

Revelation Overview

By James West

Chapter 1: John is appointed to write the book

(v. 1) This book is the revelation (apokalypsis: unveiling or disclosure) of things to come. Jesus received this message from the Father, and revealed it through an angel to John.

(v. 2) John recorded God's message, given to him by Jesus Christ, as well as everything that he saw.

(v. 3) A blessing is promised to all who will read or hear the contents of this book, and will keep (or guard) its contents in their hearts. We must treasure this book, and hold its prophecies close to our hearts.

Just before my father passed away from a brain tumour, and when he could no longer speak as a result of the tumour, he was still treasuring God's Word. I remember that he gestured for me to come into his office. He showed me a little page with some very rough sketches he had made, illustrating some of the prophecies of Daniel, along with chapter numbers. I realised that he had made these sketches to help him memorise key concepts in Daniel. He could no longer speak, but he reverently looked at this little page in his hands. To this day, I am impressed with his passion to study prophecy, when he could no longer preach or even speak. Even writing was a struggle. I now have that very page on my desk, and with admiration I look at his shakey hand-writing. How we need to treasure God's prophecies! How we need to labour not to forget them!

The fact that we need to guard these prophecies in our hearts and live in the light of them is intensified by the fact that 'the time is at hand.' We are at the very doors of its fulfilment!

(v. 4) John wrote to seven local churches in Asia minor. The idea that these seven churches find parallels in seven stages of church history is not self-evident from Scripture. It is better to simply draw spiritual lessons from the instructions to, and descriptions of, each of these churches, for we will find that the same kinds of problems are present in one way or another in every age of church history, and the same truths are applicable to all.

The description of God—'him which is, and which was, and which is to come'—demonstrates the sovereignty of God who holds the future in His hands, as well as the past and present. The letter is from God—even the seven spirits of God (4:5). These are not seven angels, and there are not seven persons in the Godhead—only

three. These 'spirits' seem to be God's perfect character and attributes, and maybe we can cross reference with Isaiah 11:2-3: 'And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD...'

(vv. 5-6) The letter is also from Jesus Christ. He was a faithful witness, in that he spoke the truth, and sealed it with His blood. He is therefore worthy of all honour, and his message must be accepted as solemn truth. Jesus was the first son to be raised from the dead, and His brethren will soon follow. He is the King above all rulers. John breaks out in adoration for His Lord: 'Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him *be* glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.'

(v. 7) This appearance of Christ is not speaking of the rapture of the saints, which could happen at any time. It is speaking about the time thereafter, when he returns to establish His kingdom at the end of the seven year tribulation period. He will come in the clouds (which are an outward representation of the glory of God. The Jews and all nations will see Him (Zech 12:10; Matt 24:30). Those who have not repented among the nations will be grieved to know that their judgment time has come.

(v. 8) The Lord Jesus identifies Himself both here and in verse 11 as 'Alpha and Omega.' These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In saying that He is the beginning and the ending, Jesus is declaring that He holds history in His hands, from start to finish. He created all things, and will ultimately bring all things to a condition of justice.

(v. 9) John identifies with his readers in their sufferings for the Gospel. Christians belong to a kingdom that is not of this world, and we must patiently endure the sufferings we encounter in this world until that kingdom is established by Christ on the earth.

John explains that he received the content of the book while he was in the isle of Patmos. Patmos is about 100 miles southwest of Ephesus and between Asia Minor and Greece. John had been banished to this island by the Roman government for his faithful witness for Christ. Tradition tells us that his exile occurred after his effective pastoral work in Ephesus, and that he worked as a prisoner in the mines of this small island. Apparently, in A.D. 96, he was allowed to return to Ephesus by the new emperor.

Chapter 2: Letters to the Churches at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, and Thyatira

Ephesus – The church that lost its first love – Ephesus was called ‘the market of Asia’, and ‘was the most easily accessible city in Asia, both by land and sea’. (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*). Although it had a large artificial harbour, this was prone to silting and shifting, so that the shore is now 6 miles away. This is a graphic picture of what can sadly happen in so many Christians’ lives today. If we are not diligent, our love waxes cold, iniquity and apathy begin to reign, and we shift further and further away from the love we once had for God. Just as trade by sea would have become impossible because of this situation, so doing ‘business’ in God’s harvest becomes an increasing impossibility if we fail to be vigilant and diligent in keeping our first love for God.

Ephesus had a theatre that could seat 24,000, and this is where the events of Acts 19:23-41 took place. There was also a great library, two stories high.

The whole city was devoted to the worship of Diana (Roman name), also known as Artemis to the Greeks. The temple of Diana was one of the ‘seven wonders of the ancient world, being 110 metres long and 55 metres high. Each of its 127 columns reached to 60 feet high. The structure was of quality woods, marble, and it glittered with gold. Just imagine it towering in the distance, gleaming in the sun!

Paul planted the church here on his third missionary journey (Acts 20). This was where Timothy ministered, and it was here that he received his first epistle from Paul, called by his own name. It was also here that John ministered as an elderly man.

(v. 1) Christ describes Himself by a separate set of characteristics to each local church, depending on the need of that local church. Here the characteristic of Christ is that He has control over the messengers and the churches. In other words, He gives the messengers to the churches, He holds those messengers responsible (they are in His hand), and He carefully observes the intensity of the light with which each local church glows. He is able to remove His blessing from a church, and do with its messengers what He will.

(vv. 2-3) ‘I know thy works’ is the statement Christ makes at the beginning of each of the letters. He knows our hearts, our thoughts, our actions, and our intents. This ought to make us to fear before Him and to pay careful attention to our way.

The church in Ephesus is commended for its tireless work for the Lord, and for patiently continuing to do right under duress. This church was commended for its concern to maintain pure doctrine, and for the fact that they were not easily deceived by false teachers, but had rather examined and exposed the false claims of those people. They had ‘borne’ or ‘carried’ the burden of the ministry work in a responsible way. Their admirable labour is referred to three times, and their patience

is commended twice. They also had not 'fainted', meaning that they had not given in to the toils and stresses of life, but had continued to labour for His name's sake.

(v. 4) It may seem strange then to see that our Lord rebuked this church for leaving its 'first love.' But our Lord sees as no other can see. The unreserved service and self-sacrifice which these believers had displayed when they first believed had now diminished. Christ was not pleased, for they were holding back their love from Him. The first flush of loving zeal had cooled to a calculating reservation. When we hold back from Him, we also cannot enter into the joy of all that He has prepared for us to learn of Him in this life. Let us remember that without charity, we are nothing.

(v. 5) They were to recall that place from whence they had fallen, and then act upon the realisation with contrition of heart, and seek to take back the ground they had lost. Christ warns this church of the possibility of removal from its position of privileged service, and the withdrawal of His blessing. His intention is not to frighten them into love, but to rescue them from their miserable condition. A church that will not be moved by love is in some regards like the wicked and slothful servant who possessed a slavish fear of his master. God's plan for us is that perfect love may cast out all fear, and that love rather than such fear would be the catalyst for us to put our hands to the work.

(v. 6) Christ commends the Ephesian church, however, for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Some writers simply identify them as 'a heretical sect, who retained pagan practices like idolatry and immorality...' (*Revelation*, Mounce, p. 89). There are some early writers say that these were followers of Nicolaus of Antioch, and that they were 'a sect of licentious antinomian Gnostics who lapsed into their antinomian license because of an overstrained asceticism' (*Revelation 1-7 – An Exegetical Commentary*, Robert L. Thomas, p. 148). Some have also tried to base a supposed definition of *Nicolaitan* on the etymology of the name.

Christ commends and corrects. What He commends ought to be continued. What He seeks to correct ought to be repented of and rectified.

(v. 7) 'He that hath an ear...' We ought to be attentive to these letters, for they are open letters, intended for us to read and benefit from. The right to eat of the tree of life in the Heavenly city is promised to the overcomer. The overcomer is not a name for a special kind of Christian, but for all Christians. The testimony of the overcomer's life is proof that he is indeed an overcomer. 1 John 5:5 'Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?'

Smyrna – The suffering church – Smyrna was a seaport. The most famous of its large streets was the Street of Gold, in which were erected temples to various gods, including Zeus, Apollo, and Aphrodite. It was a free city in the Roman empire, and a

centre of culture, including literature, games, and music. It was supposed to have been the birthplace of Homer. There were many Jews who lived there, and they were quite influential.

(v. 8) In describing Himself as 'the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive,' Christ was comforting this persecuted church. He was reminding them that He holds all the events from the beginning to the end in his hand, and that He as their head had overcome death, ensuring their final victory over the grave. We recall some of Christ's other statements from the gospels: (John 16:33) '...In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' (John 14:19) '...Because I live, ye shall live also.'

(v. 9) This is one of the seven churches to whom Christ brings no rebuke. Their testings had served to keep their spirits safe and well. Christ knew their works; that is, He knew what it was costing them to serve God, and to be a faithful witness for Him. He knew the sufferings of persecution that they were experiencing, and was touched by it. He also knew about their poverty. Maybe they had suffered the spoiling of their goods, like those described in the epistle to the Hebrews. (Hebrews 10:34) 'For ye...took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.' They were nevertheless rich in good works, and rich in faith. Their faith was such as would be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Christ.

There was evidently a synagogue of unbelieving Jews who persecuted the believers of this church. Christ calls it the synagogue of Satan, for although they probably thought they were serving God, in reality they were serving Satan by persecuting the Christians.

(v. 10) These believers were not to be afraid of the things they would suffer. Some of them would be thrown into prison for their faith. Unless there was a period of ten literal days during which this church faced persecution, the ten days may simply refer to the limited time of the coming persecution. If they were to die for their faith, they could take hope in the fact that death would only be the doorway to eternal life in the very presence of Jesus. The crown of life most probably refers to eternal life itself. Although purchased solely by the blood of Christ, this is a glorious crown to those who have suffered for Christ (James 1:12).

Church history tells us that it was Smyrna where the pastor Polycarp was burned as a martyr for his faithful witness.

(v. 11) We are again exhorted to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches in these letters. The overcomer (the Christian) need not be afraid of dying for his faith, for by death he enters into the very presence of the Father and the Son. His suffering

is nothing compared to the eternal second death which the unbeliever will face in the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14).

Pergamos – The culturally affected church – Pergamos was the capital city of Asia minor. It sat on a tall conical hill, and the Mediterranean Sea could be seen 24 kilometres away. Its library was second only to that of Alexandria, Egypt. ‘Pergamos was especially connected with the worship of Asclepius the god of healing, who derived his power from Propyhton, the snake god. His temples were the nearest approach to hospitals in the ancient world that drew people worldwide’ (H. Richard Hester, *New Testament Bible History*, p. 317). The symbol of a snake is still used in the field of medicine today. Being the capital of Asia also made Pergamos the centre for Caesar worship. The proconsul there had the right to put a Christian to death at his own will. These facts add up to help us understand why John described it as the place ‘where Satan’s seat is’.

(v. 12) The sharp sword of Christ’s mouth is mentioned to show that He is able to punish this church for tolerating the sin of certain members.

(v. 13) ‘I know thy works’; Christ knew about the persecutions they were facing, but He also knew about their toleration of sin in the church. Even when we are experiencing fiery trials, God doesn’t excuse any friendship with the world. Christ still requires holiness in his suffering servants. We have already discussed the meaning of ‘Satan’s seat’ in the first paragraph dealing with the letter to this church. This church had faithfully suffered for Christ, and had not denied the faith. Antipas was the name of a particular one who was martyred for his faithful witness for Christ. ‘...Where Satan dwelleth,’ is the second time Pergamos is described in this way. Maybe God is reminding this church that they live in enemy territory, and ought not to be indifferent concerning the immorality and idolatry surrounding them. It would seem that Antipas was an exemplary witness for Christ, in the midst of this dark culture.

(v. 14) Christ begins His rebuke. The controversy Christ had with them was that they were tolerating church members who held to the doctrine of Balaam (For the story of Balaam and Balak, see Numbers 22 to 25). God had not permitted this pagan diviner to curse Israel, but only to bless them, against the wishes of king Balak. However, against the will of God, Baalim later taught Balak that the way to bring a curse on Israel was to cause them to commit fornication and to participate in idolatry. This is a device that Satan was using among the Christians in the church at Pergamos. Idolatrous feasts were so much a part of the culture in Pergamos, that it was a strong temptation to those in the church membership. Such scenes were probably the stage for temptations to fornication. No doubt, these unlawful and unequal unions were a great tool in the hand of Satan to infect the spiritual atmosphere in the church.

(v. 15) There were also those who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. We discussed these in our comments on verse 6. Maybe the Nicolaitans were doing pretty much the same things as the former group of verse 14, seeing that both groups seemed to be using the grace of God as a licence to sin.

(v. 16) Christ knows how to deal efficiently with both the perpetrators of sin and the tolerators of sin in a church. He deals very harshly with them, for they defile His holy name, and they sin against the conscience of their brethren. Christ will defend those of His children who desire purity, and will strongly resist those who are careless in conduct. Such conduct destroys the unity and true spirit of love in a church. Carnal believers selfishly expect others to tolerate the stench of their own sin, and thereby bring about a divided spirit in the church, and are an abomination to Christ (Proverbs 6:19). Christ may chasten or even take the lives of those who do not repent. Some of the methods by which Satan opens the floodgates of fornication and idolatry in the church today are immodest dressing and contemporary Christian music.

(v. 17) The person who is trying to walk with Christ in a worldly environment will often feel isolated and lonely, for others will tend to ostracise him. At times he may be tempted to become envious of the pleasures that unbelievers enjoy. The wonderful promise to such believers – and of course to all Christians (overcomers) – is that one day they will eat of the hidden manna to the full. We know that Christ is the hidden manna, the bread of Heaven (John 6:33). Even now, believers feed on Christ by faith, and are hid with Christ in God, until they appear with him in glory (Col 3:3-4). Their joy is something the world knows nothing of, and their glory is yet to come.

I am not sure if the white stone is to be taken metaphorically, like the hidden manna, or if it is a literal stone that will be presented to each believer in Heaven. Either way, it signifies a unique relationship between each believer and Christ for eternity. The believer's new name – written on the stone – will be unknown to others outside of the relationship. The name also implies a special relationship. The colour white no doubt symbolizes the holiness and purity of the believer.

'The most satisfactory understanding of the white stone derives significance from the free doles of bread and free admission to entertainments that people of the Roman Empire received from time to time. These were in exchange for "tickets," which often took the form of white stones...Such a white stone with one's name on it was the basis for admission to special events. It was also a well-established custom to reward victors at the games with such a token enabling them to gain admission to a special feast. This practice coincides with the victor's participation in the feast of Rev. 3:20...The "hidden manna," the other part of the reward in v. 17, suggests a reference to the Messianic feast. The white stone is, then, a personalized *tessera*

[small piece of stone used as a token or ticket], which would serve as his token of admission to this great future feast...' (*Revelation 1-7 – An Exegetical Commentary*, Robert L. Thomas, p. 201).

