

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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The Book of Revelation ~ Forward

The book of Revelation is not an easy book. The complexities of the book and questions over what is symbolic or literal, what the symbols mean, how the book is constructed, what time period is covered, and how the specific prophecies are fulfilled cause many thoughtful Christians to draw back. Sensationalist interpretations add to the frustration or apathy with this conclusion to the Old and New Testaments. Others consider the book not relevant to their Christian walk.

It is because of the consternation this book causes that the first of the appendices is *Appendix A ~ Revelation for Everyone (An Introduction for the Faint of Heart)*. Three challenges are addressed in this appendix:

- ❖ Is Revelation a Book of Identifiable Symbols?
- ❖ Can Revelation Be a Book of Passion and Hope?
- ❖ Is There a Discernible Structure to Revelation?

Anyone afraid or confused by this book, or impatient with all the conflicting theories, or just generally skeptical of the value of this book is encouraged to start with this appendix.

The Present Popularized View of Revelation

Another difficulty with acceptance of this book is the most publicized view of Revelation in our modern day. Today this interpretation is known as the “Futurist View” of the book. Within this interpretation most of Revelation (typically beginning with the fourth chapter) still awaits fulfillment in the near future in a very literal series of mind-bending supernatural events. It tends to be the most literal interpretation of the book, although typically a few elements are still understood to be symbolic.

Many people seem to like this view because of its easy accessibility. Others including tabloids and Hollywood like it for the vivid outlandish events this interpretation creates.

What most sincere Christians don’t realize is that its popularity is of relatively recent origin (beginning to gain serious interest over just the last 100-150 years).

Until recent times it has never been the predominant view of the church.¹ It became much more popularized in the early 1970's with the release of Hal Lindsey's book *The Late Great Planet Earth*² and more recently with the *Left Behind* series of novels. As a result the popularity of the futurist interpretation is driven as much by pop theological books and novels as serious interpretation of scripture.

As Duke University basketball coach Mike Krzyzewski recently stated on an unrelated subject, "We live in a world of quick judgment and shallow analysis."

Other Views of Revelation

Perhaps the fastest growing viewpoint is the "Preterist View" in which – by the first and most customary interpretation – the entire book is fulfilled in less than the first forty years of the church's history (ending in the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. It interprets Revelation as both symbolic and literal. (This is also its weakest point, since in the Preterist model the choice of whether to interpret any given point as literal or symbolic seems driven by whatever is convenient for the interpretation.)

Another viewpoint known as the "Idealist / Spiritual View" sees the book of Revelation as a mutable series of lessons in which any specific passage can be applied in a number of ways and to many circumstances. It views Revelation as not only symbolic, but with symbols whose meaning can vary to some extent with different applications.

It should be noted that all of these explanations are very generalized and way too brief, and that within each viewpoint there are also large and small variations. They only serve as a very broad overview of the thinking of modern interpreters of the book.

A description of the various major viewpoints of Revelation in the present day can be found in *Appendix F ~ The Book of Revelation ~ Four Views* for anyone who wants to start Revelation with an overview of the four main interpretations.

¹ Of course, this does not make it right or wrong, and it is to be expected that Revelation would be better understood as prophetic events unfold. However, many Christians seem to operate under the assumption that the Futurist View of Revelation is a time honored interpretation. It is not.

² From Wikipedia – "*The Late, Great Planet Earth* was the first Christian prophecy book to be picked up by a secular publisher (Bantam, 1973) and sell many copies. Despite some dated content, 28 million copies had sold by 1990. The film *The Late Great Planet Earth* was narrated by Orson Welles and released in theaters in 1979."

The Viewpoint of the Following Commentary on Revelation

The fourth and final view of Revelation – and the one that is primarily found in the following pages – is known as the “Historicist View” of Revelation. It is the traditional Protestant view of Revelation, although it can be traced much further back in time to the beginnings of the church.³ The Historicist View sees the book of Revelation as completely symbolic (but with the understanding that a few symbols are occasionally duplicated in the real world, also).⁴

Historicism has a number of advantages over the other viewpoints, as follows:

- Since it begins with the beginning of the church, it fulfills the expectation of the book’s own initial description as a book of “the things which must soon take place” (Rev. 1:1).
- Since it’s a continuous history from the time of the early church to the present and into the future, it is always immediately relevant for the church.
- Because it views everything in the book symbolically, there are no convenient but questionable switches between literal and symbolic interpretation.
- The symbolism of the book is consistent. Each symbol always has the same general meaning (i.e., a “mountain” always represents a kingdom or a “star” always represents someone who teaches or enlightens).
- The fulfillment of many passages in the book can be identified throughout history and lends credence to the viewpoint and faith to the believer.

Closing Thoughts Before Starting the Book

Revelation is not a book for sensation seekers. Too much of the interest in Revelation in recent decades is superficial and as likely to be found in a tabloid headline as in a serious Bible study. It is a book that requires some work, but it is also a book with rich rewards for those who persevere.

Neither should it be turned into a mere technical exercise of facts. It is a passionate book. The powerful imagery of the book is not accidental, but instead gives us an insight in the very soul of God.

³ For some extremely well detailed and supported evidence for the long history of the “Historicist View”, see Froom, L. *The Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers*, vols. I-4. Review and Herald: Washington DC.

⁴ E.g. Rev. 17:9 with reference to Rome.

Finally, it is a book of hope. Revelation is seldom appreciated for the love of God revealed in the book – not just at the end – but also throughout all of its pages. And when God is angry in the book, it is not like the frequently selfish human response to injustice. Instead it springs from the God who loves this world (Jo. 3:16) and plans to save it from itself.

We also find a book especially written to give comfort to the church that is faithful despite opposition on all sides (1 Peter 4:12) throughout the age. He hears and his heart responds to the cry of their sacrificial lives – “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood?” – that calls out to Him like ashes from under the altar (Rev. 6:9-11).

Those who read this book and see only literal descriptions of terrible events do not read it rightly. Those who read it through the heart and mind of a God who longs to forevermore complete this present lesson on the consequence of evil... those will find it to be a much different book.

“Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy...”

An Outline of the Book of Revelation

Revelation as a Highly Structured Book

To those used to thinking of Revelation as a disorganized series of unrelated descriptions and events, it might come as a surprise to know that the book is very highly organized... and that this organization can be seen regardless of which interpretation of Revelation is chosen.

Revelation is a very structured book that can be fairly conveniently broken down into 4 to 7 sections depending on preference, and these sections can be further subdivided. Some who are familiar with the book of Revelation may quibble over minor details or slight differences, but most would probably concede that the outline presented here is a fairly concise overview.

In order to convey both the simplicity and complexity of the structure of Revelation, the structure will be shown in three different ways. There is a great deal of similarity among the three perspectives, and each approach to organizing Revelation is valid. These approaches are:

- ❖ A basic outline of Revelation acknowledged nearly universally by all interpreters with at the most only slight modifications.
- ❖ A more detailed outline that breaks down the basic outline with more detail.
- ❖ A numerical outline that divides and subdivides the book in a common numerical pattern.

Many commentators also suggest that these three approaches to the book also structure Revelation in chronological order into three primary periods.⁵ These three periods are the Gospel or Christian Age as a whole (chapters 2-13), the close of that age with a Harvest/Tribulation period (chapters 14-19), and then the Kingdom of God (chapters 20-22).

A survey of each of the three approaches to organizing Revelation follows in the same order as listed in the bulleted list and the chronological order shown above. This should help the student of Revelation understand the surrounding context of

⁵ Although most commentators with the Futurist View would assign chapters 2-11 to the Tribulation period.

each passage in Revelation, as well as understanding where the passage generally fits in time.

The Basic Fundamental Outline of Revelation

The outline below is very simple and probably agreeable or closely agreeably with minor distinctions to nearly every interpreter of Revelation. It divides the book into five or six parts, as follows:

Part 1 – Revelation chapter 1 [opening verses] ~ **Introduction** to the book.

Part 2 – Revelation chapters 1 through chapter 11 ~ The **Sevens Series** of 7 Churches, 7 Seals, and 7 Trumpets with two “interludes” in chapters 4-5 and chapter 7.

Part 3 – Revelation chapters 12 and 13 ~ The **Woman**, the **Dragon**, and the **Beasts**.

Part 4 – Revelation chapters 14-19 ~ Period of Transition – the **Harvest** of the Church and the **Great Tribulation** upon the World.

Part 5 – Revelation chapters 20-22 ~ The **Kingdom of God** in Heaven and on Earth.

Part 6 – Revelation chapters 22 [closing verses] ~ **Conclusion** to the book.

An Outline of Revelation in Detail

1) Introduction (Chapter 1):

Chapter 1 – Introduces us to Jesus, John, the angel who delivers the visions to John, and to the seven churches.

Verses 1-3 – Introduction to Revelation

Verses 4-11 – John’s salutation to the Churches

2) The Sevens Series Dividing the History of the Christian Age into Seven Periods ~ Seven Churches, Seven Seals, and Seven Trumpets and including Two Interludes (Chapters 1-11):

Chapter 1 – Introduces the seven churches and the seven messengers or “angels” to the churches.

Verses 12-16 – A vision of Jesus

Verses 17-20 – Jesus introduces the Seven Churches and Seven Stars

Chapters 2-3 – **The Seven Churches**

Each message has:

- (1) The Name of that Church
- (2) A Unique Description of Jesus
- (3) The Message to that Church (Praise and Rebuke)
- (4) The Promise to that Church

Chapters 4-5 – **(Interlude 1)** The Throne Scene and the Five Praises (Introduction to the Seven Seals

Introduces the Four Living Ones, the Lamb, the 24 Elders, the Strong Angel, and the Scroll with Seven Seals.

The five praises in these chapters are shown in some translations such as the NASB, NIV, and Revised Version, and are listed below:

- (1) Revelation 4:8
- (2) Revelation 4:11
- (3) Revelation 5:9-10
- (4) Revelation 5:12
- (5) Revelation 5:13

Chapter 6 and Chapter 8:1 – the Seven Seals

The first six seals occur in order throughout chapter six. Chapter seven is another interlude before the seven seal is found in Revelation 8:1.

Chapter 7 – (Interlude 2) the Four Winds, the 144,000, and the Great Multitude or Tribulation Saints)

Verses 1-3 – Four Winds Held Back

Verses 4-8 – 144,000 Servants of God Sealed

Verses 9-17 – The Great Multitude (sometimes referred to as the “Tribulation Saints”)

Chapter 8 (verse 2) through Chapter 11 – the Seven Trumpets

Chapter 8:2-6 – Introduction of the Seven Trumpets (Preparation to Sound)

Chapter 8:7-11:19 - Where the Trumpets Are Found:

- Chapter 8:7-13 - The *first four* trumpets
- Chapter 9:1-12 - The *fifth* trumpet
- Chapters 9:13 through 11:13 – The *sixth* trumpet
(including an extended description of the Little Book in chapter 10 and the Two Witnesses in chapter 11:1-14)
- Chapter 11:15-19 - The *seventh* trumpet

3) The Beasts Describing the History of the Christian Age in Continuity (Chapters 12-13):

Chapter 12 – the Woman, the Dragon, the Man-Child, and War in Heaven

Verses 1-6 - The woman, the dragon, and the man-child

Verses 7-9 - War in heaven

Verses 10-12 - The victors rejoice

Verses 13-17 - The dragon continues to pursue the woman in the wilderness

Chapter 13 – the Dragon, Beast, Two-Horned Beast, the Image of the Beast, and the Mark)

Verses 13:1-10 – The dragon and beast

Verses 13:11-15 - The two-horned beast and the image of the beast

Verses 13:16-14:5 – Those with the forehead mark of the beast and those the forehead name of God and the Lamb

4) The Harvest of the Church and the Great Tribulation (Chapters 14-19):

Chapter 14 – the Two Harvests of the Church and of the “Vine of the Earth”

Verses 1-5 – The 144,000 on Mt Zion (transition/bridge used twice)

