's also a part of that fragmented empire (the first beast). The former Soviet States are part of its expanded territory and peoples. Russia's veneer of Christianity survives, yet it's long since promoted a man-centered worldview that makes the last beast proud.

Could Islam be the second beast? I believe so. It came on the scene late (Muhammad starting to teach in 610 A.D.) – and its primary influence was directly a spiritual entity masquerading as an angel of God (consider 2 Corinthians 11:14). Islam then began to take over the Roman Empire, in the east, starting in the mid-seventh century. It's functionally ruled most of the still fragmented nations of the east since. Even large parts under Russia's influence are now Islamic. While Islam failed to take the west militarily, or hold some portions they once captured in

Europe, they still have designs on the west. Now, switching tactics, they're using western ideas to carry out what they couldn't do militarily.

Islam has learned that all it needs to do to exercise the authority of the west (the driving force of first beast) is to use its existing veneration of the majority (democracy). First, have that majority silence the minority in the name of pluralism (fear and intimidation aid this). Second, become the majority yourself. Once Islam's the majority it will be the first beast's sole representative, its sole voice. Islam will readily absorb the major ideas the west now stands for. This false prophet can include democracy (as some Muslim countries currently do, at least in name, including Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey). Islam also has no problem with materialism (as some Muslim countries excel at, including Qatar, Kuwait, the U.A.E., Oman, and Saudi Arabia).

When Islam has finally defeated the remnants of the western branch of the Roman Empire, and perhaps Russia, they will be successfully exercising the authority of the first beast. Together both beasts will deceive the world, collectively carrying out the devil's purposes (who gave his authority to the first beast, now sharing it with the second). Using the west's doctrine that a majority fixes what's true and right; Islam will have a perfect platform for declaring itself the only truth. They already claim themselves superior whenever they gain a majority in any area. How much more when Islam controls the entire former Roman world and its expanded though fragmented territories, the empire that left its mark on the entire world (and continues to do so)? No beast in history has had the influence exercised by the fragmented Roman Empire, spanning the Americas, Europe, much of Africa, Russia and parts of Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Islam wants to use the first beast's power and worldwide voice.

If Islam isn't the second beast, it's hard to image an empire that would be more fitting. They already show willingness to persecute and hate God's church, plus any people identified with the one true God (consider their hatred of Jews and Israel). To deprive all who oppose them of economic livelihood, or their lives, has been Islam's standard practice from its beginning.

Unlike the first beast, the Bible calls this second beast a false prophet (Revelation 16:13; 19:20). The west and non-Muslim east has become willingly amoral and agnostic (if not atheistic). The west claims peace through tolerance and acceptance. Into this religious void, it preaches tolerance of the intolerant (including Islam), effectively enabling the intolerant to not tolerate the tolerant. Islam directly preaches a god who is not the one true God and disparages His only son, Jesus Christ – mocking the idea of His crucifixion. It believes peace comes from unwavering submission to Islam and seeks to silence anything it finds offensive or in opposition to its beliefs or practices. Far more than merely a religion, Islam is a socio-political force that dictates all facets of living and government. If any empire deserves the label "false prophet,"

it's Islam. In function Islam has claimed itself prophet, priest, and king (a false Messiah. See Revelation 13:11).

Islam already claims for itself great and miraculous signs (Revelation 13:13). The sign Muslim's point first is their supremacy, their claimed miracle is their ability to take over and destroy those who came before, especially Christians. Fire from heaven has been a visual symbol of God's judgment and cleansing (see 2 Kings 1:10-14; Luke 17:29; Luke 9:54; Revelation 20:9). Islam claims to be a human "fire from heaven (see Revelation 13:13)," a people executing God's purify judgment, cleansing and judging the earth, conquering and claiming in his name. That Islam has wiped out every Revelation church from present-day Turkey's soil is one claimed miracle of Islam and proof Allah (and the Qu'ran) is superior to the Christian God (and the Bible).

The twin horns (Revelation 13:11), or authorities of Islam, are the Sunni and Shiite branches. While there's further fragmentation within those Islamic sects, all sub-sects (such as Alawite, Sufi, or Druse) claim loyalty or faithfulness to one of the two branches. Islam teaches that good works outweigh bad, something stressed in many Surah's of the Qur'an. This doctrine makes works the means of salvation. It's a full rejection of God's gospel of grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9). The false prophet of Islam spews the devil's deceptions from beginning to end.