If these historical details have something to do with John's mention of the white stone, then this highlights the fact that believers, although misunderstood, disesteemed, and excluded by the world, are known and treasured by God. They will not only be accepted into God's presence in Heaven, but will be gloriously honoured at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Let us set our sights on the honour that comes from God alone, for that is the only honour that truly matters.

Thyatira – The sin-tolerating church – This city was located approximately 100 miles southeast of Pergamos. It was famous for its dyeing industry. Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), who was Paul's first convert in Philippi may well have been connected to this guild, as she was from this city, and worked in that trade. Each industry in this city had its own guild. 'Guild members were expected to attend the guild festivals and to eat food, part of which had been offered to the tutelary deity and which was acknowledged as being on the table as a gift from the god. At the end of the feast grossly immoral activities would commence. To exit at the time of such activity would lay a person open to ridicule and other kinds of persecution...' (*Revelation 1-7 – An Exegetical Commentary*, p.208, Robert L. Thomas).

In Thyatira were temples to Apollo, Artemis, and Tyrimnaios. The temple of Sambethe 'featured a prophetess who acted as an oracle...' (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 122, David Cloud).

(v. 18) Christ's description of Himself here is foreboding. 'Eyes like unto a flame of fire' speak of His penetrating gaze, which sees into the works and hearts of men. Feet like fine brass speak of his perfect and efficient judgment. His judgment will be unyielding as He treads upon all His adversaries.

(v. 19) Christ commends this church for its love, service, faith, patience, and works. Despite the rebuke He is about to bring, He acknowledges that they had actually increased in good works since the beginning of their faith.

(v. 20) We do well to remember that although a church may be charitable and patient, full of faith, zealous and full of good works, yet it may still have very serious moral and spiritual decay. The exact accusation against this church was that they were tolerating the deeds of a certain woman who called herself a prophetess. We do not know if Jezebel was her real name, or if Christ was designating her as such, for Jezebel was also the name of the king Ahab's wicked Zidonian wife, who led her husband and Israel into sin, and the depravities of Baal worship (1 Kings 16:31-33; 1 Kings 18:19; 1 Kings 21).

This self-acclaimed prophetess was actually casting the stumbling block of Balaam before the church (see 2:14). She herself was a seductress. How could it be that the church would listen to such a woman, whose doctrine and practice were as far removed from the apostles' as the east is from the west? We might do well to ask a similar question of many people who profess the name of Christ today. Why should the church tolerate the female contemporary Christian music celebrities who dress like harlots and cast down many strong men? These women, since the time of Amy Grant, pretty well parallel with the Jezebel here described. For that matter, why do many Christians think that they can watch R-rated movies, wear scant clothing at the beach, get tattoos, and drink beer? There is an insidious idea that because of grace, the New Testament Christian is more free to sin than an Old Testament believer. This idea has been around since the days of the apostles themselves. It is not new, although maybe it hides under the garment of '*neutralism*', and a very thin garment it is. For a Christian, immodest clothing, strong drink, r-rated movies, tattoos, and rock music are off-limits. They are not morally neutral. They are morally corrupting. Neither does grace teach us that we can do these things.

Such leaders, both male and female are rife in the so-called body of Christ today. They are the false prophets and prophetesses who speak smooth things in the last days. They are rejecting traditional norms in favour of what they see as a more discerning, enlightened, enjoyable, and culturally relevant way of following Jesus. They are promising liberty to their followers, but they themselves are the servants of corruption. The books of 2 Peter and Jude warn specifically about these people.

Christ was holding this church accountable for not exercising church discipline towards this blatantly unrepentant woman.

(v. 21) Christ actually gave this woman time to repent, but she didn't. 'I will cast her into a bed' stands in contrast to her bed of adultery. As she had lain in her bed of adultery, Christ would cast her into a bed of destruction. Maybe this bed of destruction would be a deathbed, a casket, or Hell. It may also be a warning of the coming seven-year period of great tribulation, which will be a foretaste of Hell.

(vv. 22-23) The 'children' could refer either the literal children of 'Jezebel', or to her followers in the church. We know that God chastens unrepentant Christians, even to the point of death, if they continue in wilful sin. Such a death would serve as a warning to other churches that Christ doesn't deal lightly with sin in the church. (Jeremiah 17:10) 'I the LORD search the heart, / I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, *and* according to the fruit of his doings.'

(v. 24) It seems that there were those in the church who professed that they could move freely within the sphere of Satan's realm, and go unscathed. Maybe they felt

that most believers had not discovered the freedom that was available to them. Maybe, like many today, their 'knowledge' taught them that fornication and idolatry could have no truly harmful effect on them. John had to warn other believers, possibly in Asia minor also, against a strange notion to the contrary. (1 John 3:7-8) 'Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil...' 'As they speak' possibly refers to how these antinomianists spoke of their own knowledge of Satan's realm.

(vv. 25-27) There were some faithful brethren among these apostates, and Christ simply exhorted them to remain faithful. The true believer's life will be characterised to one degree or another by keeping God's commandments. It will be an evidence of his salvation. Christ promises believers that we will rule with Him in His coming kingdom. They will rule with Christ's rod of iron, bringing justice swiftly upon evil-doers, who disregard the commandments of God, as these antinomianists were doing.

(vv. 28-29) Christ Himself is the morning star (see 2 Peter 1:19 and Revelation 22:16). Believers are as those who wait for the morning to appear, signalled at certain seasons by Venus, the morning star. We rather wait for the return of Christ, in the midst of a crooked and dark world. (Psalm 130:6) 'My soul *waiteth* for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning: *I say, more than* they that watch for the morning.'

Chapter 3: Letters to the churches at Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea

Sardis – The sleeping church – The city of Sardis was located 50 miles south of Thyatira, and slightly to the east. 'The greatness of the city under the Roman Empire was due entirely to its past reputation...there is a remarkable analogy between the history of the city and the history of the church...' (*Dictionary of the Bible; Sardis*, James Hastings). Maybe this church had adopted a mentality from a culture that rested on past achievements, rather than focusing on present productivity. 'Travellers describe the appearance of the locality as that of complete solitude' (*Smith's Bible Dictionary*).

The art of wool-dyeing is supposed to have been invented in Sardis, as well as the practice of minting gold and silver coins. The pagan temples here included those of Zeus and Artemis, and the city was known for its immorality. It is evident that a large number of Jews lived here, for an excavation in 1962 revealed the largest synagogue ever discovered.

(v. 1) Christ reveals Himself to this self-assured church by reference to His omniscience and omnipotence. 'He that hath the seven Spirits of God' describes

Christ's omniscience. This can be seen by cross-referencing with 5:6. Christ knew that this church had a reputation for being a spiritually-minded church, but it was only a reputation. Christ sees the true state of affairs in every church, and it is His evaluation that ultimately matters, not the evaluation of men. Men may praise our testimony, but only God can see the true state of things.

'The seven stars' were what Christ held in his hand (see 1:20). We learn in chapter 1 that these seven stars represented the messengers of the seven churches – probably the pastors (The Greek word 'angelos' can be translated 'angel' or 'messenger'). This shows us that Christ is the one who provides pastors for the churches, or removes them. Christ is able to bless or chasten pastors, according to whether or not they are faithful in their ministries.

This church was reputed to be very much alive spiritually, but in reality they were spiritually dead.

(v. 2) The solution was to wake up, and to stay awake. We are to be watchful over every area of our lives as believers: in prayer, Bible reading and meditation, service, speech, thought life, and everything we do. We are also to be watchful against the temptations of the world and the attacks of Satan, so that we can live efficiently for God, and be quick to respond to danger.

The church was not completely dead. There were true believers there, but they were seriously cooling off in their walk with God and service for him. They were becoming 'barren and unfruitful'. They were growing slovenly in their devotion and service to God. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the solution to such a sloppy mindset is to '... lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed' (Hebrews 12:12-13). They needed to take stock of their situation, otherwise they would slip further and further away from where Christ wanted them to be. Likewise, Peter tells us: (1 Peter 1:13) 'Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober [watchful]...'

(v. 3) This church was instructed to seriously consider all the good teaching it had received. Instead of sleeping, and letting all that good instruction slip away like a flowing stream, they were to grasp it firmly. (Proverbs 23:23) 'Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.' 'I will come as a thief'—The rapture of the saints will be an unpleasant surprise to those who have attended church all their lives, and have not ever personalised the message of the Gospel for themselves. It will also be a shock to Christians who are not walking with Christ as they ought to be, for they will not feel ready to stand before Christ. We do not know when Christ will return for us. That is why we need to be ready at all times by diligently redeeming each moment of time that we have.

(vv. 4-5) 'Even in Sardis' shows that it must have been a dead church indeed – probably many of them were unbelievers. Believers are characterised as those who keep their garments clean from the stains of sin. (1 John 5:18) 'We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.' God will give believers garments of white to wear in glory. Their testimony in this world, which is the result of their imputed righteousness, declares that they are worthy of such an honour. What a wonderful thing it will be to see the book of life opened, and our names confessed by the Son of God before the Father and the holy angels!

(v. 6) Let us not be dull of hearing, for there are many who sit in church all their lives, and either do not grow, or were never saved. May God awake such out of sleep!

Philadelphia – The 'weak, yet strong' church – This city was located 28 miles southeast of Sardis. It was so named because of the loyalty of Attalus II to his brother Eumenes II. Due to its magnificent temples and public buildings, it was called 'Little Athens.' 'The primary purpose for the city's establishment was consolidating, regulating, and educating the central regions that were subject to the Pergamian kings. These rulers wanted Philadelphia to be a hub of Graeco-Asiatic civilization so as to spread the Greek language and manners in the eastern parts of t Lydia and in Phrygia. It thus had a missionary function from the outset as an apostle of Hellenism in an Oriental land. It was successful in this effort to foster a unity of spirit, customs, and loyalty within the area, as evidenced by the vanishing of the Lydian language by A.D. 19 and the dominance of the Greek language as the only one spoken' (*Revelation 1-7 – An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 271, Robert L. Thomas).

The city was positioned in a volcanic region, and the volcanic ash had made the land unusually fertile. As a result of earthquakes (some people were afraid to stay in the city) and also by reason of the fertile soil, many city residents moved outside the city, and turned to farming for a livelihood. In A.D. 92, because of a famine, the emperor Domitian ruled that at least half the vineyards in the provinces be destroyed, so that corn could be grown instead. Since there was subsequently not enough corn to support the area during famine, this decision proved crippling to the city of Philadelphia.

Like the other cities of Asia Minor, idolatry and immorality was rife in this city. 'It was famous for its wine (which was celebrated by the Roman poet Virgil), and the city's coins featured an image of Bacchus (or a female Bacchant), the god of revelry and debauchery. Dionysus was also worshipped in Philadelphia' (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 143, David Cloud).

(vv. 7-8) Christ describes Himself here as 'he that is holy'. That is, Christ is qualified to be set apart and consecrated to the office of Messiah. Messiah-ship is in focus here, as can be seen on two accounts: 1. Christ's truthfulness in this verse is set over and against the falsehood of the unbelieving Jews of that time who denied Jesus' authority (see verse 9). 2. Christ's possession of the key of David shows that He 'controls entrance to David's house, which ultimately refers to the Messianic kingdom' (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7 – An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 275).

We must understand the 'open door' in its context. It speaks of a doorway into that eternal kingdom which will be under the governorship and administration of 'the house of David' (1 Chronicles 17:10; Isaiah 9:7). Of course, there is no possibility that the believer may fail to enter this kingdom, but the open door is here mentioned as a comfort to a church that was persecuted, beaten down, and belittled by the proud and unbelieving Jews.

Here was a church that was afflicted by thorns in the flesh, but it was strong in faith. No amount of persecution or ridicule would change the fact that they were accepted by God, and would enter glory's gates at last. Yes, they only had a little strength, but God's strength would be made perfect in their weakness, so that they would bear the fruit He had ordained for them. No matter how weak we may feel in ourselves, God will give us the grace to lay up His Word in our hearts, and to be faithful to His name. And beyond mere entrance into Heaven's gates, Peter tells us (2 Peter 1:11), there is held out to all believers, both naturally strong or weak, a special reward of an abundant and rapturous welcome into the everlasting kingdom, if we will lay hold in this life of all that is already ours in Christ.

(v. 9) There is coming a day when the world will know that God loves His own, and will be ashamed for its persecution of believers (Isaiah 60:14). 'The synagogue of Satan' refers to the Jews who professed to worship God, but in reality were doing Satan's bidding by persecuting true believers. These Jews were not Jews in heart (Romans 2:8), but were rather lying against the truth. Though they would have claimed that the door of the Messiah's coming kingdom was shut against all followers of Jesus of Nazareth, in reality Jesus Christ was the true Messiah who held the key to that door (see verse 7 and 1:18), and would permit entrance to His own, and refuse entrance to the unbelievers.

(v. 10) Christ promised this church that He would keep them 'from the hour of temptation', which refers to the coming seven-year tribulation period (see also 2 Thess 2:11, 12). If we remember the letters to these churches are for all believers in this present church age, that we can understand that this is an assurance to us that church age believers will not pass through that horrible time.

(v. 11) This admonition can be understood two ways. 1. It may be a warning to the believer not to backslide from confidently serving the Lord, lest he lose rewards. 2. It may be a warning to those who are 'on the verge' of putting their faith in Christ, not to throw away the good Word that they have heard, and thus reject the gift of eternal life (Heb 10:35). 'That no man take thy crown' may refer to the unbelieving Jews, who were not content to reject the Gospel for themselves, but also tried to stop others from receiving it (Matthew 23:13; Col 2:18).

(vv. 12-13) To the overcomer (the true believer, who overcomes by faith) it is promised that he will be a pillar in the house of God, that is, an ornament of strength, stability, beauty, glory, and eternity. No longer will he be regarded as weak, but he will be among the strong and stately pillars comprising the habitation of God in a living and spiritual sense. Far from being shut out from the kingdom, he shall be, as it were, an integral part of the palace. Upon him will be written: 1. The name of God. 2. The name of the city of Jerusalem. 3. Christ's new name. These all speak of the fact that the believer belongs in Heaven, is owned by Heaven, and is known and loved by the Father and the Son, and will enter into deep communion with the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What a wonderful promise to a church that was excluded and ostracised by the self-righteous wing!

Let us take courage from these promises if we find ourselves excluded by the world and its religious professors alike. The life-story of Joseph shows what God can do for the 'weak-yet-strong' believer today (see Genesis 49:22-26).