Verses 6-16 – The harvest of the earth

Verses 17-20 – The harvest of the vine of the earth

Chapters 15 and 16 – the Seven Last Plagues

Chapter 15 – The setting of the plagues

Chapter 16 – The seven last plagues

Chapter 17 – The Rise and Fall of **Babylon Part One** (Political and Social)

Chapter 18 – The Rise and Fall of **Babylon Part Two** (Spiritual and Economic)

Verses 1-8 – The warning of the coming destruction and call to leave it behind

Verses 9-19 – The nations and merchants who lament for Babylon

Verses 20-24 – The final fall and destruction of Babylon

Chapter 19 – the Marriage of Christ and the Church and Their Final Victory

Verses 1-10 – The celebration of the marriage of the Lamb and His bride

Verses 11-16 – The description of the conquering king

Verses 17-21 – The final end of the enemies

5) The Kingdom of God (Chapters 20-22)

Chapter 20 through 21:1 – the Millennium or 1,000 year reign of Christ

Verses 1-3 – The binding of Satan

Verses 4-6 – The first resurrection

Verses 7-10 – The loosing of Satan

Verses 11-21:1 – The general resurrection

Chapter 21:2 through 22:7 – New Jerusalem (heaven)/Paradise Restored (earth)

Chapter 21 – The description of the New Jerusalem and the earth

Chapter 22:1-7 – The river of life

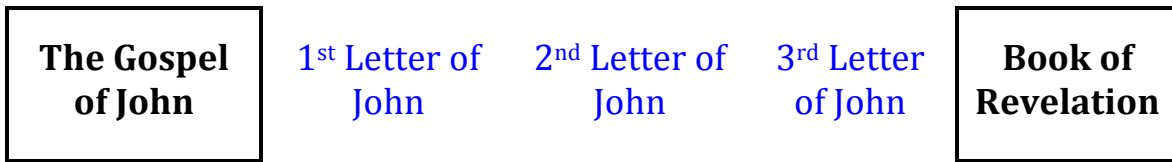
6) Conclusion (Chapters 22):

Chapter 22:8-21 – Final words

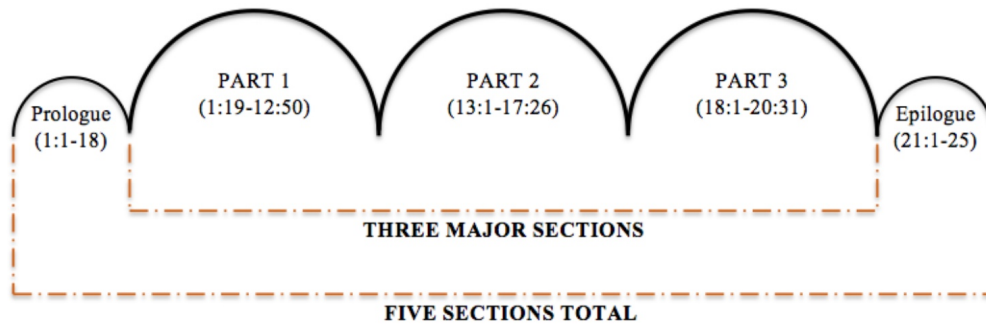
The Numerical Structure of the Book of Revelation

There is a numerical structure to all of John’s writings including the Book of Revelation. This numerical structure is built on the numbers three (for the atonement and Jesus on earth) and five (for Jesus as the deliverer now from heaven).

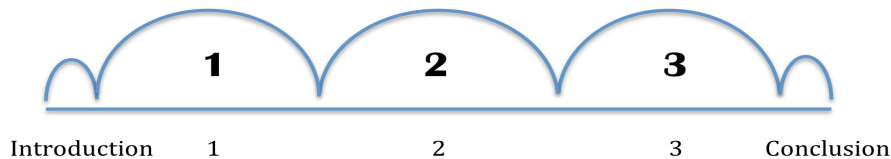
In over view John wrote five books of which the middle three are briefer letters and bookended by the Gospel of John and Revelation. Collectively they look like this:



Each of the two larger books exhibits a similar pattern of five and three, and the numerical structure of the gospel of John is shown in an illustration below:⁶



The book of Revelation also exhibits the same pattern as shown below and illustrated in the chart on the following page:



⁶ The three major section shown above represent the public ministry of Jesus (part 1), the private ministry of Jesus (part 2) and the passion of Christ comprising the arrest, trials, and crucifixion (part 3).

The three major sections of Revelation – when viewed numerically – are each composed of five separate subjects, as follows:

The Sevens and the Beasts	Harvest and Tribulation	The Kingdom of God
(1) Introduction to the Seven Churches and the Seven Churches Revelation 1:9-3:22	(1) The Harvest of the Earth and the Vine of the Earth Revelation 14:6-20	(1) The Thousand Years (Millennial Age) Revelation 20:1-10
(2) Introduction to the Seven Seals and the Seven Seals Revelation 4:1-8:1	(2) Introduction to the Seven Last Plagues and the Seven Last Plagues Revelation 15:1-16:21	(2) The Great White Throne Judgment Scene Revelation 20:11-21:1
(3) Introduction to the Seven Trumpets and the Seven Trumpets Revelation 8:2-11:14	(3) The Rise and Fall of Babylon (Political and Social) Revelation 17:1-18	(3) Heaven and Earth in the Kingdom of God (the new order of things) Revelation 21:2-8
(4) The Woman, the Man Child, and the Dragon at War Revelation 12:1-17	(4) The Rise and Fall of Babylon (Spiritual and Financial) Revelation 18:1-23	(4) The New Jerusalem comes down (to restore mankind) Revelation 21:9-27
(5) The Beasts, the Image of the Beast, the Deceived, and the Faithful Revelation 13:1-14:5	(5) The Tribulation – Jesus and the Church Victorious Revelation 19:1-21	(5) The River of Life and the Paradise of God Revelation 22:1-7

Taken altogether, the three sets of five shown above follow a similar pattern to the previous outlines of the Book of Revelation we’ve already considered. Not only is it fascinating to see this numerical pattern played out in John’s writings including Revelation, it also gives us some confidence that we are on the right track in our previous outline of the book.

Revelation Chapter One ~ Introduction to Revelation

The Apokalypsis Iwannou or in English transliteration from Greek – Apocalypse [Revelation] of John is the earliest title given to copies of this book of scripture by the early church. It is an apt title, but one that is not specifically stated in scripture. The title was meant to distinguish this apocalypse from other apocalypses, i.e. it is the particular apocalypse recorded by John. It is the only apocalypse considered authentic and therefore the only one added to the canon of the New Testament.

The first chapter of the Book of Revelation serves as an introduction to the entire book. The first three verses alone provide a summary of the origin of the book (from God to Jesus through the angel to John), the literary style of book (symbolic), the time setting of the book (to begin immediately), and the purpose of the book (to be a blessing to the reader).

The rest of the chapter gives us John’s greetings and blessings (doxology), the recipients (seven churches / congregations in Asia), a symbolic description of the author (Jesus), and a description of the first symbols to be used in the book (seven stars and seven candlesticks).

Verse 1

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to His bond-servants the things that must shortly take place; and He signified it and sent it by His angel to His bond-servant John.” (Revelation 1:1)

The first verse of Revelation is one of the most lightly considered verses in the Bible... particularly in light of its importance to understanding the rest of the book. Three things of note in this first verse:

- (1) The full title of the book is *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*.
- (2) The second item of note is the order in which the book is communicated to us. The book is transmitted from God to Jesus to the Angel to John to us.
- (3) However, the most critical item of note relates to the word “signified” at the end of this first verse:

Aune translates this word (Gr. εσημασεν) in his text as “he made known”.⁷ This is surprising, since he has a lengthy discussion on the origin of this word in which he connects it with “the fact that the Delphic oracle gave ambiguous advice using images and riddles, and that such advice required interpretation.”⁸ With his reference to the Delphic oracle, he seems to equate the meaning of the Greek word with the word sign [or perhaps in more modern language the word symbol]. He also references passages of the New Testament where the word “indicate” is appropriate (Acts 11:28, John 12:33, 18:32, 21:19).

Nor does he stop there. Even more surprisingly, he makes it clear that “...in Rev. 1:1, σημαίνει cannot mean ‘to indicate clearly.’ By using the term σημαίνει, the author expresses the difficulty in understanding the revelation narrated in the text that follows, and perhaps even emphasizes the necessity of informed interpretation.”⁹

Other translators have suggested similar meanings for this word. W. E. Vine mentions Rev. 1:1 in particular, “where perhaps the suggestion is that of expressing by signs.”¹⁰ Rotherham translates the entire phrase as “he showed them by signs,”¹¹ and many translations such as the NASB (margin) or the KJV translate the word as “signified.”

This word has a purpose for appearing in the very first verse of the book. We are to understand from the start that the language of the book is symbolic. A literal interpretation of the imagery of the book will do violence to its meaning.

This is an appropriate place to prompt the reader to review *Appendix B – Bible Symbolology* before and/or while studying Revelation. The explanation for the symbols used in Revelation will not always be explained within the body of this commentary. Also helpful in understanding the language and symbols of Revelation are *Appendix C – Special Note on “Heaven” in the Book of Revelation*, *Appendix D – Two Groups in Revelation Compared*, and especially *Appendix E – The Tabernacle and the Temple in the Book of Revelation*.

⁷ Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (p. 6). Dallas: Word Books.

⁸ Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (p. 15). Dallas: Word Books.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under “signify”, 1.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company.

¹¹ J.B. Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*.

Verses 1-3

These verses give us some basic particulars about the book:

- We are told that the book is about things that would begin quickly. It is not a book of events that are confined exclusively to the end of the age and the time when Jesus returns. The book represents a long and gradual fulfillment.
- The contents of the book are about “the visions he saw” [Aune]. That is, John did not see or imagine them in his mind, but the visions are something he “witnessed” in some way that is not explained to us in detail.
- That the contents of the book are to be a blessing to all who read and “hear” [understand] and “heed” [practice and obey] the words of the prophecy. In other words, the prophecy is not for sensationalism or merely to satisfy curiosity. It is meant to be a positive experience for those who take it seriously. They will be “blessed” or made better as a result.

Another reader prompt is appropriate here. Many people are frightened of the Book of Revelation and cannot see a blessing in it in any manner. Those who feel this way are encouraged to read *Appendix A – Revelation for Everyone (An Introduction for the Faint of Heart)* before proceeding any further.

Verses 4-8 (20)

John begins his own introduction to the book in a similar manner to most letters of the New Testament. “John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you, and peace from Him who is and who was and who is to come...” He follows that with a list of the things that are important to him and praiseworthy, and concludes in verse eight with the authority of the author of the book. First let’s consider the various parts of verses 4-6 individually, although not precisely in the order given:

- ❖ The book is written to seven churches and with grace and peace “...from the seven spirits...” This is an appropriate place to consider who are the seven churches and seven spirits.

There is sufficient evidence for the existence of at least most of these churches in John’s day, and it is reasonable to assume he sent this book to seven churches in the literal sense of the word.

However, the internal evidence from Revelation suggests that it covers a passage of time beginning from a “time [that] is near” (1:3) and extending to

the time of Christ's return (11:15, 19:11-21, etc.) the end of the Christian or Gospel Age (14:14-16, cf. Matt. 13:39), the completion of the church in heaven (19:7-9), the fall of the institutions of this world (chapters 16-18), and the Kingdom of God (chapters 20-22).

Since this book is clearly written for the church and covers events throughout the entire age, it suggests that the seven churches stand symbolically for the entire church. Built upon many centuries of past and present interpretation, it is common (but not universal) to see the seven churches as symbolic of seven periods of time beginning with the time of the apostles and stretching out to Christ's return.

Various aspects of these seven churches seem to confirm this point:

(1) The seven churches are represented by seven candlesticks (1:20). As the tabernacle and its furniture are frequently found in the descriptions of Revelation (see *Appendix D – The Tabernacle and the Temple in the Book of Revelation*), it is unlikely that the candlesticks of the Tabernacle and Temple are only intended to represent seven congregations in Asia. They must reasonably stand for the church as a whole.