In summary, the fragmented Roman world (now heavily influenced by the west) and its creed "truth by majority and might" unquestionably matches the scriptural features of the first beast of Revelation. This empire exerts greater control and influence over the world than any encompassing empire before it. This influence over centuries includes Rome, Byzantium, the Roman Catholic Church, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Crusades. It continues through the German Empire, the British Empire, the Spanish Empire, the French Empire, NATO, the Russian Empire, the Russian Orthodox Church, Australia, the UN, and America. See Revelation 13:7 and Daniel 7:7). We could summarize its credo as "follow us and you will thrive, don't and we will force you."

Islam, with its false God and works-based religion, meets all scriptural signs that it could be the second beast (false prophet) of Revelation. Its credo is openly "submit or die, either slowly or immediately – but you will die." Past and present, it unquestionably shows itself willing to act in the manner ascribed to this second authority (John singling out beheading as a major means of martyrdom for God's saints. Revelation 20:4). While the methods may vary, the two beast's ideologies are similar. The fragmented Roman world, to the present, is willing to kill for what it stands for and is quite willing to exert economic pressure to change minds. Islam does the same. The thought of them working together isn't as removed as you might think.



If these are the two beasts of Revelation, the first beast is still in process of giving its authority to the second beast (perhaps unwittingly). When the transition ends, they will focus their combined rage on everyone not yielding to the majority's tyranny. In their eyes, God's church is something needing extermination and the world will wait to cheer when they're finished (Revelation 11:10). The Bible alludes to the ferocity and means of the beast's persecutions ("killed," "beheaded," and "no one could buy or sell"). I have no doubt that if we could see it all we'd describe it with the same wording Daniel did when he saw this vision of end times devastation; "I was appalled by the vision. (Daniel 8:27)"

Could all I've presented be the end-times picture of Revelation? Might the second beast now be receiving authority from the first beast? Time will answer these questions, whether years, decades, or centuries. Regardless, Islam's danger to the west and to the church is real. What's already happened to most of the Eastern Roman Empire is proof. It's hard to imagine an empire more sinister or worse in ideas and actions. Yet, it's a real possibility that Islam's assault is rehearsal for something far more severe. God didn't give the Book of Revelation's message chiefly to identify the beasts, let alone an Antichrist, rather He wanted to remind us to be on guard and remain faithful no matter what happens.

The church mustn't focus on politics or social trends, or even moral issues, as if they are the goal themselves. Yes, having the right party or individual elected can make a difference and assure relative peace and relative prosperity in our time. Yes, taking a stand for what the Bible says about extramarital sex and homosexuality will impact families for generations. Unquestionably, halting abortions and preventing euthanasia upholds a God-given sanctity of life. The church could win all these smaller battles and still lose. Winning these at all cost isn't wise. If Islam gains control of the west, by intimidation or by majority, it's not inconceivable they could repeal homosexual marriage and outlaw abortion. Dictatorships (including religious dictatorships) are often orderly and secure – in ruthless suppression there's sometimes an illusion of safety, peace, and prosperity.

Secondary issues aside, if the church loses its ability to live out and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's as good as dead even if people within her continue to breathe for a time. Both the west's intolerant drive for "tolerance" and Islam's eastern onslaught have common designs on silencing Biblical truth. Testimony of the east shows Islam's in this battle for the long game. Extermination of the church in those areas took them hundreds of years. Some think the west's coming persecution will be helpful "because the church thrives through persecution." Sometimes the church does thrive through persecution (look to former communist countries for some great localized examples). But sometimes the church merely dies through persecution (there's hosts of examples in the Islamic world). God alone decides which will happen. God's church might continue during and through persecution for generations. There might be

widespread revival watered by the blood of martyred saints. But if the God-ordained time has come for removing the lampstand (Revelation 2:5), or for killing the twin witnesses (Revelation 11:3-4, 7), persecution can and will bring about the end.

It's time for the church to wake-up (Romans 13:11; Revelation 3:2-3), be on guard (1 Peter 5:8-9), and be the witness we're called to be. We must do so for the sake of our children and our children's children plus multitudes needing to hear of life found only in Jesus Christ. Our readiness to stand firm doesn't change whether Islam is one of many assaults on God's saints or the final onslaught preceding the end of this world.