Laodicea – The lukewarm church – The city of Laodicea lay about 40 miles southeast of Philadelphia. It was probably founded by Antiochus II, and named after wife Laodice. The population was probably quite a mixture of different ethnic groups, including Jews. The major industry of Laodicea was the production of soft glossy black wool. This was used to make garments for local use as well as for exporting. There was also a famous medicine school here, and the physicians of it produced a popular substance to cure eye diseases. This city was so wealthy that when a big earthquake destroyed it in A.D. 60, it did not need to use the financial help of the Roman government to rebuild after the devastation. It has been referred to as the 'Wall Street' of Asia minor. It was also a city of culture, with magnificent buildings, sporting events, and musical contests. There was a large stadium, 1,000 feet in length, and three marble theatres, one of which was 450 feet in diameter.

The people of the city worshipped a number of different gods, the chief god being Aseis, possibly meaning 'powerful.'

As Paul ministered at Ephesus in the school of Tyrannus for 2 years during his third missionary journey, his outreach became the means for many in Asia Minor to hear Gospel (Acts 19:9, 10), which demonstrates the strategic location of Ephesus. It may

have been during this time that the Gospel reached Laodicea. It is probable that Epaphras ministered in Laodicea, as he did in nearby Colosse (see Col 1:7; 4:12, 13). Paul intended the epistle to the Colossians (possibly written A.D. 61) to be read by the church in Laodicea. It is sad that by the time of the writing of Revelation, the Laodicean church had already forgotten Paul's injunctions found in the following references: Colossians 3:1-5; 3:23. In fact, it seems that the apostle John was one of God's means for persevering with the work begun in Asia minor, after many there had turned away from Paul's ministry some thirty years earlier (2 Tim 1:15).

(v. 14) Christ describes Himself here as 'the Amen.' The Greek word for 'amen' is a transliteration of a Hebrew word which refers to that which is 'true', 'unchangeable', and 'fixed'. It is used here to show the credibility of Christ. As 'the faithful and true witness' He cannot lie. He is therefore not lying about the state of the Laodicean church or things to come either. Further, His credibility and truthfulness is set forward in stark contrast to the hypocrisy and mere lip-service of the church He is addressing. In stating that He is 'the beginning of the creation of God', Christ is not saying that He was created by the Father, for He is from eternity past. The Greek word 'arche' (translated 'beginning') implies that he is chief in rank or status. To better understand this description of Christ we need to look at Colossians 1:18, which explains the concept intended here: 'And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence' (see also notes on Revelation 1:5). As the head of the new creation of God (the church), Christ deserves the highest honour that we can possibly give to Him. The Laodicean church were not walking worthy of their calling (see also Ephesians 4, particularly verses 1-16), but were doing dishonour to the name of Christ.

(vv. 15-16) Christ knew that the works of this church didn't match their profession, and that theirs was mere lip-service and hypocrisy. He compared their zeal to lukewarm water. If a man was offered a cup of lukewarm water on a hot day, expecting that it would be cool water, the result would be instant disappointment and dissatisfaction. If the water was said to be cold, and upon taking a large gulp he found it otherwise, we would not blame Him for spitting it out again. This imagery may have been especially meaningful to the Laodiceans, seeing that water was piped to them from Hierapolis, and by the time it reached Laodicea, it was lukewarm. Christ is not speaking of believers when he says 'I will spue thee out of my mouth.' He is talking about hypocritical professors, who are simply trying to keep up some form of appearance. No doubt, this church was filled many unsaved people. 'If they continue foisting this spiritual sham upon Him, He has no choice but to respond by spewing them out of His mouth, as any person who has stomach sickness would' (Robert L Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 309). We cannot doubt that there were also genuine believers among these who were also bringing sadness to Christ's heart.

(v. 17) This was a materialistic bunch of people. Why they came to church is anybody's guess. It just doesn't make sense to keep coming to church if you are not really interested. If you don't feel that you need what is being preached, why come? The normal experience for a child of God should be a constant awareness of his need. If there is no understanding of one's need, then it could mean that a person is not saved. This is a thoroughly wretched and miserable condition to be in. It is a condition of spiritual poverty and blindness. Such a person stands naked and exposed to the wrath of God, for he is not yet covered in the robes of Christ's own righteousness.

(v. 18) Christ advises these hypocritical professors to buy gold tried in the fire, referring to everlasting riches. This does not imply that we can buy salvation, but when a person comes to Christ, he has to part with the lusts of other things. He has to turn from his sin (repentance) if he would wear the white robes of Christ's righteousness. He has to give up his self-assured pride if he wants to receive spiritual eye-sight to see His condition the way God sees it.

(v. 19) Christ says these things because he loves His church. It is a rebuke to worldly Christians, and Christianized worldlings alike. He will have all men to be saved and to receive a full reward.

(v. 20) Here is an invitation to salvation and a sweet relationship with Christ. 'Solid joys and lasting treasures, Non but Zion's children know' wrote John Newton, and none can understand the joy of the Christian until he comes to feast with Christ.

(vv. 21-22) To the overcomer (the true Christian) it is promised that he will reign with Christ (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; 2 Timothy 2:12). To sit with him in his throne will be to enjoy a place of honour and intimate fellowship (John 17:24). The Corinthians felt that they could enjoy the prestige of kings here and now without the stigma that believers must endure (1 Cor 4:8). This was a similar problem to that found in Laodicea.

Chapter 4: God Almighty seated upon His throne

John is commanded to enter through a door in the heavens, and doing so, he sees God seated in glory upon His throne. The throne is surrounded by twenty four elders. Powerful sounds emanate from the throne. In front of the throne is a sea of glass. In and around the throne are four beasts, full of eyes. They have four different faces, and six wings each, and continually worship God. The elders do the same, casting down their crowns, and saying, (v. 11) 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.' This chapter displays the awe and majesty of the Judge of the

universe, and how he is to be feared and adored. The Judge of all is ready to reveal His righteous judgments against an ungodly world.

Chapter 5: The Lamb who is worthy

(vv. 1-6) In the right hand of God John saw a book (most likely a scroll) sealed with seven seals. No man was found worthy to open the book—not even the strong angel who asked, ‘Who is worthy...?’ and so John wept, until one of the elders notified him that the Lion of Judah was able to do it. This speaks of the power of our Lord, who was of that tribe (Gen 49:9, 10) He is also the long-promised descendant of David who would deliver His people—the Messiah (Isa 11:1-4). Jesus appeared now in John’s eyes as the sacrificed Lamb.

(vv. 7-14) The Lamb took the book. The beasts and the elders then fell down before the Lamb, with harps and golden vials of sweet smells, representative of the prayers of the saints. Christ’s loosing the seals of judgment, thereby bringing final justice to bear in His universe, is truly a fulfilment of the prayers of the saints of all time! It will be the ultimate answer to such prayers as that found in Matthew 6:10 ‘Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as *it is* in heaven.’ The beasts and the elders sang a new song to glorify the Lamb who had redeemed the elders (who possibly represent the saints of all time). They also sang: (v. 10) ‘And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.’ The Apostle Peter likewise tells us: 1Pe 2:5 ‘Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.’ John also heard the voices of millions of angels glorifying the Lamb, as well as the voices of all created things.

Chapter 6: The Lamb opens the seals

Walvoord believes that the events spoken of from this chapter and forward don’t include the first part of Daniel’s seventieth week (the seven-year tribulation period), but only the last 3 ½ years. However, I feel that it does include both halves of the tribulation period. ‘In his teaching Jesus divided the time into two periods, the beginning of birth pangs (Matt. 24:8) and the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21). The former part closely parallels the first four seals in particular. So an important key in fixing the time period of the seals in this message was given by Christ some sixty-five years earlier when He taught about the future time of trial on earth.’ (p. 416, *Revelation 1-7; An Exegetical Commentary*, Robert L. Thomas; underscore added)

What are the seven seals? They are progressive stages in God’s plan during the tribulation period. They are as follows:

1. Antichrist on white horse

2. Rider on red horse (war)
3. Rider on black horse (food shortage)
4. Death riding on pale horse, followed by Hell
5. Souls under the altar, praying for justice
6. Earthquake and wonders in heaven. 144,000 Jews sealed.
7. 7 trumpet judgments begin.

(v. 1) One of the four beasts called to John with a voice of thunder, to 'come and see.'

(v. 2) First seal: Horses seem to represent God's administrative activities in Scripture, if you compare with the book of Zechariah. This white horse seems to represent peace and innocence, but in actual fact, it's rider is the Antichrist of Daniel's seventieth week, who will subdue the nations under his own dominion. He is the false Christ, posing to be the innocent prince of peace.

(vv. 3-4) Second seal: The red horse represents bloodshed, and its rider brings a sword to the earth. There will be wars, and much loss of life.

(vv. 5-6) Third seal: The black horse and rider represent death by famine. The balances are weighing scales, showing that food merchants will exact a high price for food, because of scarcity and demand. A voice (maybe the voice of God) gives the following instructions: One penny (denarius) will be able to buy a measure of wheat. One denarius was about a day's wage, and a measure of wheat would be enough to feed one person for a day. If, however, the buyer chooses to purchase three measures of barley (a lesser quality food), he will be able to feed others in his family also. 'Hurt not the oil and the wine' seems to indicate the availability of luxury products for the rich, because the majority (the poor) will not be able to buy them. This great disparity between the rich and the poor, which has always been a factor in war-time, will be part of the righteous judgment of God on the earth.

(vv. 7-8) Fourth seal: The pale horse is actually the colour of pale green (chloros), representing the colour of death. Death rides on its back, and Hades (the abode of the unsaved who have died—a place of fiery torment) follows close behind, ready to engulf the victims of Death. One quarter of the earth's population will be destroyed by them—by sword, famine, pestilence (probably inferred by 'death'--See Ezek 14:21), and wild animals.

(vv. 9-11) Fifth seal: These souls are probably those who have been slain already within the seven-year tribulation period. To wear white robes may imply that all saints who die are given intermediate bodies (as both Walvoord and Cloud believe), to serve until the time of the resurrection. The colour of white shows forth their righteousness and purity (Heb 11:38). It is probably the heavenly altar of incense,

under which they pray for justice to fall on those that killed them. Note that the judgments of this book are in answer to the prayers of the saints (See 5:8; 8:3-5).

(vv. 12-14) Sixth seal: These wonders in the heavens are spoken of in the following passages, as well as others: Luke 21:25-27; Joel 2:28-32). The passage in Joel is cited by Peter in Acts 2:16-21, and shows that we are in the last days. Other passages that talk about God's shaking the earth include: Isa 2:19-21, Haggai 2:6, Hebrews 12:26-29. 'Sackcloth of hair' signifies an extreme darkening of the sun. The moon may undergo a total eclipse.

'Untimely' means 'unripe.' On falling stars, also see Isaiah 34:4. These are probably meteors. The Greek word can signify a luminous body like a star. For the heavens to begin to depart like a scroll being rolled indicates something unimaginably catastrophic. The heavens will not completely disappear at this point, however. The earthquake will shake all islands and mountains out of place.

(vv. 15-17) The effect of all of these catastrophic wonders will be that men will clearly understand God's coming judgment. Wealth, power, or freedom will make no difference to mankind's universal fear at that time. They will try to hide in caves and among rocks in the mountains, even though it is irrational to do so. Men will know that God is sovereign, and that they are now about to be judged by the Lamb, whose love and mercy they have rejected (2 Thess 1:8).

The seventh seal is not opened until 8:1.

Chapter 7: The Redeemed of the Tribulation Period

This chapter is like a little sanctuary of protection, nestled between the surrounding descriptions of God's judgments in Revelation. It is a beautiful interlude, and a snapshot of God's wonderful plan for the redeemed of the tribulation period, before we see the opening of the seventh seal in chapter 8.

(vv. 1-2) 'The holding back of the winds is "the lull before the storm." God will use the earth's elements in His judgment during the Tribulation (e.g., Rev. 8:7), but here the forces of nature are held in check while the Jewish saints are sealed.' (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 216, D. Cloud)

(vv. 3-4) The sealing of the servants of God in their foreheads is very similar to what we find in Ezekiel 9. In Revelation, those that are spared are described as 'servants.' (They serve the Lamb by preaching the Gospel.) In Ezekiel, those that are spared are described as 'those that sigh and that cry for all the abominations.'

These 144,000 Jews are unmarried men (Rev 14:1-5), who are going to be used of God to preach the Gospel to the whole world (Matt 24:14). It will be a fulfilment of Joel's prophecy (Joel 2:28-29). In this way, Israel will truly be a blessing to the whole world (Rom 11:2).

(vv. 5-8) The 144,000 are sealed from among the 12 tribes which are listed here, but the tribes of Dan and Ephraim are not named. Instead, Joseph and Manasseh (Ephraim's older brother) are listed. This is interesting in light of Genesis 48:17-20. To whom God gives great privilege, of them more shall be required. Ephraim did not give great glory to God as a tribe, but had a lead role in apostasy, stubbornness, and idolatry. Dan was also involved in idolatry. One of Jeroboam's idol calves was placed in Ephraim, and the other in Dan. Dan did not conquer all the land that they were given by God in Joshua. They also went and destroyed Leshem, a peaceful people that were not disturbing anyone, setting up their own religion in the process.

However, we see in Ezekiel 48:1 & 5 that both Ephraim and Dan will enter into the millennium, and will inherit land.

(vv. 9-10) John saw in his vision a multitude comprised of many nations. These are no doubt those who have heard the witness of the 144,000 Jews, and believed, and were also martyred for it (v. 14). This looks to a time in the future—maybe after their bodies have been resurrected (which happens after the tribulation period, and at the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ (20:4).

They are praising God and the Lamb, giving glory to Him who had granted them deliverance at last. Their white robes signify the fact that they have been washed by the blood, and are innocent.

The significance of the palms: The palm tree signifies the triumph of righteousness in the Bible. Psa 92:12 'The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree...' It stands upright, like a righteous man. The Jews, Greeks, and Romans all used its branches to symbolise victory. At Jesus' triumphal entry, and at the Feast of Tabernacles, the Jews used palm branches. At the Feast of Tabernacles were used as part of joy and thanksgiving. Here in Revelation we see palm branches used in an appropriate display of thanksgiving for the ultimate triumph of the martyrs over the wicked world that persecuted them.

(vv. 11-12) All the angels (see 5:11), the elders, and the four beasts fell on their faces and worshipped God. 1 Peter 1:12 teaches us that the angels deeply desire to understand more about God's redemptive plan for mankind.

(vv. 12-14) The vast multitude of nations here described, have come out of the persecution of the tribulation period, and overcame by the blood of the Lamb. The world is not worthy of them (Heb 11:38), but God will honour them (1 Sam 2:30).

(vv. 15-16) They will serve God with joy continually. They will have an honoured place in his presence. Even though Heaven does not have a temple (21:22), it will be in itself a temple (Rev 3:12; 21:3; Heb 8:2). All their needs will be supplied, and they will experience no more trials or hardships. The sun will not light on them anymore, and there will be no more need for sun in Heaven anyway (21:23; 22:5).