(2) There are seven spirits eventually sent forth into the earth (5:6). The holy spirit is thus sent forth seven times with a message to each of the seven periods in the history of the church. Since the spirit of God itself is indivisible, the seven spirits must represent seven messages of the spirit sent throughout the earth and not just to seven churches in Asia.

(3) As we shall see in chapters two and three, the message to each of the seven churches fits perfectly with successive time periods beginning with the first church (Ephesus) representing the time of the apostles and ending with the seventh church (Laodicea) at the time of Christ's return. It just works.

- ❖ “...*Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead...*” The emphasis on these particular qualities of Jesus is true, but they might be unusual as an introduction unless found introducing the Book of Revelation. Jesus as the faithful witness serves as an encouragement to the faithful witnesses throughout the age and a contrast to the pretensions and hypocrisy of the institutional church. The firstborn from the dead serves as a promise to those who are faithful in their witness to the gospel and Christ-like character.

- ❖ *“...Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood...”* Throughout all the events of Revelation, we are to remember that Jesus loves us to the point of dying for us.
- ❖ [Jesus] *“...the ruler of the kings of the earth”* is followed by the promise to the church to be *“...kings and priests...”* of God. The language in verse six is variously rendered as the more literal translation, “He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to his God and Father” (cf. Ex. 19:6), or the more idiomatic expression, “He has made us kings and priests to his God and Father”.

At issue is whether it is a kingdom in which everyone is a king, or it is a kingdom in which the kings are also priests. The first interpretation seems difficult in light of 5:10 *“...and made them for our God a kingdom and priests, and they will reign on the earth.”* It seems clear from this verse and others that saints must be reigning over someone (e.g. 20:7-10).

So the likely intent of the verse is the same as Peter’s description of a “royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9) following the Septuagint translation of Ex. 19:6.

The description of the church as “kings and priests” also likely extends from the preceding description of Jesus as “ruler of the kings of the earth” and who “released us from our sins by His blood.” Priests are intermediaries between God and man, and Jesus is gracious enough to invite his people to share with him in the work of restoring the rest of mankind (20:4-6) through his own precious blood in the kingdom.

Now let’s consider the final two verses (1:7-8) of this section one verse at a time:

Verse 7 is a promise and not a warning. Christ will return and everyone will mourn for Him. This is a promise to the church in the present that the world will not always be as it is now. Yet despite the short length of this verse, it requires a great deal of explanation.

“Behold He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him...”

Compare this verse to Matt. 24:30 –

“And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky [lit. in heaven], and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on [or in per many transl.] the clouds of the sky [lit. heaven] with power and great glory.”

While tempting at first glance to view the verse above in Matthew as a literal statement of physical eyesight, there are several problems with this.

(1) In the passage in Matthew the disciples ask for a sign (Matt. 24:3) to know when Jesus would be present (Gr. παρουσία or parousia). Jesus answers their request for a sign in Matt. 24:30. Yet why is a sign needed if the whole world will literally see Jesus with their eyes? Why doesn't Jesus just say "and everyone will see me"? The need for a sign is at odds with the opinion that the description in Matthew is of a visible return will be literally seen by everyone in the world.

(2) The idea that he will appear in heaven is also problematic, where the "sign" appears and also where the clouds occur. Observe the verse just preceding Matthew 24:30, which reads, "the powers of the heavens will be shaken." This does not seem like an expression that should be interpreted literally. How do the literal heavens have "powers"? How are they "shaken"? It's true that reference is made to events in the sun, moon, and stars in Matthew 24:29. Yet assuming that the reference to these celestial bodies requires a literal interpretation of "the heavens" is equally questionable, since other prophetic passages use heaven or heavens and the sun, moon, and stars as obvious symbolisms.¹²

(3) Finally, what of the expression of Jesus "coming in the clouds of heaven"? Yet any evangelical preterist would interpret this expression regarding the clouds of heaven as symbolic without a second thought. A preterist would reference Is. 19:1 – "The burden concerning Egypt, behold the Lord is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them." This is a description of historical judgment on the nation of Egypt. Evangelical preterist author Kenneth Gentry describes it this way – "Obviously God does not literally and visibly ride down on a cloud against Egypt."¹³ Other passages of scripture also use the same kind of apocalyptic metaphor that we find in Matthew chapter 24.¹⁴

¹² See for example Revelation 12:1-4 which states that "a great sign appeared in heaven" and then speaks of "a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars" and also "another sign [that] appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns... and his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth." Few people would be likely to suggest a literal meaning to heaven or to the sun, moon, and stars (or the woman and the dragon with seven heads for that matter) in these verses of prophecy. See also Eph. 6:12, Daniel 8:9-10. Will the stars literally fall "to the earth" (Rev. 6:12) when even our own small star (the "sun") is 1,300,000 times the size of the earth?

¹³ Gentry, K. L. Jr. (1998). *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*. p. 47. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan.

¹⁴ That the scriptures use clouds – particularly storm clouds – as a symbol for trouble is given in verses such as Jer. 4:13 and Is. 19:1. Other examples of passages that use clouds as apocalyptic metaphor are Ps. 18:7-15, Ps. 97:1-6, Is. 30:27-33, 34:1-10, Joel 2:1-2, and Micah 1:3-4. In passages like Is. 13:13 and Luke 21:26-27, clouds are associated with the shaking of the heavens... specifically in the

Returning to the verse in Revelation under discussion – Rev. 1:7 – this verse also describes Jesus coming with clouds of judgment and speaks of the same universal response to this judgment, when “all the tribes of the will earth mourn over Him...”

This passage adds the description “even those who pierced him” to the description. Like other parts of the verse here and in the passage from Matthew 24:29-30, the prophetic language is picked up from the Old Testament. There we read in Zech. 12:10 that, “I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.” In this passage the spirit is poured out on the Jewish people so that they will look upon Jesus whom they pierced. This “looking” upon Jesus in Zechariah is not the result of a visible event in the sky, but in the passage just cited it comes about through an outpouring of the spirit of God that results in their final understanding of the identity of their Messiah.

Another factor that complicates any literal interpretation of this verse in Revelation is the Greek word *horao* (Gr. *oraw*), which is translated “see” in this verse. Here it is a future tense of *horao* (in Rev. 1:7 the Greek word is *oyetai* or “will see”), but it means the same thing – to *stare* at, i.e. (by impl.) to *discern* clearly (physically or mentally); by extension to *attend* to, etc. per Strong’s Concordance #3708. Elsewhere, various translations define the word as see, perceive, take heed, discern, etc.¹⁵ Perhaps this use of a particular word that means “to discern” is another indication that *physical sight* is not the intent of this passage.

Like the passage in Matthew 24:30, this passage is clearly drawn from apocalyptic metaphor. Therefore this verse is simply not definitive enough by itself to establish the intended description as a literal appearance of a physical spectacle of Jesus in the sky.

Verse 8 is another complicated verse. (Take courage, the rest of the chapter including its symbolism gets much easier after this verse.)

Luke passage as the “powers of the heavens”. Again, this does not appear to be a reference to the literal sky, and also those things associated with it like clouds would certainly be symbolic in that context.

¹⁵ *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 1976 ed. (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan) gives an extensive list of suggested translations of the various forms of this word, as follows: *to see, behold*, Matt. 2:2, et al freq.; *to look*, Jo. 19:37; *to visit*, Jo. 16:22; Heb. 13:23; *to mark, observe*, Acts 8:23; Jas. 3:24; *to be admitted to witness*, Lk. 17:22; Jo. 3:36; Col. 2:18; with *θεου*, *to be admitted into the more immediate presence of God*, Matt. 5:8; Heb. 12:14; *to attain to a true knowledge of God*, 3 Jo. 11; *to see to a thing*, Matt. 27:4; Acts 18:15; *οπα*, *see, take care*, Matt. 8:4, Heb. 8:5, et al; pass. *to appear*, Lk 1:11; Acts 2:3, et al; *to reveal one’s self*, Acts 26:16; *to present one’s self*, Acts 7:26.

The difficulty here is in sorting out who is speaking. The problem is that the earliest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament (called uncials – they were all written capitals letters) did not have much in the way of punctuation. The addition of punctuation to Greek New Testaments came much later. So consider two different renderings of verse 8:

(1) *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

- or -

(2) *“I [Jesus] am the Alpha and the Omega says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

In the first instance above it means that God is speaking the verse and describing himself. In the second instance above Jesus speaks the entire verse, and the Alpha and Omega is a descriptive title of Jesus that God gives to him.

The most difficult problem with the first rendering above is that it is difficult to find anywhere else in Revelation where God speaks directly, except for a strong possibly in a very similar passage in 21:5-8 (which will not be dealt with at this point). Revelation is given to Jesus in the first verse of the book, and throughout the book he either speaks directly or through the angel. That it is Jesus speaking and not God the Father in verse 8 is further emphasized in 1:4-5 – “Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and was and is to come... and from Jesus Christ...” where Jesus is distinguished from the Almighty. This same language occurs in verse 8 – “who is and was and is to come, the Almighty.”

Regardless of Christological arguments, it seems clear that in verses 4-5 Jesus is being distinguished from God the Father, and also that Jesus is the only person speaking in 1:8.

An additional point of interest is the connection of this verse with part of Zechariah 12:10 – “...they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him...” The imagery of piercing and mourning for him in Rev. 1:7 “...even those who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him...” is drawn from the verse in Zechariah.

While Rev. 1:7 is undoubtedly connected to Zech. 12:10, apparently so is the following verse. Following the word “Me [whom they have pierced]” in the verse from Zechariah are the Hebrew letters “aleph” and “tay” (a variant of tau). These

letters are typically left untranslated because they are there to give direction to the construction of the sentence.

Yet the point we wish to make is that these letters in Zech. 12:10 are the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet in the same way the Alpha and Omega in Rev. 1:8 are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. In the Syriac manuscript(s)¹⁶ that reflect the native Aramaic language of Jesus and the Apostles and continued to be spoken in the Syriac Church, Lamsa notes that in 1:8 they continued to use “Aleph-Tau” rather than Alpha and Omega... apparently with a better local grasp of the intended subtlety of the language.

So why these two Hebrew letters? One obvious reason is that they are the first and last letter of the alphabet, emphasizing in letter format that Jesus is the beginning and end of everything. Still, there is a second reason for connecting these two letters with Jesus. The first letter aleph (or alef) means a calf or young bull, a picture of Jesus in the Old Testament tabernacle and temple sacrifices. The last letter tau (or tav) means a mark or sign and in Biblical times was written in the form of a cross like the modern “t” representing the sacrifice of Jesus in the New Testament. Aleph and Tau... the bullock and the cross.

One final note related to this verse – if you are using the KJV, note that the words in Rev. 1:11 “...I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, and...” are not found in any of the oldest manuscripts, and therefore are not included in any of the more modern translations of scripture (cf. the NIV and NASB for examples of this).

Verses 9-16

The remaining verses of the chapter introduce us to John’s visions on the Isle of Patmos and to Jesus and the seven churches.

In the first couple verses of this section, John describes the reason for his own personal imprisonment on Patmos in the common language of the Book of Revelation “...because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.” In this way he identifies with those who would read the descriptions of the church’s experiences contained in this book. He also introduces himself as “I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom...” He uses his

¹⁶ Lamsa, George. (1940). *The New Testament According to the Eastern Text.*

experience as a point of fellowship and communion with the recipients of the book then and throughout the centuries that would follow.

As all details seem important in Revelation, no matter how small they may be, it is worth noting that the voice (like that of a trumpet, cf. also 4:1) that speaks to John (1:10) comes from behind (1:10 and 12). Trumpets are used throughout scripture to represent important announcements and warnings (as they also do in Revelation). The voice like a trumpet comes from “behind” John and he turns to see that is happening. This may suggest that the church “hears” and “sees” or understands the book better in retrospect. [And perhaps this suggests that even John himself in the book becomes representative of something else, symbolizing the last members of the church on earth (John 21:20-23) looking backwards in time.]

After first acknowledging the seven churches of Asia Minor to whom the book is addressed, John follows this with the description of Jesus that he sees in his visions. Let’s consider these symbols one by one:

- “I saw one like the son of man” (1:13) – A common term from both the Old and New Testament for the Messiah of Israel and the world as fulfilled in Jesus.
- “I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the middle of the lampstands...” (1:12) – The lampstands like the literal seven churches picture the church down through the age. Jesus stands among them showing his closeness throughout the age to the people that hear his voice and follow him.
- “...clothed in a robe reaching to the feet...” (1:13) – The robe is not given any description beyond its long length. Elsewhere Jesus is described as wearing a robe dipped in blood (19:13), so the significance of the robe may be what is added to its description in each instance. Here the length may be significant. Shoes and feet are related to dominion and inheritance,¹⁷ and the robe itself may represent righteousness and authority as robes do elsewhere. Taken together it may illustrate the righteous authority of Jesus to govern.
- “...and girded across his chest with a golden sash.” (1:13) – The word for girded (Gr. περιζωννυμι or perizonnumi) means to fasten garments with a girdle or belt [or sash in this case]. The meaning of being “girded” is the

¹⁷ See *Appendix B – Bible Symbolism in Prophecy* for examples.

tying up of loose garments in order to wait on a table (cf. Luke 17:8). It is used by Jesus of faithful service in Luke 12:37, where Jesus affirms that he is still the willing servant of his people – his friends and brethren – just as much as he was when he washed the disciples feet. It is the same message of servanthood here in Revelation. However, the sash that he girds himself with is golden now representing his divine nature and position.

- “His head and His hair were white like wool, like snow...” (1:14) – When a Jew took the Nazarite vow, they were not allowed to cut their hair (Num. 6:5).¹⁸ So hair is a symbol of consecration to God. Hair that is white like wool shows purity as in Isaiah 1:18 where the same language appears – “...though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be [white] like wool.” Here in Revelation the language suggests the forgiveness and righteousness that comes to the church through Jesus and his atoning sacrifice.
- “...and His eyes were like a flame of fire.” (1:14) – Eyes represent wisdom and insight, and fire (among other similar things) represents judgment. Putting these together shows us that Jesus is a wise and righteous judge (and not arbitrary and capricious).
- “His feet were like burnished bronze,¹⁹ when it has been made to glow in a furnace...” (1:15) – The process of refining metal is used in scripture as an illustration of the trials that test and develop character and separate out the dross (Mal. 3:2-3, Dan. 12:10, 1 Pet. 1:7, Rev. 3:18). As noted previously, feet represent dominion and authority and inheritance, and here the connection of feet to this refining process tells us that even in our most difficult trials, Jesus is still in control of them for our benefit.²⁰
- “...and His voice was like the sound of many waters.” (1:15) – Earlier we are told that the voice John heard was “like a trumpet” and now we are given another characteristic of how Jesus speaks. Jesus uses the languages

¹⁸ Samson took a Nazarite vow, which is why God dealt so severely with him when He cut his hair and broke his vow.

¹⁹ There is some difficulty in the translation of the compound word for “burnished bronze” which is all one word in the Greek text and never occurs anywhere else in Greek lit. Many translators favor bronze or brass (an alloy of copper and zinc) per Aune (Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (p. 96). Dallas: Word Books.), although he notes that the first part of the word is applied not only to brass and to bronze (most frequently) but also to copper. Strong’s Concordance (#5474 – χαλκολιβανον) defines the word as “burnished copper”.

²⁰ Why bronze is the metal used here instead of the gold and silver connected with refining elsewhere (Mal. 3:2-3, 1 Pet. 1:7, 1 Cor. 3:10-15, Rev. 3:18) is unclear. One possible suggestion is to note that in the tabernacle and temple the metals farthest out from the inner sanctuary are the least valuable (copper and bronze) progressing to silver and then gold. So the use of bronze here might suggest the process of refining of character on earth with gold and silver the end result. Another possibility could be that the bronze shows the process will continue into the Kingdom of God on earth and also includes all of mankind (Matt. 25:31-46) represented in the less precious type of metal (cf. Num. 21:9 with John 3:14 regarding the translation and meaning of copper and/or brass or bronze).

of all the various people of the earth (17:15) to speak to his people (5:9, 7:9).

- “In His right hand He held seven stars...” (1:16) – The seven stars are the messengers to the seven churches (1:20) held in the right (or favored) hand. The messages that Jesus is sending are of particular importance to him, and he will see to it that these special messengers and their messages reach their intended destination – the faithful people of God.
- “...and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword...” (1:16) – Building on the previous descriptions of how Jesus speaks to the people of God, the description now narrows down to the Bible. The Bible is the two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12) of the Old and New Testaments. These two parts to the Bible are also described as two olive trees, the two anointed ones, the two witnesses, two lampstands, and the two wings of the great eagle (Zech. 4:3, 11-14, Rev. 11:3-4, 12:14). A sword coming from the mouth seems like an awkward visual until we realize the meaning of this imagery.
- “...and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.” (1:16) – The sun is a picture of the gospel (see notes on Rev. 12:1) as opposed to the moon that pictures the Jewish laws and ceremonies. Jesus is the center of the gospel message or the sun “shining in its strength.” The face more than another part of the body reveals the character of a person, and the character of Jesus is represented in his life and his sacrificial death.

This description of the character of Jesus reveals so many beautiful things about our Lord. There is certainly nothing dry and intellectual about this passage of Revelation.

Verses 17-20

Now Jesus begins speaking again. His first words are words of comfort “...do not be afraid...” He then adds more description of himself, this time in the form of titles as:

- the first and the last,
- the living one, and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore,
- and I have the keys of death and hades (the grave).

The context (1:17-18) suggests that by listing these titles, Jesus is giving John reasons why we shouldn't fear. John was not in the hands of a terrifying potentate without mercy (cf. Heb. 4:16), but instead he was seeing a vision of the very one who would save him from death.

And once again showing that Revelation would describe a considerable span of time, John is told (1:19) to write about "the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things." He then concludes this chapter and prepares for the following chapters with definitions of the seven star and candlesticks (1:20).

Brief Overview of the Seven Churches, Seals, and Trumpets of Revelation

There is debate over when and in what order the seven churches, seven seals, and seven trumpets take place. Much of the discussion results from different views of the Book of Revelation. If someone with a preterist viewpoint considers these sets of seven, then all of them must take place by the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. If someone with a futurist view of Revelation considers these sets of seven, then all of them take place in the future.²¹

However, perhaps it is more reasonable to view the seven churches, seals, and trumpets as describing the same time periods. If so, it would look like this:

- (1) First Church at Ephesus, First Seal, First Trumpet – the period from Pentecost (33 AD) to the fall of Jerusalem and then the end of the Jewish War (73 AD).
- (2) Second Church at Smyrna, Second Seal, Second Trumpet – the period of persecution under the Roman Empire from the breakup of the Jerusalem church and end of the Jewish “tribulation” (73 AD) until the persecution by Rome is ended with the Edict of Milan (313 AD).

...and so on through all seven churches, seals, and trumpets.

The evidence for parallel/simultaneous fulfillment of each church, seal, and trumpet together (as illustrated above) will become evident as these sets of seven are considered in detail. In fact it becomes not just evident, but seemingly unavoidable as the timeline for each set is identified historically.

Additional supporting evidence can be found in the chart that immediately follows. The chart illustrates a numerical connection between the churches, seals, and trumpets. This relationship also suggests a simultaneous fulfillment for each of the churches, seals, and trumpets in the same order in which they occur.

²¹ Many – perhaps most – futurist interpreters of Revelation follow a “telescoping” view of the sevens of Revelation. While the seven churches may be literal only or may occupy seven periods throughout the Gospel or Christian Age, the rest of the sevens of Revelation follow progressively smaller timeframes. In plainer language, the seven last plagues all occur during/following the seventh trumpet, and the seven trumpets all occur during/following the opening of the seventh seal. This view is popular, despite the fact that there is no direct evidence other than the hypothesis that every verse of Revelation should be read as if in chronological order. While Revelation undoubtedly unfolds in a general chronological order, to force every single verse into that mold creates various problems in sequencing verses, subjects, and chapters.

The Four-Three Split in the Sevens of Prophecy (Chart)

SEVENS	FIRST FOUR	LAST THREE
(1) <u>Revelation Churches</u> (Rev. chapters 2 and 3)		Coming, coming quickly, at the door (Rev. 3)
(2) <u>Revelation Seals</u> (Rev. chapter 6)	Four Horsemen (Rev. 6)	
(3) <u>Revelation Trumpets</u> (Rev. chapters 8-11)	Four initial Trumpets each reference “one third”	“Woe” Trumpets define the last three Trumpets
(3) <u>Major Prophets</u> per the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh)	Four Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings)	Three Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel)
(5) <u>Seven Parables of Matthew 13</u>	Four Public Parables (sower, tares, mustard, leaven)	Three Private Parables (treasure, pearl, dragnet)

(1) Revelation Churches – The last three churches are united by the increasing nearness of the Second Advent (Revelation 3:3, 11, 20).²² Compare Revelation 2:24-25.

(2) Revelation Seals – The first four seals are united by four horses/horsemen.

(3) Revelation Trumpets – The first four trumpets are united by similar phrasing and length and the use of “one third” in each of these four trumpets. The last three trumpets are united by their description as “woe trumpets” (Revelation 8:13, 9:1 and 12-13, 11:14-15).

(4) Major Prophets – In the Tanakh or Jewish Bible (i.e., Old Testament) the prophetic books are divided into seven major prophets and a book of twelve minor prophets. The seven major prophets are then divided into four former prophets and three latter prophets. The theme of each prophetic book parallels the description of one of the seven churches in the same order they occur in the Bible.

(5) Seven Parables of Matthew 13 – These parables also describe the Gospel or Christian Age in seven divisions. The first four parables were given in public and the last three parables were given in private to the disciples.

Items 4 and 5 will be explained more fully in discussion following the seven churches.

²² The Greek word translated “come” earlier in Rev. 2:5 and 2:16 is different and literally means, “to come upon or against”.

Revelation Chapters Two and Three ~ the Seven Churches

Significance of the Seven Churches

There are several viewpoints on whether the seven churches of Revelation represent anything additional to the seven literal churches to which they are written. For example, some think of the seven churches as representing seven types of Christian experiences and seven struggles within the larger church as a whole. Others view the seven churches as dividing the Christian Age into seven historical periods from the early church to the final great tribulation.²³

It is this last interpretation of the seven churches as seven historical intervals that will be the focus of the following commentary. So it is appropriate to ask what evidence would suggest that the seven churches represent historical periods.

The Seven Churches Represent the Entire Church

There are a number of reasons for thinking the seven churches symbolize something greater than the congregations to which they are written:

- ❖ The book of Revelation is written to seven churches. If the Book of Revelation is intended for all of God's people as most believe (cf. 1:1-3), then the seven churches stand in place of – that is represent – all of the church.
- ❖ As previously discussed, the Book of Revelation is a book of symbols, and so it stands to reason that the seven churches represent more than just themselves.
- ❖ Most of the seven churches addressed in Revelation were small and insignificant congregations even in the early church. Why send a book with so much significance to just these seven literal congregations?
- ❖ The seven churches are represented by seven golden candlesticks (Rev. 1:20). This seems like a clear allusion to the seven branches of the

²³ Note that this third view is not entirely incompatible with viewing the seven churches as representing seven types of experiences within the church as a whole. Within each of the seven historical periods are experiences especially common to that particular time.

candelabra of the tabernacle and temple.²⁴ This illustration is also used elsewhere in prophecy including (most notably) Zech. 4:1-3, 10. It seems unlikely that the use of the seven candles would be used as a repeated picture throughout the history of Israel and through prophecy if they only represent seven literal congregations in Asia Minor.