(v. 17) Jesus—the Lamb who suffered for them, to purchase them such eternal life—will nourish them in every way—spiritually and physically. He will lead them to drink of living water, probably signifying the stream of water in Heaven (Rev 22:1; Ps 36:8), but also showing that He is the ultimate source of living water (Jer 2:13; John 7:38). God will give complete healing from all the sorrows of the past.

Chapter 8: The Trumpet Judgments Begin

(vv. 1-2) When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was an ominous silence in the courts of Heaven for about half an hour, indicating the solemnity of the coming judgments. Seven angels were given seven trumpets, to sound one by one.

(vv. 3-4) Here is the altar of incense in Heaven (typified by that in the tabernacle of the Old Testament), under which the martyred saints of 6:9 were gathered praying. Their prayers to be avenged are now about to be answered. An angel carried a golden censer (a container of some kind) to this altar, and offered their prayers with the incense.

In the Old Testament, the censer was used to carry coals from the brazen altar of sacrifice to the altar of incense. The incense was to be burned on the fire. 'The altar of incense in the tabernacle pictured the believer's communion with God through Christ and Christ's intercessory prayer for the believer.' (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 225, D. Cloud)

The incense was a sweet smell to God, and showed that the saints' prayers are only acceptable to God because of the perfection of His own Son, who died in our place.

(vv. 5-6) The angel took the same censer, and filled it with fire (probably from the brazen altar of sacrifice)—not now for burning incense, but for answering the prayers of the saints by bringing the fire of God's judgment on the unrepentant world which persecuted the saints. 'The fire from the altar reminds us of the altar of sacrifice that depicted Christ's sacrifice for man's sin. Mankind, having rejected Christ's sacrifice on

Calvary, will be judged with the same measure of judgment that Christ took upon Himself in their behalf.' (*The Book of Revelation*, p. 226, D. Cloud).

After the angel cast the censer into the earth, there were ominous sounds and lightnings, indicating terrible judgments to follow. The seven angels prepared to sound their trumpets.

(v. 7) First trumpet: God rained hail, fire, and blood upon the earth. One third of all trees and also the green grass was burned. There will be great devastation to farmers' crops and forests.

(vv. 8-9) Second trumpet: Something that looks like a great burning mountain is thrown into the ocean, and the third part of the world's seas or oceans become blood, causing a third of the sea creatures to die, and ruining a third of the ships.

(vv. 10-11) Third trumpet: A great star falls to earth, called 'Wormwood.' The Greek word (*Artemisia*) was the name of a bitter plant. Possibly this star will be a large meteor. It pollutes a third of the rivers and springs—that which is not ocean (see v. 8). Drinking of these waters causes many deaths.

(vv. 12-13) Fourth trumpet: The sun and the moon are smitten with darkness. This seems to indicate two things: 1. That the brightness of the sun and moon was diminished, and that only two thirds of the previously visible stars could now be seen. 2. That the heavenly bodies only shine for two thirds of the normal day and night durations. How God will do this, we do not have to understand.

Maybe the angel described in verse 13 will be verbally warning humanity of the woes which are to come as he flies through earth's upper atmosphere. 'Woe, woe, woe,' signals three more great judgments to come, which are the remaining three trumpets.

Chapter 9: Satan's legions released upon earth

(vv. 1-12) Fifth trumpet: The star that falls is Satan, who is elsewhere described as a star (*Isa 14:12*). 'Lucifer,' Satan's old name before he fell, means 'morning star,' and comes from a Hebrew root which means 'to shine.' He opens the abyss, the bottomless pit (Probably the same as 'Tartaros' in *2 Peter 2:4*), and releases hordes of demons onto the earth. The descriptions of these creatures are to be taken literally.

These demons have the appearance of locusts, and they sting unrepentant humanity for five months with their scorpion tails. People won't be able to die to escape the torment. The other descriptions given are clear enough from the text.

Apollyon, a powerful demon, or maybe even Satan himself, is the king of this army of demons, and he is identified by the Hebrew and Greek titles, meaning 'destroyer.'

Verse 12 declares that there are two more woes to come.

(vv. 13-19) Sixth trumpet: God's voice comes from between the four horns of the altar of incense, where the prayers of the saints were offered. He continues to answer their prayer to avenge their adversaries (6:10). 'Horns' are symbolic of the prevailing power of prayer in Christ.

The command is given for the release of four powerful angels bound in the great River Euphrates. They are bound there to be released for a specific time and duration. These appear to be captains over a huge army of demons. These demons manifest themselves as riders on horses.

The breastplates of the riders are burning—probably with a blue flame, which is the colour of sulphurous fire, and having the reddish-orange colour of the gemstone jacinth. The other descriptions given are clear to understand. The third part of humanity are killed by these.

(vv. 20-21) The survivors still will not repent of their sins, for their hearts will be so stubborn.

The seventh trumpet will not sound until 11:14.

Chapter 10: John receives the little scroll

(v. 1) John saw a powerful angel descending from heaven to earth. 'Clothed with the a cloud' represents great glory. The rainbow about his head represents God's merciful covenant toward His redeemed. With a face like the sun and feet as pillars of fire, he represents the consuming and searching presence of God—a presence that scatters darkness with light—although the angel himself is a delegate. The appearance of this angel reminds us of the prophecy in Psalm 50.

(vv. 2-3) The little open scroll which the angel holds contains more revelation for John to proclaim. By placing his feet on the land and the sea, the mighty angel lays claim to the whole earth to bring about complete restoration for the glory of Jesus Christ (Col 1:20). Like the Lion of Judah, he cries with a loud voice, signifying vengeance upon an unjust world. Seven thunders utter their voices. These no doubt signify judgment to come, and the number seven shows the perfection of this judgment.

(vv. 4-7) John was prohibited from writing what the seven thunders said. The angel then swore by the authority of God that the time for judgment upon the present evil world was about to be completed, showing God's faithfulness to answer the prayers of the saints in 6:10. God is a faithful judge, and His children can depend upon Him to judge an unrepentant and persecuting world. He is the faithful Creator, and He will liberate both His children and the creation from the damaging consequences of mankind's sin (Rom 8:21; 1 Pet 4:19; 2 Thess 1:6-10).

'The mystery of God' is God's great plan, previously revealed, yet dimly, to the prophets. Revelation ('apocalypse') literally means 'disclosure.' Therefore, Revelation discloses a great deal more of that mystery. However, until we see it all fulfilled, many of its parts will yet remain known only to the mind of God. This 'mystery,' as I said, is God's plan by which He will judge the sin of this world, and will establish His everlasting kingdom of righteousness.

(vv. 8-10) John is commanded to take the little book (scroll) from the mighty angel. This is another example in Revelation of how God invites John to be an active participant in the discovery of God's plans. John was hungry to know. When John went to take the little book, the angel told him to eat it as well, warning him that it would be bitter for his belly, but sweet as honey in his mouth. In Ezekiel chapter 3, we also find the command for the prophet to eat God's words. To Ezekiel, the words were sweet, but along with this pleasure came a commission to prophesy to his rebellious brethren. Ezekiel was bitter about this. However, there is no other way to be truly satisfied, than in doing the will of God (See also Jeremiah 15:16).

It was sweet for John to learn of the wonderful future for the saints, and of the final banishment of evil from the earth. It would have been bitter for him to think of those loved ones who would experience God's judgments. It also would have been bitter to think of possible further hardships and sufferings he would have to endure for prophesying these things. Besides this, more understanding of prophecy motivates us to deal seriously with the bitterness of indwelling sin.

(v. 11) John was again to prophesy to many people.

Chapter 11: The two witnesses in the second half of the tribulation period

(v. 1) John was given a reed to use for measuring. This was a hollow stem of a plant, used for measuring, because of its light weight. It resembled a rod, a stick used for walking or leaning on. The mighty angel of chapter 10 told him now to measure the temple. This temple is the one that will be built either at the beginning of the 70th week of Daniel (the tribulation period), or before it. The act of measuring probably signifies God's ownership and favour towards his elect Jews at that time, who are

sincerely seeking after God through the worship at the temple in the first half of the tribulation period.

(v. 2) John is commanded not to include the outer court (which was for Gentiles) in his measurements. This signifies God's abhorrence towards the unbelieving Gentiles that will be persecuting His precious people the Jews. Under the antichrist's rule, the Gentiles will oppress the Jews in the second half of the tribulation, dominating Jerusalem and the temple for forty-two months (3 ½ years). The antichrist will desecrate the temple half-way through the 7 year agreement that he will have made with Israel, breaking that covenant and causing God's sacrifice to cease (Dan 9:27). He will sit on a throne in the temple, demanding worship (2 Thess 2:4).

(v. 3) God will empower two men with his Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel and to warn the nations. The Scriptures don't tell us who they are, so we need not speculate. They will prophesy for the duration of the second half of the tribulation period, when persecution will have started against the Jews (1260 days = 3 ½ years).

(v. 4) The text here points back to Zechariah's writing (Zechariah 4). In Old Testament times, after Babylon fell to the Persians, Cyrus of Persia came to power. Exiles were then enabled to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Joshua (the high priest) and Zerubbabel (the governor) went with them, and were characterised by God as olive trees (see Zech 4), through whom the oil of God's Holy Spirit could flow and move powerfully through Israel to bring about the rebuilding of the temple and the re-establishment of the Jews in their land. The two witnesses here in Revelation are also likened to two lampstands (again, see Zech 4). In both instances (Zech 4:14 and Rev 11:4) God is described as being Lord of the whole earth, showing that he is the sovereign protector of Israel.

(vv. 5-6) God will protect his two witnesses by giving them power to destroy people supernaturally with fire out of their mouths. They will also be able to stop the rain, turn water to blood, and command plagues, all as judgment on their enemies.

(v. 7) When the two witnesses shall have finished their work, God will allow the antichrist to kill them. He comes out of the bottomless pit, showing that he is possessed of a power far greater than himself.

(vv. 8-10) The dead bodies of these two men will lie in the streets of Jerusalem, which God is willing to call Sodom and Egypt, both synonymous with sin in the Bible. Without using the description 'holy city' or 'Jerusalem,' John now describes it as the city 'where also our Lord was crucified' (Matt 23:37). The city is no more holy, but it is 'great.'

For 3 ½ days, the images of their dead bodies will lay unburied, so that the whole world can rejoice over the sight, which will probably be broadcast through technology across that planet at that time. 'The ancients regarded this length of exposure as a great indignity' (*Revelation 8-22—An Exegetical Commentary*, Robert L. Thomas). The world will rejoice to such an extent that they will send gifts to one another.

The 3 ½ days seems to parallel the 3 ½ years of reproach that Israel as a nation shall suffer under the Gentiles, after which God will bring vindication and glory. This certainly seems to mirror the 3 days and nights our Lord spent in the grave, after which he also was vindicated. We may also recall the prophecy in Hosea 6:1-3, which spoke in dim light of that future event.

(vv. 11-13) After 3 ½ days, God will call to the two witnesses with a great voice from Heaven. They will be resurrected to stand on their feet, and then raised up to heaven in a cloud—a picture of glorious vindication. Their enemies will watch in terror. In the same hour, there will be a great earthquake in Jerusalem, killing 7000 people. The remainder of Jews in Jerusalem will be converted.

(v. 14) The second woe (the 6th trumpet judgment) has now finished. The third woe (7th trumpet judgement) follows hard on its tail. Included within the 7th trumpet judgment are the seven vial judgments, but these don't actually appear until 15:7.

(v. 15) The mighty angel had already announced that when the seventh trumpet would sound '...the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets' (10:7). The seventh angel now sounds his trumpet, and Christ's everlasting kingdom is announced.

(v. 16-18) At this moment, the twenty-four elders fall upon their faces and worship God. They praise Him for taking vengeance on a rebellious and angry world (see Psalm 2). 'The time of the dead, that they should be judged' probably refers to the same truth as Daniel 12:2: 'And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.' This will begin to take place at the end of the tribulation period, and will involve the resurrection and reward of tribulation saints, and probably the resurrection of the Old Testament saints as well.

Concerning Daniel 12:2, Leon Wood comments '...it is logical to believe that Jews of Israel's national status (i.e., constituted their own nation) from Old Testament time will be resurrected at the same time as Jews of Israel's national status of this future time' (*A Commentary on Daniel*)

Concerning the timing of the resurrection of Old Testament saints, the following Scripture may give us a clue:

Dan 12:12-13 'Blessed *is* he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days. But go thou thy way till the end *be*: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.' This was spoken to Daniel. 'The end of the days' refers to the second half the 7-year tribulation period. This would seem to indicate that Daniel's body will be resurrected following the tribulation period. If this is the case, then it would make sense that all Old Testament saints would be raised at that same time.

The resurrection of the unsaved will not happen until 1000 years later, when Christ hands over his kingdom to the Father (Rev 20:4-6, 11-15). God will finally pour out his righteous judgment upon the wicked who destroy His elect and His creation through their wicked ways and persecutions.

(v. 19) The temple of God in heaven would seem to be the Heavenly city itself, which is the original, after which the tabernacle was patterned.

In Heaven, John sees the ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant in the Old Testament tabernacle was a wooden box-shaped construction, overlaid with gold, with a crown of gold around the top. The ark had a lid, called the mercy seat, made of solid gold. The blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on this mercy seat. It is interesting that the Ten Commandments were kept under this mercy seat, for Christ's blood sacrifice perfectly covered the demands of the law.

There were two cherubim on the mercy seat, looking inward, towards where the blood would be sprinkled once a year. The cherubim and the other angels, as perfectly just and holy creatures are amazed at God's plan to atone for undeserving sinners (1 Pet 1:12).

'The Greek word translated "mercy seat" in Hebrews 9:5 is translated "propitiation" in Romans 3:25. It means a covering or a satisfaction of a debt. Jesus Christ wholly satisfied the demands of God's law.' (*A Portrait of Christ*, p. 141, D. Cloud)

The ark of the covenant represented God's great holiness, and was a symbol of God's presence among His people. It was to be treated with utmost respect. It was also symbolic of His special relationship to them. It shows us that we may have a special relationship with a holy God on the basis of the blood of His own Son.

Here in Revelation, the significance of the ark being seen in Heaven is that God's covenant with His people is such that His righteous and holy anger is now provoked to execute full judgment upon His children's persecutors. They shall have provoked

His anger to the full, and shall have shunned His provision of appeasement for sin. The angels now look on, and the situation requires nothing but perfect justice. The lightening, voices, thundering, earthquake, and great hail upon the heathen are the outcome of provoking the eyes of His glory (Isa 3:8), and touching the apple of his eye (Zech 2:8).

Chapter 12: Satan's wrath against Israel

'These chapters [12-15] do not advance the narrative chronologically, but present events and situations that are concurrent with the soundings of the trumpets.'
(Walvoord; *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Edited by Walvoord and Zuck)

The seventh trumpet heralds the vial judgments, but these are not poured out until chapter 16. In the meantime, there is other information provided in chapters 12 to 15, to fill in detail. Note the short summary of chapter contents below:

Chapter 12: A short sketch of Lucifer's original fall and his subsequent warfare with Israel and her seed. In particular, his warfare against Israel during the second half of the tribulation period is described.