- ❖ The seven candlesticks each have a lamp or flame. These “seven lamps of fire” are burning before the throne and represent “the seven spirits of God” (4:5) or seven messages illuminated through the seven churches. Again, it seems that these messages must represent more than just the light from the seven literal congregations of Asia Minor (cf. Mark 4:21-23).

More revealingly these “seven spirits of God” are sent into *all of the earth* and not just to the seven literal congregations in a corner of Asia Minor (5:6). Clearly the messages to the seven churches are the spirit of God sent to the greater church throughout the age.

Finally, the messages themselves give evidence of a much larger context than the Apostle John’s time and place. Some parts of these messages also seem out of place if limited to the just seven literal congregations of Asia Minor. This becomes evident when the messages are compared in detail to history. It just works.

Objections to the Historical View Considered

Of course, there are also objections to seeing the seven churches as seven periods of time. The following challenges and responses are the most common objections to the symbolic historical view of the seven churches and are reproduced directly from arguments by others.

[There is significant disagreement between different proponents of the view concerning which periods of history are represented, both their characteristics and dates. In this, the historical-prophetic scheme suffers from the same problems as the Historicist Interpretation of Revelation.](#)

Actually, this is not the case. If we’re talking about specific dates, there are some relatively minor differences, but even secular historians are divided over exactly when a period specifically ends or begins. However, taken from the standpoint of a general overview of the seven churches, the views of all proponents are nearly universal, as follows:

²⁴ Various aspects of the tabernacle and the temple are referred to over 20 times in the book of Revelation and in nearly every chapter. For more discussion on this see *Appendix E – The Tabernacle and the Temple in the Book of Revelation*.

Church 1 (Ephesus) – the period of the apostles.
Church 2 (Smyrna) – period of persecution under the Roman Empire.
Church 3 (Pergamum) – the period of the growth of ecclesiasticism.
Church 4 (Thyatira) – the medieval period of the church.
Church 5 (Sardis) – the early Reformation period.
Church 6 (Philadelphia) – the latter Reformation/Evangelistic period.
Church 7 (Laodicea) – the present day (material wealth & spiritual poverty).

Church history is far more complex than can be reflected by seven periods sharing global characteristics.

This is a sort of “straw man” response. Certainly history is far more complex than can be completely captured briefly in seven periods! Yet historians universally acknowledge periods of history with specific and varied characteristics.²⁵ There is nothing objectionable to the idea that unique historical characteristics and religious movements could highlight seven periods of history.

The correlation made between the letters and church history is entirely westernized and fails to take into account important movements and activities elsewhere in the world.

Yes, it is westernized, because – like it or not – Bible prophecies are westernized. They focus almost exclusively on the Middle East and Europe and related nations.²⁶ The people of China or Africa are important to God, but those regions of the world are (relatively) unimportant in prophecy.

If the churches truly are representative of the course of church history, this fact must have been concealed from the early church or it would have destroyed the concept of imminency [sic].

It seems almost simplistic to say that prophecy is best understood in hindsight. It can be understood in advance to a lesser degree, but at the very beginning of the Christian Age it would be unrealistic to believe that the early church would have a complete understanding of everything that would follow. No actual disagreement here.

²⁵ For example, most people would probably agree that there are at least *some* differences between today’s democratic governments and the past rule of kings and aristocracy at the political level.

²⁶ For example see Daniel chapters 2, 4, 7, and 11 or Ezek. chapters 36-39 or Rev. chapters 17-18.

The historical-prophetic interpretation seems to read more into the text than what is intended.

At this point we've reached the level of sheer opinion, and the earlier discussion explaining why the seven churches represent the church as a whole and as prophetic periods suggests that in fact we *are not* reading too much into the text.

In various periods of the church throughout history, the church did not see itself as represented by one specific church in Revelation. So the historical interpretation would have no value to the people living at the time.

Partly true. However, as most that object to the historicist view of the seven churches often point out, the principles contained within the messages are all true at all times for all of the church.

More importantly, as time progresses the church becomes more aware of where they are on the stream of time. Perhaps it wasn't as important in earlier periods, as it would be later. At this point a brief history of interpretation might be in order.

From the earliest periods of the church, it was common for some to think of the seven churches as representative of the whole church everywhere and throughout time. Eventually, expositors began to describe the church as seven periods in the history of the church with the last period ending with the second advent:

- Bede in the 8th century was one of the earliest to express this opinion.
- By the 12th and 13th centuries, Joachim of Flora and Peter John Olivi (Pierre de Jean Olivi) expressed the opinion that they were living in the period of the 5th church or Sardis. (It is typically understood today that they were actually living in sometime in the 4th church or Thyatira... so at least close.)
- The belief that the seven churches represented seven historical periods became increasing popular, and by the 15th to 17th centuries a number of Protestant expositors interpreted the seven churches in this manner.
- In the 17th century prophetic scholars in the Pietist movement began to correctly interpret their period of the church as the sixth or Philadelphia period. Prophetic interpretation had unfolded through time until it could be located in history and understood.
- During that same period William Penn came to the same conclusion. Not only did he understand that he lived in the sixth or Philadelphia period, but he named a city Philadelphia partly in honor of his prophetic understanding.
- By the 18th and 19th centuries it became very common and popular to interpret the seven churches of Revelation as seven periods, and by the turn

of the 20th century, many commentators on Revelation pinpointed the last church or Laodicea as the time period in which they – and we – now live.

As to whether the seven churches actually form a legitimate historical portrait of seven periods of the church, this will be the subject of the church-by-church study that follows.

Yet whether the churches represent seven literal churches, or the experiences during seven periods of time, or simply seven general issues or experiences that confront the church, the words of Steve Camp's song "Living in Laodicea" still seem appropriate for our day of material wealth and spiritual poverty, as follows...

Living in Laodicea

Oh Lord, take Your plow to my fallowed ground
Let Your blade dig down to the soil of my soul
For I've become dry and dusty, Lord I know there must be
Richer earth lying below

For I've been living in Laodicea
And the fire that once burned bright, I've let it grow dim
And the very Word I swore that I would die for all has been forgotten
As the world's become my friend

We have turned from Your Law to try to find a better way
Each man does today what is right in his own eyes
We will pay the price for our sinning
We can never know true living, we've exchanged His truth for lies

For I've been living in Laodicea
And the fire that once burned bright, I've let it grow dim
And the very Word I swore that I would die for all has been forgotten
As the world's become my friend

It is no small of a thing that He's done for you
By shutting the gate to [death] upon the cross
We were sentenced once but now we are pardoned
And He chooses to use us though we fall

So while we're living in Laodicea
Keep the fire burning bright, don't let it grow dim
For the very Word we swore that we would die for, it must not be forgotten
Fear the world become a friend
For the very Word we swore that we would die for, it must not be forgotten
Fear the world become a friend

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Structure of the Messages to the Seven Churches

The message to each church follows the same pattern or structure in all seven of them, as follows:

- 1) Each church begins with a descriptive title of Jesus.
- 2) Next there is a message to each church that always begins with the words “I know...”
- 3) The description of the specific experience of each respective church follows.
- 4) This is followed by a particular promise to that church and an admonition to “hear what the spirit says to the churches.”

The final item (4) in the sequence list above is variable, as follows:

- Church 1 – First the admonition to hear and second the promise to that church.
- Church 2 – First a promise, then the admonition to hear, then another promise to that church.
- Church 3 – First the admonition to hear and second the promise to that church.
- Church 4 – First a set of promises to that church and second the admonition to hear.
- Church 5 – First a set of promises to that church and second the admonition to hear.
- Church 6 – First a set of promises to that church and second the admonition to hear.
- Church 7 – First a promise to that church and second the admonition to hear.

The specific historical experiences for each church occurring in each message is always connected backwards to the title(s) that Jesus gives himself for each church and forward to the promise(s) given to that church. In other words the titles, messages, and promises are all related to the experience of that church.

The First Church of Revelation – Ephesus (2:1-7)

Assuming the churches are chronologically listed in the same order as the periods of history they represent – and there is every reason to think so based on the interpretations of the churches that follow – then the first church must represent the approximate time of the apostles beginning with Pentecost.

(1) The Title of Jesus – “The One who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the One who walks among²⁷ the seven golden lampstands...”

Jesus immediately points to his presence with the church from beginning to end of the Gospel Age. From the first church until the last he holds the seven stars in his “right hand” or position of favor, confirming one of his last promises to his disciples that “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20).

While the seven lampstands are clearly connected to the seven lamps of the lampstand(s) in the tabernacle and temple, there is a distinction in Revelation where the lamps stand individually rather than united into one base. This is done partly to emphasize the individual and sequential history of each church, but there is a second reason, also.

In Revelation 2:1 when we see the Lord walking among the seven lampstands representing the seven churches, it suggests a type of covenantal arrangement seen in many of the animal sacrifices from the time of Abraham onward.

Historically there were various types of sacrifices within and outside of the services of the tabernacle and temple, but only one type of sacrifice was used to seal a covenant. When sealing or confirming a covenant during the Old Testament period, the two parties of the covenant would pass through the pieces of the animal sacrifice. See for example:

- The original covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:5, 15-16 where God is the only party to pass through the parts of the animals (because this covenant is a promise by one party only, cf. Gal. 3:18, 20).
- Genesis 21:27 where the modernized English translation “make a covenant” should literally read, “cut a covenant”.

²⁷ NASB margin – “lit. *in the midst of*”.

- The institution of the Law Covenant where the large number of people involved made it impractical for all the people to pass through the parts of the sacrificed animals, and so the people were sprinkled with the blood instead (Hebrews 9:18-19). Yet when Jeremiah recounts the commitment of the nation of Israel to the Law Covenant, he speaks of the people of his day as if having passed through the pieces of the animal sacrifices (Jer. 34:18-20), but without an honest commitment to the covenant.

Here in Revelation, the Lord passing through the sacrificial church represents the sealing of the New Covenant, a covenant not sealed with animal sacrifices, but with the blood of Jesus and also with the blood of the church by his grace.²⁸

Of course, the image of the Lord walking among the churches can simultaneously be viewed on a very personal level, that He walks among us and with us always.

(2) The Description of the Church – “I know your...”

This church is commended for its efforts, as it should be, as the gospel gradually spread throughout the Roman Empire by their efforts. The name Ephesus itself means “first” or “desirable”. Both of these meanings are particularly appropriate for the church of the apostles.

This church is also commended for its discernment between true and false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13), and this is the first confirmation that these seven churches represent seven periods of history in chronological sequence. Only the first church would be challenged by false apostles and put to the test in this way. In the six churches that follow this one, there is no reference to discerning of false apostles.

Yet despite their perseverance, they apparently have lost sight of the most important thing of all... their “first love.” How ironic when the name of their church is “first” or “desirable”. It seems difficult to imagine how this could be, and yet toward the end of this period it seems the church is already fracturing (cf. 2 Thess. 2:7, 1 Jo. 2:19).

This church is called to “repent, and do the deeds you did at first” or their lampstand will be removed out of its place (2:5). This does not suggest that their light would be extinguished or that their candlestick/lampstand would be

²⁸ Heb. 9:16-17. Cf. Rev. 6:9 where the sacrificed lives of the church are located under the altar where the ashes of sacrificed animals in the tabernacle and temple altars would fall through the grating.

eradicated from among the others. Rather that it would be relocated from “out of its place” ... not in the sense of a different place in the listing of the seven churches, but perhaps alternatively in terms of physical location.

This possibility is suggested by the use of the word *kineo* (Gr. κινεω) rendered “remove” in the NASB, but more generally meaning, “to set in motion, move”.²⁹ The church is still centered on Jerusalem during this period (Acts 15:2). If the zeal and ardor of this church failed to reach Judea, and then flagged consequently and failed to move outward to the rest of the Roman world and beyond, then this church or “candlestick” would be forced to move “out of its place” in Jerusalem and Palestine and into the larger world following the destruction of the city and the end of the Jewish “harvest” period (John 4:35-38, Matt. 3:12, Luke 21:20-24). While Paul took the gospel into the Gentile world, many of the Jewish church that remained behind apparently lost their “first love” and slackened their efforts.

This gives us a probable timetable for this church, also, beginning with the launch of the church at Pentecost in 33 AD and ending first with the fall of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple in 69 AD and then finally with the end of the Jewish War at the fall of Masada in 73 AD. The result is a very specific period (33 – 73 AD) of 40 years of testing on the Jewish people (Luke 21:20-24). After this time Jerusalem and Israel would no longer be the center of the church and at the same time the apostles are either nearly or completely off the scene.

Meanwhile the first church of Revelation receives another commendation for their hatred of the “Nicolaitans”. Today we are unsure if this represents a real or a figurative group, but there is no particular history of a group with this name. Most likely the significance derives from the meaning of their name which translates as “victory over the people” or perhaps more significantly as “conquering the laity”.³⁰ As such, the Nicolaitans represent the corrupting division between clergy (bishops) and laity that would prove to be such a problem for the third church of Revelation (2:15). While there are already beginning to be problems in this first period of the church, the leadership was still relatively true to their calling as servants of the church rather than as lords over it (1 Pet. 5:1-5).

²⁹ Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under “move”, 1.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company.

³⁰ Many – though not all – commentators view this name as a combination of the Greek words *nikos* (Gr. νικος) meaning “victory” (*Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 17th Zondervan printing 1976, p. 426) and *laos* (Gr. λαος) meaning “people” (*ibid*, p. 372) and from which we get our English word “laity”.

(3) The Promise to the Church – “To him who overcomes I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of God.”

As much as any other description of the first church of Revelation, this promise confirms the identification of Ephesus – first or desirable – with the initial historic period of the church’s history on earth.

The tree of life in the paradise of God must be referring to the tree of life in Eden (Gen. 2:9, 3:22). Yet, remembering that Revelation is a book of symbols, there is little reason to assume this is the same tree. This is confirmed in the closing chapter of Revelation where the “tree of life” in the New Jerusalem (22:14) compares with multiple “tree[s] of life” on each side of the river of life (22:2).

The church will no longer have need of a literal tree of life in the resurrection,³¹ so the tree of life in paradise must represent something else. It represents Jesus – nailed to a “tree” or cross – who becomes the “life giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45, John 3:16). It is through the blood of Christ that the church has access to life (22:14).

How appropriate this is for the first church composed largely of Jews and also Gentile proselytes of Judaism! Originally under the bondage of the Law Covenant, which led to death rather than life (Rom. 7:10-11), the church becomes freed through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus and are now “granted” access to the tree of life.³² How appropriate that the tree of life – in a literal sense a picture of their original hopes for an earthly kingdom and resurrection – is transformed into something much greater than they expected.

The promise to this church is a beautiful illustration of the church coming out from bondage to the Mosaic Law and into Christ. And later in Revelation the church as a whole is promised an opportunity by God’s grace to share in the kingdom reign (20:4) of giving life to others (22:17) as trees of life themselves (22:2, cf. Ps. 1:3).³³

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit
says to the churches.*

Rev. 2:7

³¹ Cf. John 4:14, etc.

³² Cf. John 6:54.

³³ The trees bear 12 kinds of fruit once a month for 12 months. This multiplies to 144 (12 fruits X 12 months). Cf. Rev. 14:1.

The Second Church of Revelation – Smyrna (2:8-11)

As a prelude to discussion of the second church, it's apparent that one of the defining characteristics of this period is the severe persecution of the church. The church had no power and little recourse other than martyrdom. Even by the time Christianity was legalized 280 years after Jesus, Christianity was a very small percentage of the population of the Roman Empire.

Even the name of this church corresponds to these severe experiences. Smyrna is derived from the word *myrrh*, a spice that is popular and fragrant when used as spice / perfume or burned as incense, but bitter tasting when mixed with wine. These attributes of myrrh portray the bitter experiences of this period that combined with the fragrant perfume of the faith, love, and devotion of this church.

(1) The Title of Jesus – “The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life...”

Jesus points to his own death and resurrection when referring to himself. His title is a particular comfort to the church to whom it is directed. The message and promises to this church that follow provide a similar feeling of comfort.

(2) The Description of the Church – “I know your...”

While the message to this church is the shortest of the seven, a great amount of information is packed into the brief description.

Though a suffering and persecuted church and poor by the standards of this world, this church is “rich” with a consecrated spiritual life (2:9). It is one of only two churches (the other being Philadelphia or the sixth church) whose message contains no criticism.

Contrast this description of the worldly poverty and trials and yet the spiritual riches of Smyrna with the message to the seventh church or Laodicea:

“Because you say, ‘I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,’ and do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked...” (Rev. 3:17)

Another identifier of this period is the reference to “those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (2:9). These are pretenders to faith that appear outwardly spiritual. There is little reason to think that literal Jews are

meant in this passage, who would not actually be Jews anyhow but only pretenders to that faith. Instead – remembering once again that we are in the symbolic book of Revelation – that the Jewish people represent *spiritual* Israel or the church. This is not an inventive interpretation, but rather an interpretation consistently used elsewhere in the New Testament³⁴ as well as in Revelation.³⁵

These who only claim to be spiritual Israel and are something else instead represent the growth of the “tares” in the second of the seven parables of Matthew chapter thirteen (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43). They look like “wheat” until the harvest when the wheat turns golden and the heads bow over from the grain. They are not of the church, however.³⁶ The first church of Ephesus left its “first love” by its close, and now the fruitage of this departure is becoming apparent.³⁷ This would continue to be a problem in later periods of the church (2:13, 24, 3:9).

There follows an encouragement and a warning (2:10).

The encouragement – “do not fear what you are about to suffer” – is connected to the promises that follow this warning. Jesus is the Lord of life and death and their faithfulness will not go unrewarded.

The warning is in two parts. The first part is testing and imprisonment. Actual prison would match the experiences of the church very well, but it is probably not the intended meaning. There is another connection with imprisonment in the preceding chapter (1:18) where we read that Jesus has “the keys of death and of hades [the grave].”³⁸

This description of imprisonment is followed by the warning of “10 days” of tribulation. Obviously not ten literal days, it represents ten years since it must

³⁴ Romans 2:28-29, 9:6-8, Galatians 6:16, Philippians 3:3. (Note: This is not the same concept as the “replacement theory” that all the promises to Israel now belong to the church. Instead it means that sometimes Israel *represents* the church, also.)

³⁵ Cf. Rev. 7:4-8 with Rev. 14:1-5. The second passage clearly refers to Christians who have the name of Jesus written on their foreheads despite the chapter seven reference to Israel. Other related examples from Revelation include the picture of the church as “the new *Jerusalem*” (21:2, cf. Gal. 4:24-26) and the *temple* in which the church members become “pillars” (Rev. 3:12).

³⁶ The false claimants to Christianity are seen in two distinct groups. The first are represented in sects like the Gnostics and Manicheans that claimed some or all of Christianity for themselves despite their radical divergence from the actual teachings of Jesus and the apostles. The second and increasingly dominant group is represented in the rise of the institutional church with its division between clergy and laity, its increasing allegiance to creeds and to the state over biblical authority, and its replacement of an inner spiritual life with outward forms of worship. It is this second group that is primarily represented by the “tares” of the parable in Matthew thirteen.

³⁷ As noted previously in the description of the first church: 2 Thess. 2:7, 1 Jo. 2:19.

³⁸ Some have suggested that a connection between prison/captivity and death is suggested elsewhere in scripture. These instances are not straightforward but of some interest. In Luke 4:18 the captivity spoken of would be appropriate to the prison house of death. Likewise the words of Jesus regarding Lazarus – “Unbind him, and let him go” (Jo. 12:44) – seem appropriate to a release from imprisonment. Finally, this may also be a part of the reason for Paul’s use of the word “captivity” in Eph. 4:8. Cf. Ps. 107:10.

follow the same use of “days” found elsewhere in Revelation and scripture at “a day for a year.”³⁹

From this detail the exact close of this period can be determined. These ten years represent the most severe period of persecution under the rule of the Roman Empire known as the Diocletian Persecution. In 303 AD this Roman emperor issued an edict⁴⁰ that rescinded all rights of Christians and required them to obey Roman [pagan] religious practices. This persecution continued for 10 years until the Edict of Milan⁴¹ in 313 AD brought a permanent end to the persecution of the church by the pagan empire.

Thus we have a distinct period of persecution defining the duration of the second church. The Smyrna church begins with the close of the first church in 73 AD and continues until the cessation of persecution in 313 AD. The final span of ten years of [extreme] tribulation that closes out this period is specifically noted in the description of the second church of Revelation.

This cannot be accidental. It defines a very specific event – Diocletian’s 10 years of persecution of the church – and places it exactly where it would be expected.

(3) The Promise to the Church – “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life... He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.”

This is the only church to which promises are given both before and after the admonition to “...hear what the spirit says...”. Perhaps this is due to the extreme nature of the church’s experience in this period of time. And of course, the assurances to this church – as in everything else connected to this church – relate to the promise of eternal life in return for faithfulness and self-sacrifice.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit
says to the churches.*

Rev. 2:11

³⁹ The rule of “a day for a year” applied to time prophecy is found in Ezekiel 4:1-6. (Also note that nearly every interpreter since the second century and including most present day commentators has defined the 70 weeks or 490 days of Daniel 9:24-27 as 490 years.) This understanding of time prophecy will be discussed in more detail in later chapters where the same principle occurs again.

⁴⁰ Known historically as Diocletian’s Edict.

⁴¹ Issued by Constantine and Licinius.

The Third Church of Revelation – Pergamon (2:12-17)

The third church begins with the time of Constantine and the Nicene Council. As Christianity gradually becomes the religion of the empire, the church makes many compromises to accommodate their new relationship with the state. It is the emperors that called councils and for all intents and purposes enforced their own chosen theology. The name itself – Pergamon or Pergamos (lat. Pergamum) – refers to an elevated place, particularly a citadel or acropolis.

(1) The Title of Jesus – “The One who has the sharp two-edged sword...”

The two-edged sword is the Bible (Heb. 4:12), and the fact that Jesus gives himself a title directly connected to the scriptures immediately tells us about the challenges this church faces. They rely on the sword of the scriptures in defense of their Christianity, while their opponents lean more and more on church doctrine and creeds and authoritarian decrees to buttress their positions.

(2) The Description of the Church – “I know where you dwell...”

There are several allusions in this chapter to various images from the Old Testament and from elsewhere in Revelation. The first two allusions are references to Satan:

“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is...”

“...My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.”

It should be obvious that the church does not literally dwell at Satan’s throne nor are they killed where Satan dwells. Yet God has not left us to guess at the meaning of these phrases. Instead He has given us a clue to the meaning in the message to the previous church in the reference to the “synagogue of Satan” (2:9). As noted by the apostles from the earliest days of the church, an alternate and corrupt Christianity (a “falling away” or “apostasy” 2 Thess. 2:3) was already in the incipient stages and would only increase with time. By the second church it is a recognizable entity (the synagogue of Satan) and by the third church it is becoming powerful and has a “throne” where the church “dwells”.

The faithful church is entangled in this process. Note how this is suggested in the related phraseology – *“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is...”* and *“...among you, where Satan dwells.”*

This aptly describes this period of the church when Christianity becomes (1) outwardly enmeshed with the state and (2) increasingly controlled by bishops and emperors. Even the name of this city – Pergamon, meaning a citadel or acropolis – is fitting for a period in which the church is being elevated to a position of power.

The two other examples in the message to this church from elsewhere in the scriptures (below) further illustrate this theme of the general rise of the church to power and in particular the growth of the power and prestige of the clergy.