Chapter 13: Description of the beast and the false prophet. In particular, their activity in the second half of the tribulation period is described.

Chapter 14: God's saints will be victorious despite all opposition, but the unrepentant will suffer eternal misery. God will reap the harvest of judgment, which will include His battle at Armageddon.

Chapter 15: In Heaven, seven angels are prepared to pour out the seven vial judgments.

Exposition of Chapter 12:

(vv. 1-2) The woman clothed with the sun represents Israel through history, traveling to bring forth the promised seed of the Abrahamic covenant, which is Christ. We recall Joseph's dream where the sun, moon, and the eleven stars did reverence to Joseph (Genesis 37). Here, again, the whole picture clearly represents the nation of Israel. The sun represents Jacob, who stood in the lineage of the Abrahamic covenant. The moon represents Rachel. Just as Rachel sorrowed for much of her life in her desire to have children, and then died giving birth to Benjamin, so Israel has sorrowed in her efforts to bring forth the Messiah and to inherit the blessing promised to Abraham. The twelve stars clearly represent the twelve tribes of Israel.

(v. 3) Rulers animated by Satan have persecuted the Jews again and again. We recall the words of Jeremiah 31:15-17, where Rachel is pictured as arising again from the grave to weep as she sees her children of the northern tribes being killed and going into captivity to the Assyrians in 722 B.C. (before Jeremiah's time). These words were said by Matthew (Matthew 2:16-18) to be fulfilled when Herod slaughtered the infants in all the coast of Bethlehem. In God's plan, however, the very promised Seed survived at that very time of tragedy, and in him will be fulfilled all the promises to Abraham and his national seed, and that he will bring joy to Rachel's (Israel's) heart to see her children blessed in His eternal kingdom.

The great red dragon is Satan—red probably symbolising bloodshed. The Greek word for dragon is the same as the word for serpent, and we know that Satan embraced the form of a serpent from the beginning. He has always stood ready to devour the promised seed, but the attempt mentioned at the end of verse 4 was when Herod slew the infants in Bethlehem.

Note that Satan is seen here as having seven heads, ten horns, and seven crowns on his heads. In Daniel 7:7 we read about a terrible beast that has ten horns, and in Revelation 13:1-2 we see another prophecy concerning Daniel's beast. The interesting thing about the beast is that it is described in chapter 13 as having seven heads and ten horns. The dragon (Satan) however, has seven crowns upon the seven heads, whereas the beast has ten crowns upon the ten horns (We are about to explain what these symbols mean). The beast is not Satan, but is both an individual (the antichrist) and an empire empowered by Satan.

Chapter 17:9-11 tell us '...The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, *and* the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.'

We will unfold a fuller explanation of these heads, horns, crowns, and mountains later on, but for now we may understand that the seven heads (the same as the seven mountains) with their seven crowns represent seven world empires or kingdoms (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the Revived Roman Empire of the end time), in which the mystery of iniquity and rebellion towards God has been cultivated. The ten horns represent the ten kings that will rule with the antichrist at the time of the end (17:12).

The fact that Satan is described in this way shows that these earthly kingdoms and rulers are all manifestations of his own rule in the earth.

(v. 4) ‘...His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven...’ This possibly describes the time in past history when Satan fell and caused other angels to fall with him. Angels, messengers, Israel, Christ, and Lucifer are described as ‘stars’ in the Bible (Job 38:7; Isa 14:12-13; Dan 8:10; Jud 13; Rev 1:20; 9:1; 22:16).

Satan hates national Israel, and he tried to extinguish all possibility of the birth of the Messiah. He was ready to destroy Christ as soon as he was born.

(v. 5) When Christ was born, Satan was unsuccessful in destroying him, even though he tried to do so through Herod’s slaughter of the infants in all the coasts of Bethlehem (Matt 2:16). Psalm 2:9 speaks about Christ’s coming kingdom in which He will rule with a rod of iron, and three times the book of Revelation describes Christ as ruling ‘with a rod of iron.’ Being ‘caught up to God, and to his throne’ describes the time when Christ ascended bodily to Heaven.

(v. 6) Satan will seek to persecute Israel at the hand of the antichrist. Israel will flee to the mountains, where God will have a place prepared for her to be hidden and nourished for 1260 days. This is according to the Jewish month of 30 days, and equals 3 ½ years. This persecution will be in the second half of the 7-year tribulation period, and will be signalled by the setting up of antichrist’s abomination of desolation, as spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 24:15-21 (See also Daniel 9:27 & 2 Thess 2:4).

(vv. 7-10) Michael the angel will fight for Israel in the spiritual realm at the mid-point of the tribulation period (See also Daniel 12:1). Satan will seek to gain what he can for himself. Maybe he will seek again to be worshipped. We know that Satan will seek to be worshipped during this time, and maybe the placement of antichrist’s throne in the temple at Jerusalem will be just one more step toward that goal. Isaiah 14:12-17 speaks of Satan’s evil ambition, and that God will not allow him to prosper. The great accuser of the brethren will be cast down with his demons to the earth, signalling that Christ’s kingdom is about to be established.

(vv. 11-12) The tribulation saints, and indeed saints of all time have overcome because they put their trust in the cleansing blood of the Lamb. The fact that they overcome by the word of their testimony shows that our faithful witness for Him is part of our spiritual armoury against the Satanic realm. Those in Heaven will rejoice at the overturning of Satan’s kingdom and the establishing of Christ’s. The wicked world, however, will suffer the woes of Satan’s final wrath, even though he seeks worship, because his ultimate goal is to destroy humanity which is created in the image of God, so that he can hurt God in some way. His insanity is evident in that he will seek to do as much damage as possible, even though he knows that his time is short, and that he will ultimately pay for it.

(vv. 13-17) After being cast down to the earth, Satan will seek to persecute Israel with a passion. To Israel will be given means to be transported to a hidden place in the wilderness, where she will be nourished with provisions for 3 ½ years ('...a time, and times, and half a time...'). It seems that Satan will send a flood of water to try to drown believing Israel at that time, but that the earth will supernaturally open up and drain away the water. Satan knows about the prophecies of a remnant of Jews who will be saved at that time, and he doesn't want God to have His way. This will make him even angrier, and he will seek whatever means he can to destroy Israel, and no doubt any saved Gentiles on the planet at that time.

Chapter 13: Description of the beast

(v. 1) As John stood upon the beach (possibly in reality the beach at Patmos), God showed him a vision of a beast rising up out of the sea. This beast is actually the final world empire, but it's name is also used by John to designate the individual who will lead that empire. Just like the red dragon (Satan) of chapter 12, this beast (empire) has seven heads and ten horns. They carry the same meaning as they did for the red dragon (See comments on 12:3). The fact that the seven heads will carry the name of blasphemy shows that the seven world empires of the world's stage are all anti-Christ and anti-God. The ungodly spirit of all these empires will finally culminate in this last empire called 'the beast.'

One difference between the description of the dragon in chapter 12 and the description of the beast here in chapter 13 is that the dragon has seven crowns on the seven heads, whereas, the beast has 10 crowns on the 10 horns. These 10 horns with their crowns represent 10 kings who will rule with the antichrist in the tribulation period (See 17:12-13).

(v. 2) The description of this beast ought to remind us immediately of Daniel's vision in Daniel 7. With similarities to a leopard, a bear, and a lion, this beast should be identified as the fourth beast of Daniel (See Daniel 7:7, 17-24), imbibing the strengths and anti-God characteristics of the former three beasts in that chapter, which represented Babylon (lion), Medo-Persia (bear), and Greece (leopard)—all world empires from Daniel's day until the beginning of the Roman empire. Notice that Daniel's beast also has the ten horns, which represent the ten kings that will reign with the antichrist.

Satan is the one who gives power and position to this empire and its leader, the antichrist.

(v. 3) One of the heads—probably the seventh—will be wounded to death. This either signifies a fatal blow to the antichrist or his empire. The situation, however, is reversed by some miraculous circumstance, which will cause the world to be in awe of the antichrist and his administration, as well as Satan.

(v. 4) The world will actually be impressed by the healing of the deadly wound to such an extent that they will worship Satan and the antichrist. This has been Satan's dream since the beginning of history (Isaiah 14:13-14). He has raised up many antichrists through history, for he knows that a mediator is needed to connect mankind to the ultimate rulership of a spiritual power. In this way, he seeks to supplant the Father, and to provide a substitute for the Son.

Through the miraculous healing of the deadly wound, the world becomes convinced that their world leader is invincible, and worthy of their utmost confidence.

(vv. 5-7) The beast (the individual) will possess great oratory abilities to convince and influence people, and will use his tongue to blaspheme God's name, the temple, and those that are in Heaven. He will be able to continue for forty two months (3 ½ years). This is the second half of the seven-year tribulation period, for that is when he desecrates the temple. He will also put believers to death. See also Daniel 7:8, 11, 20-21, 24-25.

For a further description of the antichrist, study Daniel 11:21-35, which contains prophecies of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (a Seleucid king of the Hellenistic Syrian kingdom), and foreshadowed the antichrist. Especially study verses 36 to 45, which contains direct prophecies of the antichrist himself. Also see 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10.

(vv. 8-10) All people on the earth will worship the antichrist. All, that is, except for those whom God foreknew would be saved (Cross-reference with 17:8). Even when the world was created, God foreknew those who would be saved, and was committed to sending His Son to provide salvation (2 Thess 2:13). He has a very special plan for all who are in Christ. Those who reject Christ will be missing out on an extremely glorious, joyful, and pleasurable eternity with God, which they could have had. Let all in the coming tribulation age carefully weigh the consequences of their choice: The violent antichrist and his followers shall most certainly be destroyed, and the saints will most certainly be vindicated.

(vv. 11-14) The second beast that John now sees is referred to as 'the false prophet' in 16:13. The significance of this beast's arising out of the earth is not clear to me. The fact that he has two horns like a lamb, yet speaks like a dragon demonstrates that he is a wolf in sheep's clothing. The false prophet ascribes all glory to the antichrist, and works miracles, even calling fire down from heaven onto the earth. Competing with the two witnesses of God, he will no doubt have the same effect on

men's hearts as the magicians did upon Pharaoh, hardening him, when they duplicated the miracles of Moses. He will deceive the world's populace by his miracles, and reminding them of the antichrist's invincibility, he will persuade them to make an idol representing him.

(vv. 15-18) The false prophet will have power to give life to the idol, so that it will be able to speak. He will cause that all who will not worship this image should be killed. At the instigation of the false prophet, and at least to some degree as a token of their allegiance to the beast and his image, the whole world will be forced to receive some kind of mark in their right hands or foreheads. Without this mark, nobody will be able to buy or sell.

A mystery is now unfolded to those who will consider it: The number of the antichrist will be 666. As yet, the significance of this piece of information is a mystery, but God will make it plain to those who shall need to know in that time.

Chapter 14: The Coming of the Son of Man

(v. 1) Verses 1 to 5 flashes forward in time, possibly to a time very close to the end of the tribulation period (the rest of the chapter seems to place it within that time period). Maybe the 144,000 will have been martyred by then – we don't know if they will be martyred, or if they will live. If that is the case, they are standing with the Lamb on the Heavenly Mount Zion. To say that the Father's name is written in their foreheads stands in contrast to those described 13:16, and implies that their allegiance is to God, and that they belong to Him.

(v. 2) It is uncertain whose voice is the voice of thunder and many waters, but it would seem to be Christ's, as He sings with the 144,000. The singing is accompanied by harps.

(vv. 3-4) The music of Heaven will be so special, that it will take skill to learn it! Only the 144,000 Jewish male virgins will be privileged among human beings to learn this song. Verse 4 tells us that they are indeed unmarried men. They are fully devoted to the service of Christ, following the leading of His Spirit in everything. They are described as 'the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb,' showing that they are the first of the Jewish remnant saved in the time of the tribulation period, and are an offering.

(v. 5) The 144,000 Jewish witnesses will speak only truth. There will be no guile (trickery, deceit, or decoy) in their mouths, for they will love the truth—unlike the rest of the unbelieving world, who will make and love lies, and will not receive the love of the truth. The purity of their lips will be a result of their standing before God. A saved heart should evidence itself in pure speech.

(vv. 6-7) In 8:13 John saw an angel flying in the midst of heaven proclaiming woe. Now he sees another angel flying in the midst of heaven, preaching the Gospel to the entire world's population! This angel cries, (v. 7) 'Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.' Notice that this angel draws attention to the fact that God is over the heaven, the earth, the sea, and the fountains of waters. All of these parts of God's creation had already been touched in the seal and trumpet judgments of chapters 6 and 8, and the angel was reminding men that these elements were all at God's disposal, and that they should therefore fear Him.

(v. 8) John sees a second angel following, proclaiming the fall of Babylon (See Isaiah 21:8). The identity of Babylon and her destruction is described in detail in chapters 17 and 18. The idolatry that originated in Babylon is the spiritual fornication mentioned here. All nations are steeped in idolatry, and shall be even more so by the time Babylon the Great will be judged. Zechariah 5:11 seems to be prophesying this time to come.

(vv. 9-11) A third angel followed, warning the world against worshipping the beast and his image, or receiving the mark of the beast (see 13:16-18), telling them that the divine consequence would be everlasting torment in eternal fire.

(v. 12) In the light of eternal judgment, we see the persecuted saints of the tribulation period vindicated (Mal 3:18)—those who obey God and walk in true faith, trusting that Jesus is indeed the true Messiah.

(v. 13) Those who are yet to die for their faith in Christ are indeed blessed by God (Matt 5:10-12). To be with the Lord is an eternal rest, and they will enjoy the fruit of their labours, which, although not meriting salvation, will be rewarded in some way by Christ.

(v. 14) Here we see the Lord Jesus wearing a crown, and returning to earth to execute judgment upon the kingdoms as the King of kings (Rev 19:11-16). The white cloud will be a visible manifestation of glory.

Verses 14 through 20 speak of a harvest (such as of wheat) and also a gathering of grapes. These, however, are probably both descriptive of the same event, just as Joel used both images to describe this same time of judgment: (Joel 3:13) 'Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness *is* great.'

(vv. 15-16) The angel's words do not imply that he is in authority over Christ. Christ is seen here harvesting the wicked for judgment.

(v. 17) This second harvest or gathering is not necessarily a separate event, but probably described to impress the intensity of the same event upon John, just as the prophet Joel does in Joel 3. Like Joel, John now uses the imagery of grapes.

(v. 18) An angel comes out of the heavenly temple. Like Christ, he holds a sharp sickle. Another angel comes out from the altar, having 'power over fire,' and gives the command to gather the clusters of the vine. Stevens could be correct when he says, '...Here it is the very angel of the altar [of sacrifice], who has charge of keeping the fire perpetually burning, that commands the cutting off of the vintage and the treading of it in the winepress of the vengeful fury of God.' (W.C. Stevens, *Revelation, the Crown-Jewel of Biblical Prophecy*)

This is all a description of the judgment of the nations, also spoken of in a similar way in Joel 3:9-17. This is probably the same as the Battle of Armageddon (Rev 16:12-16; Rev 19:11-21). Revelation 19:19 tells us that the kingdoms of the earth will have gathered together to make war against Christ and His Heavenly army.

The destruction described here in chapter 14 takes place 'without the city'—that is, outside of Jerusalem, but is in the same vicinity described by Joel (i.e. the valley of Jehoshaphat), and will probably simply extend northwards, to at least as far as the Valley of Jezreel where Megiddo is situated, covering a distance of 200 miles (1,600 furlongs). Just as grape juice would splash all over the clothes of the one treading the grapes, so the splashing of blood will reach to the height of a horse's bridle, the blood-letting will be so extensive.

Chapter 15: The wrath of God from His temple

This chapter sets the scene for the pouring out of the seven vial judgments in chapter 16.

(v. 1) When John saw the angels having the seven last plagues, he described it as 'great and marvellous' on account of the fact that it was going to be the culmination of God's wrath poured out upon the earth.

(v. 2) The ground in heaven upon which John sees the martyrs of the tribulation period standing has the appearance of glass mingled with fire. This is the area in front of the throne of God, and is mentioned also in 4:6. This is possibly the same as what the elders of Israel saw in Exodus 24:10 'And they saw the God of Israel: and *there was* under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in *his* clearness.'

Although martyrs, these saints are victors. They refused to worship the antichrist, or to receive his mark, and now they sing with the harps of God as accompaniment.

(vv. 3-4) These saints in glory are excitedly singing the praises of God, for they see the justice of Almighty God vindicated in revenging the blood of his servants upon this sinful world. They sing the song of Moses (possibly that recorded in Exodus 15:1-19) and the song of the Lamb (possibly that recorded in Revelation 5:9-13).

(v. 5) John sees the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony opened in heaven. The interesting thing is that 21:22 tells us that there is no temple in Heaven, because God Himself is the temple. The reference to a temple and tabernacle here may then be a description of the immediate proximity to the throne of God. The other thing we need to note is that the Old Testament tabernacle of testimony was so named because of the 'testimony' or ten commandments which Moses kept in the ark of the covenant at God's directive (Exodus 25:16). The significance of what John sees here lies in the fact that these commandments of God are what have been violated by a wicked world, and will now be the exact measure or rule against which the world will be judged (John 5:45).

(vv. 6-7) The seven angels mentioned in verse 1 now exit the presence of God. Their clothing represents the purity of God's holy character, and their golden girdles represent the glory of His majesty. One of the four beasts (those beings that uphold the chariot throne of God, praising His holiness without ceasing) gives seven vials to the seven angels. These vials are shallow bowls or saucers, holding the wrath of the eternal God, who will not abide sin forever.

(v. 8) The whole atmosphere surrounding the throne of God at this point becomes accessible only to God Himself. It is not the place for God's beloved creatures to be, neither can they bear to witness the infinite intensity of God's fiery wrath against sinners. God would, however, have us to understand the hatefulness of sin. The presence of smoke speaks of the glory of God, and portrays Him as a consuming fire.

Praise the Lord that we are not come to the mount that might not be touched, but unto Jesus, the mediator of a better covenant. Those who despised the Old Covenant will be judged by it with incredible severity. Those who trembled at it and have fled to Jesus have obtained mercy under the New Covenant (See also Hebrews 12:18-29).

Chapter 16: The seven vial judgments

There are similarities between these and the trumpet judgements, but the vial judgments are actually more far-reaching and devastating. They happen at the very end of the tribulation period, and fall in quick succession, so that people will not have time to recover physically or psychologically in between events. The result of

these judgments shows the terrible hardness of men's hearts, similar to Pharaoh in the time of the ten plagues. We cannot fail to notice the great similarity between those plagues and these also. Indeed, they foreshadowed this great event.

(v. 1) John heard a great voice (no doubt the voice of God Himself) commanding the seven angels to pour out the vials (bowls) of God's wrath upon the earth. The word translated 'great' is used frequently throughout this chapter, and underscores the severity of the vial judgments in comparison to the previous ones.

(v. 2) **First Vial:** The result of this first outpouring is a kind of noisome (harmful) and grievous (hurtful) sore upon all who have received the mark of the beast and worship him (see comments on 13:15-18).

(v. 3) **Second Vial:** The sea becomes like the blood of a dead man, which has coagulated and become putrid. Every living creature (the word translated 'soul' can refer to animals) in the ocean dies, making it impossible for people to catch fish, and impractical to travel by sea.

(vv. 4-7) **Third Vial:** The remaining water sources are turned into blood also. The angel of the waters praises the eternal God for His righteous judgment upon a world that has been blood-thirsty for the blood of the martyrs. Another voice echoed out from the altar (possibly the altar of incense, under which the souls of the martyrs prayed for vengeance – see 6:9-10) in agreement.

(vv. 8-9) **Fourth Vial:** It appears that the heat of the sun is intensified, so that men will be burnt by its heat. Instead of repenting, they blasphemed his name.

(vv. 10-11) **Fifth Vial:** This plague is especially directed toward the antichrist and his government, but seems to affect his whole kingdom. Maybe the redeemed will have light at that time, in contrast to those who worship the beast (see Exodus 10:23). The sores are either simultaneous to the darkness, or simply remain from the first and fourth vial judgments. The latter is very likely. People will be in so much pain that they will be biting their tongues to divert the senses. They either will not have access to pain-killers, or will find that such medication is not sufficient to deal with the pain. The result is more blasphemy.

(vv. 12-14) The Euphrates River dries up, preparing the way for a great confederate army of kings from the east. As the Euphrates River runs on the eastern side of Palestine all the way down to the Persian Gulf, this will certainly make Israel more accessible to enemy nations coming by land from an easterly direction. We are not sure of the identity of these kings, but verse 13 shows us that this is going to be a time of world war. 'Though the nations may be deceived in entering into the war in hope of gaining world political power, the satanic purpose is to combat the armies

from heaven (introduced in chap. 19) at the second coming of Christ' (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 968, Walvoord and Zuck). It seems that demons will work mightily through the words of the unholy trinity – the dragon (Satan), the beast (Antichrist), and the false prophet. In the spiritual realm John can see that these unclean spirits are like ugly frogs. By the power of these unclean spirits, the beast and his false prophet may perform miracles to deceive the world powers, mustering them into confederacy against Israel (see Zech 14:1-3), and ultimately against the Lamb (Revelation 19:19).

(v. 15) In reality, this gathering is all part of God's sovereign plan to turn the wickedness of the nations on their own heads and judge them together (Joel 3:2), for He says in verse 15, 'Behold, I come as a thief.' The mention of 'garments' probably refers to a person's lifestyle. True believers will manifest a life of self-restraint and temperance, whereas an unbeliever will capitulate under pressure to the sensuality of the world, and will let down his guard and all his inhibitions generally concerning right and wrong. His iniquity will be discovered to his shame, and others will witness his shameful condition when Christ suddenly returns at the end of the tribulation period. Even in this present church-age however, believers are motivated to upright living by the imminent appearance of Christ (1 John 2:28, 3:2-3).

(v. 16) The geographical location of Armageddon is one and the same as the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2), and the Hebrew name literally means 'mountain of Megiddo'. This battle is also described in Joel 3, Revelation 14, and Revelation 19.

(vv. 17-18) As the seventh vial is poured into the air, a voice (probably God's) declares with triumph that judgment is being finally completed, saying, 'It is done.' The biggest earthquake the world will ever have seen until that time will then shake the entire earth (see Isaiah 2:12-22; 24:20; Haggai 2:6-7; Hebrews 12:26-29).

(vv. 19-21) 'The great city' that will be divided into three parts by the earthquake could be Jerusalem (see 11:8) or 'Babylon the Great' (14:8). Cities all over the globe will utterly crumble because of this global earthquake. 'Great Babylon's' time for judgment has finally come, and is described in chapter 17. The extent of the earthquake's damage is to move all the islands out of place, and to level mountains. God also sends hailstones at that time, with stones weighing up to around 130 pounds, or 55 kilograms. The plague of hail will be very great – extremely devastating. The result, however, will not be repentance, but more blasphemy.

Chapter 17: The Woman Rides the Beast and is Judged

The judgment on great Babylon (mentioned in 16:19) leads naturally to a more detailed description of the part it will play in the whole scheme of the tribulation period, and so this is what is unfolded in chapters 17 and 18. The description of the

whore given here in chapter 17 is actually a description of a worldwide religious system of worship, which has been in existence since the time of ancient Babylon, and stands opposed to God and the saints. This Babylonish spirit of idolatry, apostasy, sensuality, and materialism, will come to great power in the tribulation period, and will be used by Antichrist to promote false religion, and as an arm to persecute the true believers. However, Antichrist and his ten kings will then turn against it (17:16-17).

In chapters 17 and 18 'great Babylon' does seem to refer to the literal city of Babylon, possibly rebuilt where it stood by the Euphrates River. The judgments described in these chapters may actually occur all together at one time.

(vv. 1-3) The 'great whore' is presented in this chapter as a religious system. 'Many waters' represents all the nations of the earth (v. 15), for her influence will be worldwide. The 'fornication' of the kings of the earth is their participation in her apostasy from the knowledge and ways of the one true God. The 'wilderness' could be referring to the desert surrounding ancient Babylon (Isa 21:1). The beast was also described in 13:1, and will be the world empire headed up by antichrist. Its seven heads and ten horns bear the same symbolism as that of the dragon in 12:3: i.e. The seven heads represent seven world empires or kingdoms (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the Revived Roman Empire of the end time), in which the mystery of iniquity and rebellion towards God has been cultivated. The ten horns represent the ten kings that will rule with the antichrist (see verse 12). The 'names of blasphemy' refer to the false deities exalted in the place of God within these world empires throughout history, whether the false gods within their cultures, or the human rulers themselves, usurping the place of God.

(vv. 4-5) The clothing of the whore is strikingly similar to what the Catholic clergy wears today in ceremony. Catholic churches even use golden or gold-plated chalices for the communion table, and some of these have been fitted with jewels. Will the Catholic church be at the centre of this whorish religion, reigning as a luxuriously rich and blood-thirsty queen, while the true saints live a life of suffering for Christ?

Using the figure of a whore, John describes to us the culmination of a deceitful world-religion which was seeded in ancient Babylon, has grown through history, and comes to great power in the time of the end. Part of this is, no doubt, that in ancient Babylon, the worship of mother and child began. Then, when the Persians came to power, the cultists took their religious system to Pergamos in Asia Minor, and from there it spread to Rome, from whence they paganised Christianity with what is now the worship of Mary and Jesus. Mother and child worship has also spread to other parts of the globe, but under different names.

'Crowns in the shape of a fish head were worn by the chief priests of the Babylonian cult to honor the fish god. The crowns bore the words "Keeper of the Bridge," symbolic of the bridge between man and Satan. This handle was adopted by the Roman emperors, who used the Latin title *Pontifex Maximus*, which means "Major Keeper of the Bridge." And the same title was later used by the bishop of Rome. The pope today is often called the *pontiff*, which comes from *pontifex*.' (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, p. 971, edited by Walvoord and Zuck)

Ancient Babylon's religion is indeed a spiritual apostasy from the knowledge of God, and a spiritual prostitution of the hearts of humanity. Many moral perversions and idolatrous abominations have accompanied this age-old system.

(vv. 6-7) It would have shaken John to see that this system would be guilty of the blood of many martyrs of Jesus Christ, especially from his perspective at the beginning of the church age. False religion has always been the greatest persecutor of the espoused virgin of Christ. John looked at her with great astonishment, still not entirely sure of what she represented. The angel of verse 1 begins to explain.

(v. 8) '...Was, and is not...' That is, from the perspective of one viewing the events of the future as though it were already present. These words refer to the same event as 13:3 (see notes there). The character of the antichrist and his empire is hellish, as he/it are energised by Satan. 'Perdition' refers to spiritual and eternal ruin. All who are not saved will be in awe of the beast (the man and his government).

(vv. 9-11) The explanation of this is for a mind that has wisdom to understand. This false religion has ruled over the seven heads, which are equivalent to mountains. Mountains signify kingdoms, authority or rule in the Scriptures (Psalm 30:7; Isaiah 2:2; Daniel 2:35; Revelation 17:9-10). Therefore, these seven mountains are the kingdoms, over which there have been seven rulerships through history: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, and the Revived Roman Empire of the end time. The first 5 rulerships have come and gone, and at the time of John, the Roman empire was in power. The ruler of the revived Roman empire is still yet to come in the future, and will continue for a small time (N.B. It is important to take the beast of Daniel chapter 7 into account when considering the Roman nature of the final empires). This appears to be the antichrist with his government. In some way, he will then suffer a fatal wound, and then, upon recovery/healing/resurrection, he will be energised by the power of Satan himself to take control with more tenacity than anyone in history. Thus, he appears to be also the eighth. This eighth rulership (probably occupying the last 3 ½ years of the tribulation period is the main focus of chapter 13.

(vv. 12-14) For a short time, 10 kings will be part of Antichrist's government over the earth. They will be in agreement with him, and submit to his direction. These will

gather together at Armageddon (19:19) to fight against Christ upon His return. The 'called, and chosen, and faithful' are the saints of all time, who will return on white horses with Him, to witness the setting up of His earthly kingdom (19:14; Jude 14-15).

(v. 15) The waters of verse 1 represent the world's population throughout history, over which the Babylonish spirit of idolatry, apostasy, sensuality, and materialism has held sway for thousands of years.

(vv. 16-18) The ten kings will turn on the religious arm of Antichrist's government, probably because it is no longer serving his purposes. At that time, he and the 10 kings will no doubt persecute the harlot woman in some way or another, signified by the words, '...shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire'. This will all be part of God's plan to judge Babylon's anti-God system (Jeremiah 50-51). 'That great city' may be referring to Rome, as many have supposed, but it seems preferable to view it as the rebuilt city of Babylon during the tribulation period, since 'is' probably speaks from the perspective of that future time (see also comments on verse 8). Add to this that there is also much prophecy in the Old Testament which refers to such a destruction of Babylon as has not yet been fulfilled in entirety.

Chapter 18: Judgment of Great Babylon Completed

This chapter continues to describe the devastation of the city of Great Babylon toward the end of the tribulation period. It may be at the same time as the judgments previously described. Just a few of the Old Testament prophecies which relate to this, and are referred to in the text include: Isaiah 21; Jeremiah 50-51.