- *“...you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel...”* This is an Old Testament reference to a prophet who was willing to sell his prophetic office for money.⁴² No particular “teaching” of Balaam is known other than his willingness to sell his gift for money. In this same way the leadership of the church in the Pergamon period began to sell themselves for money and political power. While not every bishop everywhere became so callous and indifferent to the spirit of the gospel, it began to represent the majority spirit of the church leadership at this time.
- *“... to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.”*⁴³ These descriptions of the environment of the third church are picked up and repeated nearly word for word in the very next period of the church (2:20). This suggests a continuing progression of the problems of the third church would only increase in magnitude in the fourth church. The first of these sins – eating things sacrificed to idols – suggests the accommodation to pagan forms and thought by the church.⁴⁴ The second of these sins – acts of immorality – suggests the growth of the illicit union of church and state (cf. Rev. 17:1-2).
- *“...you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”* The Nicolaitans have been introduced to us already in the first church (2:6). There they are rejected by the first church who tested their own leadership and recognized only those worthy of their confidence. By the

⁴² Numbers chapters 22-24.

⁴³ Some have suggested a connection between these actions and the “teaching of Balaam” although the OT references (Num. 24:14 / 31:15-16, 25:1-2) require some deductive reasoning and are uncertain in this matter.

⁴⁴ A small example of this can be seen in the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus, which is a ceremonial observance not actually commanded in the Bible. This observance – falling in the spring – essentially replaced the spring festival of the goddess Eostre or Ostara (Old English = Eastre) in many places. This is where the word “Easter” comes from with its associated rites of spring (colored eggs, Easter rabbits, etc.).

third church the leadership is beginning to serve for worldly gain and lord themselves over God's people (cf. 1 Pet. 5:2-3, Acts 20:29).

Of all the imagery connected to the Pergamon church, only one of them is positive, and that is the figure of "Antipas, my witness, my faithful one..." (2:13). The prefix "anti" in Greek has variable meaning in English with both "in place of" and "against" as translations. Here the language describing "Antipas" indicates faithfulness along with opposition to the corruption of the church, and suggests that the name means "against (anti) the father (pas)".

The significance is obvious when set within this period of church history. Patriarchs⁴⁵ increasingly dominated the church as the chief bishops. There were five major sees (ecclesiastical jurisdictions) each with its own patriarch located in Rome, Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, and Alexandria. Rome and Constantinople came to dominate this arrangement. Today the head of the Orthodox Church is still known by the title of patriarch and the head of the Roman Catholic Church is called the pope or father (Latin derived from the Greek pappas).

The faithful of this period stood against the growth of the anti-Christian authority of the clergy and the institution of the church.

Where do we look in this period to find the faithful people of God? They "*dwell[ed] where Satan's throne is*" and were "*...killed ...where Satan dwells.*" In other words we should not look for a group or movement considering itself separate from the larger institutional church. And again, this is in harmony with what we see in this period. The earliest centers of spirituality are commonly found remote from the centers of church power in monastery communities or remote regions where the corrupting influence of this period still rested lightly, but still within the larger institutional church. One particularly observable example of this distinction is the Celtic church. They retained a continuing form of a much more humble and apostolic spirituality in their homelands far from the direct influence of Rome and Constantinople.

As to when this period begins and ends, the beginning of this period is easy since it is the same as the terminus of the previous church in 313 AD. However, a closing date is much more subjective with several candidates possible.⁴⁶ The date of 800

⁴⁵ From *patria* or family (from *pater* or father) and *arkhes* or ruling (over).

⁴⁶ There is still a clear distinction between the third and fourth period of the church, but an exact date dividing them is a little more difficult to derive.

AD⁴⁷ (at the crowning of Charlemagne as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire) is tentatively selected as the approximate date.

(3) The Promise to the Church – “To him who overcomes, to him I will give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.”

The promises to this church have a quality common to all of them... they are all very personal:

- The manna that the children of Israel ate in the wilderness of Sinai sustained them through the desert conditions through which they traveled.⁴⁸ Likewise the people of God in this period of the church are sustained by the scriptures and by personal prayer outside the public theological distortions stealing into the church. The “hidden manna” of life and truth is unseen in the sense that God’s word is no longer the outward face of the institutional church from this point on.
- The “white stone” is a symbol of a very personal and close relationship. Frank Shallieu describes its early usage this way:

“...In ancient times the Greeks and the Romans had a custom of noting and perpetuating friendship by means of a white stone. The stone was divided into halves; and after each person inscribed his name on the flat surface, the parts of the stone were exchanged. The production of either half was sufficient to insure friendly aid even from the descendants of those who first divided the stone. A king would sometimes observe a similar custom by breaking a white stone into two parts, one of which he would retain. The second part of the stone would be given to a special ambassador; if returned to the king at any time, it would insure aid. Thus the divided stone became a token of perpetual friendship as well as a mark of identification.

Apparently, the text refers to this ancient custom. The white stone signifies a precious token of the Lord’s love, and the new name written in the stone suggests that the Bridegroom will give a personal name to each overcomer. A secret relationship will exist between the great King of Kings and each individual. In other words, the overcomers are

⁴⁷ ...or possibly 798 AD or 799 AD may work as a more precise date. These fine distinctions are not explored here.

⁴⁸ Likewise in the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle and later in Solomon’s Temple, the manna “hidden” inside did not spoil as did the manna in the wilderness of Sinai. Instead this manna was preserved inside the ark (cf. Ex 16:32-34) and represents eternal life for the church.

not to be recognized merely as a class... but each will have the personal favor and friendship of the Lord.”⁴⁹

- The “new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it” is the final mark of the personal relationship that Jesus shares with each member of this church (and all of the church throughout the world and the Christian or Gospel Age). How blessed to know that we are each loved and befriended individually and not just as one among many!

These promises make a profound contrast to the increasing power and might of the institutional church and its authoritarian structure that endeavored to force everyone into a common template. Those who resisted the worldly church for the self-sacrificing examples of Jesus and the apostles found a blessing in the close and personal walk with the Lord.

A poem has come down to us from the Celtic Christians during the Pergamon period of the church that illustrates the willingness of many to challenge the rise of ecclesiasticism and its failure to provide true spiritual guidance:

*To go to Rome
Is little profit, endless pain;
The Master that you seek in Rome,
You find at home, or seek in vain.*

The third church of Revelation was in the position of fighting a rearguard action against the encroachment of an institutional Christianity that was increasingly dominating the outward church and society of the time. This counterfeit of Christianity would reach the height of its power in the next church called Thyatira.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit
says to the churches.*

Rev. 2:17

⁴⁹ Shallieu, F. (1993). *The Keys of Revelation*. p. 51. Revelation Research Foundation: Hamburg, NJ. Cf. Worth who notes the practice, but cautions against minimal evidence (yet while offering no option more certain in surrounding pages). See Worth, R.H. Jr. (1999). *The Seven Cities of the Apocalypse and Greco-Asian Culture*. p 147. Paulist Press: Mahwah, NJ.

The Fourth Church of Revelation – Thyatira (2:18-29)

The record of the fourth church is the longest of them all. The fourth period also appears to be the longest... although those two subjects may or may not be related. This is the period of the medieval church. Despite the glamorous image sometimes given to this period in books and movies, it was a period of ignorance and poverty for most of Europe. This extended to the experience of the church, as well. The light of the scriptures was not extinguished during this time, but it was buried beneath ecclesiology and church aristocracy, and those who fought for truth and a devoted and humble Christian life and church became severely persecuted for their faith even by those who professed to be Christians. This church is their story.

(1) The Title of Jesus – “The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and his feet are like burnished bronze...”

Jesus has already given himself these two descriptive terms in the first chapter of Revelation. Although the explanations are merely repeated below, yet this time consider how appropriate they are for a period of persecution and suppression only equaled by the experiences of the second church (Smyrna):

- “...and His eyes were like a flame of fire.” (1:14) – Eyes represent wisdom and insight, and fire (among other similar things) represents judgment. Putting these together shows us that Jesus is a wise and righteous judge (and not arbitrary and capricious).
- “His feet were like burnished bronze,⁵⁰ when it has been made to glow in a furnace...” (1:15) – The process of refining metal is used in scripture as an illustration of the trials that test and develop character and separate out the dross (Mal. 3:2-3, Dan. 12:10, 1 Pet. 1:7, Rev. 3:18). As noted previously, feet represent dominion and authority and inheritance, and here the connection of feet to this refining process tells us that even in our most difficult trials, Jesus is still in control of them for our benefit.⁵¹

⁵⁰ There is some difficulty in the translation of the compound word for “burnished bronze” which is all one word in the Greek text and never occurs anywhere else in Greek lit. Many translators favor bronze or brass (an alloy of copper and zinc) per Aune (Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (p. 96). Dallas: Word Books.), although he notes that the first part of the word is applied not only to brass and to bronze (most frequently) but also to copper. Strong’s Concordance (#5474 – χαλκολιβανον) defines the word as “burnished copper”.

⁵¹ Why bronze is the metal used here instead of the gold and silver connected with refining elsewhere (Mal. 3:2-3, 1 Pet. 1:7, 1 Cor. 3:10-15, Rev. 3:18) is unclear. One possible suggestion is to note that in the tabernacle and temple the metals farthest out from the inner sanctuary are the least valuable (copper and bronze) progressing to silver and then gold. So the use of bronze here might suggest the process of refining of character on earth with gold and silver the end result. Another possibility could be that the bronze shows the process will continue into the Kingdom of God on earth and also includes all of mankind (Matt. 25:31-46) represented in the less precious type of metal (cf. Num. 21:9 with John 3:14 regarding the translation and meaning of copper and/or brass or bronze).

(2) The Description of the Church – “I know your deeds...”

[Note – the following comments on the fourth church of Revelation do not occur in the order they occur in Revelation. This is done to structure the historic fulfillment of the message to this church in an arrangement that is easier to follow.]

This church is highly commended by Jesus, who affirms them for their “deeds and... love and faith and perseverance and service...” These traits were hallmarks of the faithful people of God in this time period marked by highly devoted service, perseverance under persecution, faith in lieu of a worldly façade of spirituality, and finally a spirit of love that contrasted vividly with the spirit of punishment issuing from a despotic nominal church system.

Nevertheless, he takes exception to the dominant religious influence of this period. This is “Jezebel” who claims to be a prophetess, but who teaches error to God’s servants and leads them astray. There can be little doubt who this woman represents. Her marriage to King Ahab of Israel, her idolatrous behavior and beliefs, and her persecution of Elijah and the prophets of God (1 Kings 16:31, *passim*) make her a perfect Old Testament illustration of the corrupt woman of Revelation and her alliance with the kings of Europe and her persecution of the church (Rev. 17:1-6, 18:2-4, 24).

“...she teaches and leads my bondservants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.” These are the exact same actions described in the previous church except in reverse order (cf. 2:14). As noted earlier the first of these sins here – acts of immorality – suggests the growth of the illicit union of church and state. The second of these sins – eating things sacrificed to idols – suggests the accommodation to pagan forms and thought by the church.

“Behold, I will throw her on a bed [of sickness], and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. And I will kill her children with pestilence [or “plague”]...” This warning is clearly a response to the adulterous behavior of this Jezebel. She has encouraged and practiced immorality, and now the bed has changed from one of pleasure to one of great tribulation.

The time setting is appropriate for a series of disasters that befall European civilization. Wars, plague, and famine ravaged Europe. The Black Death alone (1347-1351 AD) “killed an estimated one-third of the population living between

India and Iceland.”⁵² The description of the 14th century as a time of “great tribulation” (2:22) is particularly appropriate. Barbara Tuchman’s book *A Distant Mirror* describes this period as a time of terrible calamities when Europeans thought their world was coming to an end. Her choice of the book’s title – *A Distant Mirror* – owes the selection of its title to the similarity with our own 20th century and beyond in terms of the magnitude of trouble.⁵³

The papal church itself was facing trouble of its own late in the period of the fourth church. Toward the end of the Thyatira church, there were two popes both claiming to be the legitimate successors to the head of the Roman Church (1378-1417).⁵⁴

The reference to a sickbed and to plague⁵⁵ in 2:22-23 acts as another time indicator. While Revelation is a book of symbols including plagues (cf. Revelation 16th chapter), the language here may suggest something more literal or a meaning both symbolic and literal. “I will kill her children with plague,” suggests (first) a calamity that falls on the people or children of this Jezebel and (second) that this may be an exception to the symbolism and that the means of death is specifically plague in a very literal sense. If so, this can only refer to the Black Death.