(vv. 1-2) A powerful and shining angel descends from Heaven, announcing the destruction of Babylon. This destruction was similarly announced in 14:8 (See Isaiah 21:8). God will use the ruins of Babylon as a prison for unclean spirits, and it will become a dwelling place for unclean birds.

(vv. 3-4) Babylon will be held accountable for her luxurious and materialistic example and influence upon all the kings, merchants, and nations of the earth. The warning of verse 4 to 'Come out' is reminiscent of Jeremiah 51:6, 45, and other Old Testament texts concerning Babylon. Here is a call to God's own, living within the kingdom of the beast in the tribulation time, warning them to separate themselves from its idolatrous, sensual, and materialistic ways, and to physically remove from the midst of the city, so as not to be partakers of her sins or her judgments.

(vv. 5-10) The time for her final judgment has arrived. 'I sit a queen' expresses her temporal luxury (see Isaiah 47:7-9). God will render judgment to her for her cup of

blood and spiritual harlotry. Her judgments will come all at once, possibly precipitated by the earthquake of 16:19. ‘...She shall be utterly burned with fire...’ (v. 8). This may be referring to what is performed by the ten kings of antichrist, or it may be a separate event. That is, the kings of the earth may be rulers who are different to the ten kings of antichrist, or they may include all, bewailing the economic loss incurred, sometime after the false religious crowd of Babylon has been destroyed.

(vv. 11-19) The merchants of the earth, and the mariners will be devastated, seeing that Babylon will have become the centre of world trade and commerce. People will have built their lives around materialism, pleasure, and every luxury that Babylon will afford – for everything that anyone could possibly buy will be available to the world’s population by means of this city! People will be truly devastated, because they will have put their trust in riches and in the things of this world. They will not be able to get what they want to keep themselves happy anymore, and so they will be like the apostate Micah, in the book of Judges, who said, ‘...Ye have taken away my gods... and what have I more?’ (Judges 18:24).

(vv. 20-24) It will be a time of rejoicing for the holy apostles and prophets in Heaven, who have been persecuted and martyred by the harlot woman down through history. With triumph, a great angel hurls a stone like a millstone into the sea, likening it to the fall of Babylon. He declares that there will be no more vain rejoicing in this desolate city. All music, trade, industry, and sign of human life and pleasure will vanish from this once pompous city. At her feet God will lay the blame for the martyrdom of saints all over the earth. The city that epitomised rebellion toward God and cruelty toward His children will be brought to account in that day. By this time, it will be obvious to those who have half an eye what God thinks of the world’s Babylonish and antichrist spirit.

Chapter 19: The Lamb Returns With His Church Triumphant

(vv. 1-4) In John’s vision, he heard many people (possibly those martyred by the antichrist’s regime) in heaven praising God for His judgment of Babylon the Great. ‘Alleluia!’ is their cry, which literally means ‘*Praise ye Jah* (the Lord)!’ The smoke of Babylon’s destruction will ascend eternally in that the fiery judgment of its inhabitants on earth will continue on into eternal and fiery destruction, even after their earthly bodies have perished. The twenty four elders (possibly representative of the saints of all time), and the four beasts (the cherubim) agree with ‘Amen,’ and do likewise, falling down before God’s throne (see 1 Peter 1:12).

(vv. 5-6) The voice that comes ‘out of the throne’ may have been that of one of the four beasts. It would seem that the whole host of Heaven praised God in response to this, because the sound was like ‘many waters’ and ‘mighty thunderings’. God is praised as being *omnipotent* (all-powerful).

(v. 7) Here we see the church age saints mentioned again for the first time since 3:22. The marriage here is that between Jesus Christ and His church (Ephesians 5:32). That it does not include Old Testament believers can be argued from the point of view that those will apparently not have resurrection bodies until after the seven-year tribulation period, along with tribulation saints (See Daniel 12:1-2, Isaiah 26:19-20, Ezekiel 37:12-14, and Revelation 20:4-6), whereas church age saints will be resurrected with fully glorified bodies just before the tribulation period starts. Also, it is the 'dead in Christ' (probably only those believers who have died since the time of Christ) who shall rise first at the rapture (not OT saints, it would seem), followed immediately by those believers who are still alive on earth at that time. None of this denies that believing Israel also has her inheritance in the New Jerusalem, for indeed, the names of the twelve tribes are engraven above her gates. Is not this the city Abraham looked for (Heb 11:10)? Paul says that the New Jerusalem 'is the mother of us all'. Note also Isaiah 54:11-12 and Galatians 4:26.

The rejoicing that will take place in Heaven over the Lamb's wife will be in stark contrast to the weeping that will take place on earth over the destruction of the mother of harlots in chapters 17 and 18 (18:15-20). 'Is come' and 'hath made...ready' are in the simple past tense (aorist) in the Greek. This may indicate that the marriage takes place in Heaven, even though the supper may take place on earth during the Millennium (See Matt 25:1-13). This celebration seems to be one and the same as the supper in which redeemed Israel (both OT and tribulation saints), as well Gentile tribulation saints will participate (Matt 8:11; Luke 14:16-24; Rev 22:17).

(v. 8) The church will be clothed in fine linen, clean and white. The Greek word for white can mean bright, or shining. This will be an outward representation of the inward righteousness of Christ, which believers will be able to enjoy to the full. These shining garments remind us of Daniel 12:3: 'And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.'

(v. 9) Those who shall attend the marriage supper of the Lamb are truly blessed indeed, for it will be such a time of rejoicing for the believer. Do we love His appearing? Do we love Him? Or will we rather be ashamed, because—although redeemed—have we been wasting our time? Have we made ourselves ready (v.7)? This ought to be the whole focus of our lives: To prepare for the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ from Heaven—our Heavenly bridegroom.

(v. 10) John made the mistake of worshipping the messenger, whom most commentators believe to be an angel. All glory should rather go to God, because it is the Spirit of His Son that points men through Scripture's prophecies to Christ (John 5:39), Who in turn reveals to us the Father.

(vv. 11-14) Exactly what was opened is not clear. Was it a door in the New Jerusalem, or was it a peeling away of the firmament, to reveal something hidden? John saw Jesus seated upon a white horse. Faithful and True are His titles, because He returns according to all His promises, to execute justice, and to set up His kingdom on earth (Jude 14-15), followed by His bride, the church, riding upon white horses, wearing the same clothing mentioned in verse 8. This shows that the rapture does not happen at the end of the tribulation period, as the church is returning with him at that time. It also shows that there are animals in Heaven. Elijah was taken up to Heaven by horses of fire, and Elisha saw horses of fire surrounding Dothan.

The many crowns on Christ's head show His absolute power. What is His unknown name? Commentators Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown say: 'John saw it as "written," but *knew not* its meaning. It is, therefore, a name which in all its glorious significance can be only understood when the union of His saints with Him, and His and their joint triumph and reign, shall be perfectly manifested at the final consummation.' The vesture dipped in blood pictures the great bloodshed He will enact upon His enemies. As the 'Word (Greek: *logos*) of God', He is the revelation of who God is to man. There will be no misconceptions concerning who God is then!

(vv. 15-16) There are other passages that talk about Christ treading the winepress: Isaiah 63:3; Joel 3:13; Revelation 14:19-20. The juice from the winepress is figurative of the blood that will flow at the battle of Armageddon, also known as the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3; Rev 14:20; 16:16). His first advent revealed Him to be the humble servant, and the gracious and loving Saviour. His second advent will reveal Him to be KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS!

(vv. 17-18) The signification of standing in the sun—or at least in its direction, may be that the proclamation will be known to all the birds, and maybe to all people too. The birds will come and devour the carcasses of those who are to be slain in the battle.

(v. 19) It will be sheer madness for the antichrist to think that he can make war against Christ and prosper in the same. Revelation 17:14 tells us: 'These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him *are* called, and chosen, and faithful.' The beast and the false prophet will be sent directly to the lake of fire, for their great wickedness in persecuting the people of God, and in deceiving the world, and in leading a rebellion of an unprecedented scale against God. The armies that follow them shall be slain. The birds will then come and feed on them.

Chapter 20: The millennium and the great white throne judgment

Amillennialism is the prevailing view of prophecy in Christendom today (reaching back to Augustine as its founder in the 4th and 5th centuries), but it does not square with a literal interpretation of Revelation 20. Amillennialism teaches that the millennial reign of Christ is actually an indefinite length of time (not a literal 1000-year reign) spanning the present church age, and that all judgements will take place later. However, this is not what we see displayed in the sequence of events between chapters 19 and 20. In chapter 19, we do not see any peaceful reign of Christ on the earth. Instead, we see iniquity coming to the full, under the leadership of the antichrist. We then see Christ preparing the way for His own 1000-year kingdom, by catastrophically judging the armies of the world at Armageddon. It is only natural to take chapter 20 as following chronologically in sequence after chapter 19, otherwise the narration of events is seen to become a jumbled confusion of happenings at this point in the book.

(vv. 1-3) It is natural at this point for God to deal with Satan, now that has judged the beast and the false prophet. Satan will be bound before Christ establishes his reign of peace on the earth. Amillennialists teach that, seeing the present church age is representative of the 1000 years, Satan has already been bound. Well-known counsellor Jay Adams downplays the involvement of demons in the world today in an article entitled *Demon Possession and Counselling*. This is because he is an amillennialist, and believes that Satan has already been bound. Although his material is very helpful, and he has greatly advanced the cause of Biblical counselling, this is a serious flaw in his understanding, in light of such passages as Ephesians 6:10-18, and 1 Peter 5:8: 'Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.'

Satan is described by four titles: *Dragon*, showing his cruelty; *That old serpent*, showing that he is the age-old tempter and seducer to sin; *Devil*, showing that he is the false accuser; *Satan*, showing that he is the adversary. This four-fold title portrays how God sees the devil.

The fact that Satan will still be determined to do what he can against Christ when he is released at the end of the millennium demonstrates how determined he really is. No wonder we are commanded to be sober and vigilant!

(vv. 4-6) Those that John saw seated on thrones probably included church age saints, and Old Testament saints. In particular, he mentions the tribulation saints who will also reign with Christ. These are categorised as belonging to the first resurrection, and are therefore blessed. Some commentators believe that the term 'first resurrection' includes the rapture of the church, which we know takes place before the tribulation period begins. Whether or not those commentators are correct, we know that the church age saints will be reigning together with these resurrected tribulation saints (See 2:26, among other passages). It may be that John is

particularly focusing on the 2 resurrections spoken of by Daniel (See Daniel 12:2), both of which follow the great tribulation: The first one being the resurrection of tribulation and Old Testament saints, and the second one being the resurrection of the unsaved at the end of the millennium. The 'second death' mentioned in verse 6 is explained in verse 14 as referring to the lake of fire.

(vv. 7-10) Satan will be released at the end of the millennial reign of Christ, and will immediately begin to deceive the nations, and to gather the unregenerate together to do battle against Jerusalem, which will be the capital city of Christ's kingdom. It appears that Magog (probably Russia) and Gog (Russia's ruler) will be at the head of this rebellion. Ezekiel 38 and 39 speaks about an attack from these same entities, but that most likely takes place during the tribulation period. The fact that Satan has not given up, and that Gog and Magog strike again, and that the world strikes again simply testifies to the exceeding sinfulness and stubbornness of sin, both in Satan, and in human beings. This state of affairs during the millennium is likely what the Scripture is conveying when it says in Isaiah 26:10: 'Let favour be shewed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the LORD.'

Judgment upon Satan and sinners will have come to the full. They shall have sought to disturb the love, joy, and peace of Christ and His saints for the last time! The fire that God then sends from above to consume them will totally just. Satan will then be thrown into the lake of fire. What a long awaited and victorious day that will be!

(v. 11) The great white throne judgment then takes place. The time for the second resurrection has come (see verse 6). Most probably Christ Himself will be seated in that throne, not now as the Saviour, but rather as the Judge! Is this what Paul meant when he wrote about Christ being revealed in flaming fire with his mighty angels (2 Thess 1:7-9)? Note also that the earth and the heavens flee away at the same time! Maybe this means that the great white throne judgment is introduced with the destruction of the earth and the heavens (2 Peter 3:10-12), while the court of judgment itself is situated somewhere in the expanse of space.

(vv. 12-13) When all the lost of all time stand before God, the books will be opened. These contain the record of all their sins, including all of their idle words (Matt 12:36), and all of their secret sins (Romans 2:16). The book of life will also be opened also (see verse 15). The dead bodies of the unsaved will be resurrected, whether they be in watery ('the sea') or earthly ('death') graves. These dead bodies will be reunited with their souls from hell. 'Hell' translates the Greek word 'hades', which is the present fiery abode of the departed spirits of the unsaved. Notice that these individuals will be judged according to their *works*. The Christian's sin has been judged in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross, and therefore God's verdict

towards us is according to grace, and not works. When God makes inquisition for sin, nobody outside of His saving grace in Christ Jesus shall stand (Psalm 130:3).

(vv. 14-15) To say that *'death and hell were cast into the lake of fire'* simply means that the souls and bodies of these individuals, being once again reunited, will be cast into the lake of fire (not returned to hades), where they will spend eternity without Christ. This is called the second death. It is referred to as *'everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord'* in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Their names will not be found in the book of life (see also Revelation 13:8). There is no possibility that the names of the saved could ever be blotted out of that book, and only those whom God foreknew will have their names written in it (Revelation 3:5). This is not what God *decides*, it is simply what He *foreknows*. We must not forget that difference, lest we err on the side of Calvinism.

Chapter 21: The Eternal State – Part 1

(v. 1) John saw a completely new universe. This seems to indicate that God will again create stars and planets. There will be a new earth, and there will be no sea. We do not know why there will be no more sea, but it could be because the sea is a symbol of separation between people groups. The fact that there will be no sea will provide more habitable places for humans in the earth. There will no doubt be unlimited access to every place, with only rivers, creeks, and smaller bodies of water.

(v. 2) With great amazement, John declares that he himself was privileged to see New Jerusalem, descending from outer space toward the surface of the earth. The earthly Jerusalem had been ruined some 25 years previous to this, and so it would have pointed the hearts of any Jewish readers to a far better home, eternal in the heavens. It was beautiful to see, and John immediately recognised the beauty of marriage between Christ and His church, although this city rightfully belongs to all the saints, including Abraham. Notice though, that the beauty of the city is not simply described in aesthetic terms. Its title is *'the holy city'*. God will take great delight in His people when they are perfectly holy. At this present time, when we come to worship God, we must worship in the beauty of Christ's own holiness, separated from the world, separated unto Him alone. This brings great joy to the Lord's heart (Psalm 29:2; 45:10-11).

(vv. 3-5) John heard a great voice from the heavens announcing that the dwelling place of God is with men, meaning that God desires to dwell among His people. This has been God's desire all along. Now that men's hearts shall have been prepared, and sin and death shall have been vanquished forever, God will be able to dwell with joy among His people. How often do we grieve His Holy Spirit Who resides within us continually? But what a joy that day will be! Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 will be truly fulfilled in the deepest sense. Psalm 90:1: *'Lord, thou hast been our dwelling*

place in all generations.’ May God be our dwelling place even now, until we reach that blessed place! 1Thess 4:17 ‘...So shall we ever be with the Lord.’

What a blessed thought, that God Himself shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of the saints! The Man of sorrows has carried our griefs and sorrows. He has not forgotten our tears, but keeps them in His bottle. He Himself longs for the day when He shall comfort His children, and wipe their tearful eyes. There will be no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain. There shall be no more fear or frustration. All will be perfect peace and joy in the presence of our loving Saviour. The world with all its sadness and hurt will be gone forever. We must recognise that God is the altogether lovely One, the righteous One, the restorer of all things. There is nothing we can do to improve God’s work. We can only cooperate with it.

(vv. 6-7) Even now, God has begun to make all things new. He has begun His work in believers. But in that day, there will be no vestige of sin, or anything soiled by it. This will most surely come to pass, for God promises it, saying that His own words are true and faithful, and that He Himself is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. Those who thirst will be able to drink of the water of life freely. Do we hunger and thirst after righteousness? Jesus promised that we shall be filled (Matt 5:6). There are probably some special life-giving properties in the stream which flows out from under the very throne of the Lamb (Rev 7:17). The physical water represents God, Who describes Himself as the Fountain of living waters (Jer 2:13; 7:13; John 4:14; 7:37-38; 1 Cor 10:4). The Christian is described as ‘He that overcometh’. The only reason we are able to overcome is through faith in Christ (1 John 5:4-5). The Christian will be a co-heir with Christ (Rom 8:17), and enjoy the depths of Father-child relationship with the Heavenly Father.

(v. 8) ‘The fearful’ are those who have feared God slavishly, and treated Him as austere (Luke 19:21), trying to hide from Him, and run from Him (Prov 28:1). They have been unwilling to believe what He says about His love for them, and have rather shunned him. ‘Sorcerers’ are those who have engaged in witchcraft and magic, pursuing the dark and deep things of Satan. These people will go to the lake of fire, which is Gehenna, the second death (20:14). Once again, the Bible explains in literal and no-uncertain terms the literal fire of Hell.

(vv. 9-11) One of the seven angels who administered the vial judgments (see chapter 16) said to John, ‘Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife.’ In John’s vision, he was carried to a great and high mountain by the angel, from where he was able to see ‘that great city’, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. It is a gift from God to His children. It is the abode of Jesus and His bride, the church. However, it rightfully belongs to all the saints of all time. We know that even Abraham looked for a city that had foundations. The city bears the beauty of ‘the glory of God’. It shone with light. The light shone like a jasper stone. ‘The modern jasper is opaque, but the ancient stone must have been translucent rock rock crystal,

possibly a diamond.’ (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 342)

(vv. 12-13) The wall of the city was great and high, and it had twelve gates. ‘The city’s twelve gates are actually “gate-towers,” the noun [Greek: pylon]...being the word for a large gateway, as in Luke 16:20...’ (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22, An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 462) At each gate tower was an angel. There were three gates on each of the four sides. Each gate was inscribed with the name of one of the tribes of Israel. This is another characteristic pointing to Israel’s inheritance of the city also.

(v. 14) Concerning the foundations of the wall: ‘Layered foundations are hardly practical, however. Probably each portion of the wall joining two gates had a conspicuous basement made of a vast stone...The foundations were conceivably buttresses rising from an immense subbase. Looking at any of the four sides, John would have seen, in order, corner-base – gate – base – gate – base – gate – corner-base. The twelve foundations bring a recollection of the city with foundations for which Abraham looked (Heb 11:10)...’ (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22, An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 464) It may be, however, that there is a totally different explanation for the placement of these various stones. The names of the twelve apostles are somehow displayed on these foundations.

(vv. 15-17) The angel that talked to John had a golden reed (or rod) to measure the city and its parts. The city is described as being ‘foursquare’ which means ‘four-cornered’. Its horizontal shape is square. The length of each side of the city is 12000 furlongs, which is equivalent to about 1400 or 1500 miles. Such a city would extend such a distance as from Rome (on its west side) to Jerusalem (on its east side). It would also be the same distance as from Adelaide to Darwin. The wall is 144 cubits or 216 feet thick. That is equal to approximately 66 metres. The city is probably a cube shape.

(vv. 18-20) The wall of the city is possibly made out of diamond, or a similar stone (see comments on verse 11), which means that it is transparent. What does ‘like unto clear glass’ refer to (see also comments on verse 21)? We don’t really know exactly, but it will be something far better than we can imagine. The foundations are said to be ‘garnished’ or ‘adorned’ with all kinds of precious stones.

‘Alexander Macloud in *The Cherubim and the Apocalypse* describes the color of the stones as follows (the jasper is not listed because it is described by John as clear as crystal like our diamond):

Sapphire - pure blue or deep azure

Chalcedony - grey, with purple, blue, and yellow

Emerald - green
Sardonyx - bluish white, or it is the onyx, with red veins
Sardius - blood red
Chrysolite - green or golden colour
Beryl - bluish green
Topaz - pale green or golden colour
Chrysoprasus - bluish hue, a beautiful green mingled with yellow
Jacinth - violet or red with a mixture of yellow
Amethyst - purple colour, or a mixture of strong blue and deep red'
(David Cloud, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 430-431)

(v. 21) Each gate tower was carved out of a large single pearl (see comments on verse 12). Only God can make pearls that big! And He doesn't need a giant oyster to do it either! The streets are paved with gold, which looks like transparent glass. This description could refer to the shiny appearance, due to the absolute purity of the gold. This may be what is meant in verse 18 also.

(v. 22) John saw no temple in the city, and the reason he gave was that God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. This shows that our eternal abode is ultimately in God Himself. What a wondrous thought! We will be enveloped by His presence (Psalm 90:1; 2 Cor 6:16; Psalm 22:3; Rev 3:12).

(vv. 23-26) There will be no need of the sun in the New Jerusalem, because the glory of God and the Lamb will be the light there. When the city rests upon the earth, the kindreds of the earth will rejoice in the light that emanates from the city. There will be kings reigning in righteousness during the eternal state. They will bring offerings of treasure into the New Jerusalem. The gates of the city will never need to be shut, for there will be no night in the city, because the glory of God, and the Lamb Himself will enlighten the city. Precious treasures from every nation will be brought into the city.

(v. 27) It is very comforting to know that there will be no sin in that city, and none will be able to enter it – not that there will be anything on earth which could defile the city anyway, for we know that in the new heavens and new earth there will be no sin or curse. God's double enemies, sin and death, will be gone, and there will be absolutely no threat to the tranquillity and peace which will fill the universe in the eternal state. The last part of this verse states that only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life will be able to dwell in that city. Those who are not will be separated from God in the lake of fire for eternity (20:15).

Chapter 22: The Eternal State – Part 2

(v. 1) There is a crystal-clear river in the Heavenly city, and its water is referred to here as 'water of life'. This water of life is also referred to in 7:17, 21:6, 22:17. Also, see comments on 21:6-7. The river flows out from the very throne of God, showing that He is the fountain of living waters (Jer 2:13).

(v. 2) 'The tree of life' probably refers to many of that kind planted along the banks of the river. Concerning the position of the trees and the river, relative to the main street of the city, Thomas writes: 'The best analysis pictures a river flowing down the middle of the city's broad street with the trees on each side of the river in the middle of the space between the street and each of the river banks' (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22 – An Exegetical Commentary*, p. 483).

'Twelve *manner of* fruits': The Greek here may signify either twelve kinds of fruit, or twelve harvests of fruit – one per month. The leaves will be of therapeutic service to the nations – not that any sickness or disease will be present, but rather that the leaves will have some health-perpetuating property in them. The descriptions in verses 1-2, as well as what follows, reminds us of Psalm 36:8-9: 'They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee *is* the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.'

Ezekiel 47:1-12 also speaks of a similar river and fruit trees, but these are not to be confused with what John is writing about, for Ezekiel is describing conditions during the millennial reign, which comes before the eternal state that we speak of here.

(v. 3) There will be no more curse in the New Jerusalem. Earthly Jerusalem has been cursed because of their idolatry, but in Heaven, the Father and the Son will be on the throne. Ezekiel prophesied that the name of the millennial Jerusalem will be 'The LORD is there'. How much more blessed will it be to live in the city not built with hands! Let us cast out all known idols, for God cannot truly bless us with the fullness of His presence when there is a rival on the throne! We will serve the Lord in Heaven, and it will be such a joy.

(v. 4) 'They shall see his face'; This reminds us of Job's words (Job 19:26), and also of Jesus' promise: (Matt 5:8) 'Blessed *are* the pure in heart: for they shall see God.' Is it the face of the Father, or of the Son that we shall see? Christ is the physical representation of the glory of the Father, but our spiritual perception will be heightened to such a degree that we will be able to perceive God as a Spirit also. It is hard for us to know what that will be like, but it will truly be a blessed experience. 'His name shall be in their foreheads' indicates identity. (1 Corinthians 15:49) 'And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.' The true beauty of our God-given humanity and God-likeness will shine

forth. We will have entered the glorious liberty, belonging only to the very sons and daughters of God.

(v. 5) 'Giveth them light' could also be translated 'lightens, illuminates, or shines upon'. From this, we may see a correlation between the benediction in Numbers 6:25-27 and this future truth. The light of God will emanate forth, enveloping the whole atmosphere of Heaven. So will His love. We will breathe it in the air, we will see it reflected in the transparent gold of the towers and structures, we will hear and see it in the sparkling river, we will taste it in the fruit of the trees of life, we will be assured of it in the grandeur and strength of the towering walls and gates, we will feel its expanse in the sea of glass reflecting before the throne. But most of all, we will see it beaming from His very countenance. The very light which illuminates the entire city will stream forth from a countenance of love. The light itself will speak of love—redeeming love. What would even the light of Heaven be, if it did not emanate from the favourable countenance of our loving God?

We will reign with Him for ever and ever, probably over the redeemed nations which inhabited the millennial earth beforehand (see 21:24).

(vv. 6-7) Is this the same angel spoken of in 1:1? At any rate, he seems to be the same as the one mentioned in 21:9. He gave assurance to John of the certainty of the prophecy, as mentioned in 1:1. The message is not only for John, but to God's servants in general. Christ is coming soon (see verse 10). We believe that it will not be long now, comparative to the rest of history. We will be blessed if we keep the sayings of the prophecy of this book. That is to say, we must live in the light of these prophecies. We must lay these things up in our hearts. We must keep our eyes on them.

(vv. 8-9) John fell down to worship the angel, but was forbidden to do so, seeing that the angel was a fellow servant, serving God (Hebrews 1:14) even as John, and as the prophets, and as other believers did. John was to direct his admiration toward God instead.

(v. 10) John was commanded not to seal up the book, for the events that the angel had shared with him were imminent (about to happen; see also vv 6-7). This ought to cause us to prepare with expectancy. Daniel was commanded to seal up his prophecy (Dan 12:9), but John was told to leave his unsealed. The sealing and unsealing had to do with the veiling and unveiling of future events. In Daniel's time, much of his prophecy was for the distant future, and could not be understood. However, today, with the help of Revelation, and other portions of Scripture, we understand more about his prophecies than he himself did! John's message, on the other hand, was of immediate relevance to the churches, and was to be disseminated at once, so that

Christians everywhere could prepare themselves. If this was so in John's day, how much more now – some 2000 years closer to the events prophesied! We must walk closely with God, for the time of our departure may be closer than we think!

(vv. 11-12) The Scriptures here are not encouraging sinners to continue sinning. This verse must be understood in the light of verse 12. In other words, men will make their decisions, but regardless of what they do, Christ will keep His appointment. This is very much like the prophecies of Isaiah in Isaiah 40:10 and 62:11. The reward for the wicked will be judgment. The reward for the righteous will be eternal glory.

(v. 13) Jesus again calls Himself Alpha and Omega (1:8, 11; 21:6), showing that He is ultimately in control of the future.

(vv. 14-15) Those that do His commandments are simply those who have received the new birth and consequently live changed lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. Every truly born-again believer will be a disciple of Jesus Christ. When we see that the New Testament uses the word 'believer' two times, the word 'Christian' three times, but the word 'disciple' about 268 times, we begin to understand that the regenerated person's walk will indeed be different. Verse 15 lists the works of those who will be excluded from the Heavenly city, and sent to the lake of fire. These are people whose names are not in the book of life (20:15). He that 'maketh' a lie is someone who not only tells lies, but also practises lies. All unsaved people are in reality living a lie, for they have not yet believed the eternal truths of the Gospel.

(v. 16) Jesus speaks here, telling the churches that he is 'the root and offspring of David' (Isa 11:1; Jeremiah 33:15-16; Revelation 5:5). This shows that He is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament Scriptures. He also tells us that He is the bright and morning star (see comments on 2:28-29).

(v. 17) The Holy Spirit and the bride (the church in this present age before the rapture) are calling out to sinners to repent and turn to Christ. As believers, we who hear (or read) these prophecies ought to join in the evangelistic call, saying 'Come' to those who are yet unsaved. The unsaved person is now described as 'him that is athirst', and is invited to come. 'Whosoever will' is the wonderful and open invitation that Christ gives to all people, calling them to salvation. In coming to Him, repentant and believing sinners may drink of the water of life freely (John 4:10, 14; 7:37-38; Rev 7: 17; 22:1).

(vv. 18-19) God forbids anyone to add to His Word. The book of Revelation is the closing of the canon of Scripture, and the final part of God's inspired written record to mankind. Unregenerate minds have tried to take away or add to God's Word, and the plagues of this book shall be summed up to them in eternal torment. God will take away his part out of the book of life. I have heard a question allowing similar

lines to the following: 'Does this mean that his name was written in there originally? Doesn't that contradict Revelation 17:8, where it says that their names were not written in the book from the beginning of the world?' This is a dead-end question. It is more profitable for us to ask: What is God's mind towards men? This we can answer. Although He knows who will reject Him, He is not willing that any be excluded from the Lamb's book of life, even though most will (2 Peter 3:9). He has made provision for all to be saved, even though most will not (1 Tim 2:6).

(v. 20) The Lord Jesus' last personal address to all believers is here recorded: 'Surely I come quickly. Amen.' This sums up a common theme in this last chapter of the Bible: The imminency (about to happen) of Christ's return. It is mentioned in various ways throughout this chapter:

- 'Things which must shortly come to pass' (v. 6)
- 'Behold, I come quickly' (v. 7)
- 'The time is at hand' (v. 10)
- 'Behold, I come quickly' (v. 12)
- 'Surely, I come quickly' (v. 20)

Let us join with John's reply! 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' How dependent we ought to be on His grace, as we await His soon return!

'Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.' (2 Peter 3:14)

'And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.'
(1 John 3:3)



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