There is an element in the description of this church passed over in the preceding discussion. Now it will be easier to understand and interpret this part of the message with the background of history that is already established above. The relevant description...

“I know your deeds... and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.... [and] I gave her [Jezebel] time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Behold, I will...”

⁵² Tuchman, B.W. (1978). *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*. (p. xiii). Alfred A Knopf: New York.

⁵³ The expression “great tribulation” occurs only one other place in Revelation (7:14) and one other place outside of Revelation in Matt. 24:21. These other two instances clearly refer to the final great time of trouble that accompanies Christ’s return, but here it refers to an earlier but parallel experience. Historian Barbara Tuchman in her book *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century* describes that period as mirroring the calamities of the 20th century that still continue on in this new century. She paints a parallel between these two periods of “great tribulation.” See Tuchman, B.W. (1978). *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*. (pp. xiii-xiv). Alfred A Knopf: New York.

⁵⁴ This followed a period of time (1309-1377) known as the Avignon Papacy or sometimes “Babylonian Captivity of the Papacy” in which a French pope moved the papal court to Avignon France.

⁵⁵ The intent of the language in 2:22 is a “sickbed” as Aune discusses in some detail. He also translates the word “pestilence” in verse 23 of the NASB as “plague”. See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (pp. 205-206). Dallas: Word Books.

There are two separate periods of time described here, and both encompass the faithful people of God and the counterfeit church. The true and authentic people of God are commended for their latter deeds that are greater than the earlier deeds. In contrast the corrupt church is given a similar first period in which to repent, but a lack of willingness to change leads to a period of tribulation.

These two periods of time (early and later) can be traced approximately (and maybe precisely)⁵⁶ in time. If, as noted in the discussion of the previous church we end that church in or about the year 800 AD (or perhaps more precisely in 798 AD), and if we begin the fifth or following church with the Reformation (Martin Luther) in 1518 AD, then a midpoint for the overall length of the fourth church would be 1158 AD. Once again, this is in harmony with what we see in this period for the faithful church and separately for the nominal church.

For the faithful people of God, there is a marked change from the first half of this period:

- ❖ As in the third church, the earliest centers of spirituality in this period continued to be commonly found remote from the centers of church power in monastery communities or remote regions where the corrupting influence of this period still rested lightly. One particularly observable example of this distinction is the Celtic church. They maintained a continuing example of a much more humble and apostolic spirituality in their homelands far from the influence of Rome and Constantinople.
- ❖ In the second half of this period beginning shortly after 1160 AD, the centers of spirituality began to move outside of the Roman Church altogether. (1) The earliest dissidents from far northwestern Italy and southeastern France begin with Peter Waldo and became known as the Waldensians (from their namesake) or the Valdenses (from their homeland). (2) On the heels of this movement were new ways of thinking within the church including new orders such as the Franciscans and a new intellectual movement known as scholastic theology that impacted the complacent theology of the Roman Church beyond this point. (3) In the late 14th century two movements outside the church developed. The first began with John Wycliffe⁵⁷ and

⁵⁶ See the (final) chart following this commentary on chapters 2 and 3 and particularly note the series of time periods for the seven churches of Revelation.

⁵⁷ John Wycliffe became the first translator to translate the Bible into English. He is known as “the morning star of the Reformation” for his early protest against the shortcomings of the Roman Church. Wycliffe opposed the doctrines of transubstantiation, indulgences, and priestly confession. He believed justification came only through faith in Christ, that the Bible is the final authority for Christian life and doctrine (and not the church), and he believed the Roman Papal Church to be the antichrist. He also exercised a great deal of influence on many of the beliefs of Jan Hus and the Hussites.

eventually blossomed into a movement in England known as the Lollards who taught based on scriptural authority and an authentic Christian life. Another movement began shortly thereafter with Jan Hus (John Huss) in Bohemia known as the Hussites.^{58,59} The Reformation began with Martin Luther not long after these two movements rose to prominence.

This same division of the fourth or Thyatira church into two periods of time can be seen in the “tribulation” that would impact the nominal church in the second half of the Thyatira church. While the Roman Church is often considered to reach the height of its power just after this point with the most powerful pope in history – Pope Innocent III⁶⁰ – it is in the period following this same 1160 AD date that things first begin to go wrong for the Roman Church, as follows:

- ❖ In the late 1100’s the Waldensians appeared on the scene. They were the first of a number of movements including the Lollards and Hussites to openly or clandestinely challenge the Roman Papacy during the Thyatira period of the church.
- ❖ The crusades had previously captured Jerusalem, but early in the second half of the fourth period of the church (1187 AD) the Europeans lost Jerusalem. The year 1291 witnessed the end of the last crusader state in the Middle East (Acre).
- ❖ In 1204 the Fourth Crusade sacked Constantinople at the center of the Orthodox Church. Pope Innocent had forbidden it, but eventually saw it as a mechanism of God’s will to re-unite the two churches. Instead it poisoned the relations between the two churches.
- ❖ Some scholars believe the “Little Ice Age” begins in Europe during this period with lowered global temperatures and shortened growing seasons that impacted crop production.
- ❖ The Great Famine (1315-1317 AD) kills millions of people in Europe.
- ❖ The Black Death⁶¹ (1347-1351 AD) kills a third or more of the population of Europe fulfilling the prophecy that “...I will kill her children with plague.” In some areas the plague kills over half the local population.

⁵⁸ The Hussites believed in scriptural authority over church authority, the “priesthood of all believers”, the “common chalice” (at this time only the priests could partake of wine at communion and common Catholics were excluded from the cup or chalice), opposition to indulgences, and teaching the scriptures in the national language (Czech). Many Hussites also believed the pope or papal system to be the antichrist.

⁵⁹ The primary remaining church of this movement today is the Moravian Church.

⁶⁰ Oddly he was born in the year 1160. Although considered by many to be the most powerful pope, even during his “reign” things began to go wrong.

⁶¹ Apparently consisting of several forms plague including the bubonic plague.

- ❖ Europe enters a long period of continuous war at this time. The Hundred Years War between England and France (1337-1453 AD) is only the most glaring example.
- ❖ The Papal Schism (1378-1417 AD) divides the papacy between two rival popes with one in Rome and one under the control of France at Avignon, France. This causes both political and religious repercussions. The rival popes each accuse the other of being the antichrist. John Wycliffe, who is witnessing to the authority of scripture during this period, suggests none to gently that maybe they are both correct.
- ❖ By the end of the period of the Thyatira period, the continuing expansion of the Ottoman Turkish Empire threatened western Europe and the Roman Catholic nations of the west. The Ottomans capture Constantinople in 1453 and already control much of eastern Europe at this time. The Ottoman Empire becomes the most powerful empire in Europe or the Mediterranean.

Thus we have two identical periods for:

- The true wilderness church (“...your deeds of later are greater than at first” as the church becomes more resistant to false teaching), and
- The counterfeit church (“I gave her [a] time⁶² to repent... and she does not want to repent... Behold, I will...” bring trouble upon her as a consequence).

“But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who have not known the deep things of Satan...” Another theme of the third church was their relationship to the “synagogue of Satan” or the counterfeit church. This connection reaches its climax in the fourth church. Here the apostasy of the institutional church has reached its height, but Jesus describes it as something far darker yet.

“I place no other burden on you. Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.” Those who have not succumbed to the influence of a nearly universal and corrupt church culture, who “have not known the deep things of Satan” are given no special burden. It is as if Jesus says to this church, “you have enough to contend with already, just hold on to what you have, and I will expect no more from you.”

⁶² The Greek word here is *chromos* (Gr. *χρονος*) which “denotes a space of time, whether short... or long... or duration of time...” See Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under “time”, 1.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company, and others.

This is in contrast to the final three churches of Revelation. In the fourth church they are only asked to hold fast to what they have "...until I come." In comparison the remaining three churches are each given a warning that increases in nearness:

- "I will come like a thief..." (3:3)
- "I am coming quickly..." (3:11)
- "Behold, I stand at the door and knock..." (3:20)⁶³

"But I have this against you..." One commentary on Revelation puts this criticism of the fourth church into a proper perspective:

"This comes almost as a shock. These brethren have just been commended for love, faith, service, and perseverance. What else can there be? There was apparently a character weakness. It almost certainly applies to the fact that the Waldenses were secretive in their witnessing [2:20]. They did not offer an open challenge to Papacy. Strangely, however, the Lord does not insist on their correcting this weakness. Compare 2:4-5 and 2:14, 16 where the "against you" phrase is followed by repent. But not so here. Instead he says, "hold fast what you have" [2:25].⁶⁴

(3) The Promise to the Church – "He who overcomes... to him I will give authority over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from my Father; and I will give him the morning star."

When considered closely, these verses actually contain five separate but related promises:

- Authority over the nations.
- Authority to shepherd them with a rod of iron.
- Authority to dash them to pieces.
- Authority identical to what Jesus receives from the Father.
- And also receiving the morning star.

It is hard to imagine promises that would be more appropriate for the fourth church. The church that experienced the crushing supremacy of church and state by a worldly church claiming these very five promises of ruling the nations for

⁶³ Cf. Matt. 25:1-13.

⁶⁴ New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia. (2010). *The Revelation Notebook*, 1st bound ed. (p 85). Louisville, Kentucky: New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia.

themselves in the present... the true and faithful church is promised the same authority to reign with Christ in the real Kingdom of God on earth for real (1:6, 5:10, 20:4-6, 22:17, etc.).

This is the church that understood that the Kingdom of God was not the visible church they saw before them. They understood that the worldly church had neglected to wait for Jesus and had attempted to set up the Kingdom of God on their own terms. It cost some of the faithful church of this period their lives. Yet they persevered as an example of courage and faith and love for others. They richly deserved the promises made to them.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit
says to the churches.*

Rev. 2:29

The Fifth Church of Revelation – Sardis (3:1-6)

The fifth church is the church of the early Reformation period. It begins with Luther and ends a relatively brief 150 years later (9:1, 5, 10). Likewise the message is also much briefer than the previous message to Thyatira.

Many Protestant Christians look back at this period as a golden age of Christianity, and there is some truth in this. In the Reformation we find inspiring moments and wonderful examples of Christian leadership under fire. However, the impact of the Reformation appears uneven and is awkward to summarize as a consistently authentic movement at all times and places. This is particularly true of the early and incomplete Reformation period that is represented in Sardis.

The message to this church similarly reflects an address that contains both commendation and criticism to a church whose “deeds [are not] completed...”

The meaning of the name Sardis is uncertain. Three primary meanings⁶⁵ have been proposed – “that which remains”, “those escaping”, and “prince of joy” – and cases have been made for all three.

Although all three meanings would fit the circumstances of the fifth church, the third translation for Sardis of “prince of joy” doesn’t seem to represent the same character and language as the message itself.⁶⁶ However, the first two meanings seem to work well with a message to a church struggling to survive outward threats and its own faults.

(1) The Title of Jesus – “He who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars...”

This is an interesting title with which to begin a description of the early Reformation period.

Unlike the title by which Jesus describes himself to the first church – “The One who holds the seven stars in his right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands...” – the seven churches are left out of the description and replaced with the seven spirits. Thus Jesus limits himself to the seven stars or messengers to the churches and to the seven spirits or messages. Another

⁶⁵ I have also seen definitions such as “renewed” and “something new” with less frequency and support.

⁶⁶ While “prince of joy” could fit the early Reformation Church’s emphasis on faith in the sacrifice of Jesus as the only means of justification (righteousness through forgiveness in Christ), it does not seem to flow with the message itself.

difference is that in the title Jesus gives to the first church describes himself with the seven stars “in his right hand” or position of favor, but now that distinction is gone and Jesus simply “has... the seven stars” in his message to Sardis.

The title Jesus gives himself is appropriate for this period of the church, since the early Protestants faced severe persecution from the Roman Church. Luther himself faced threats that forced him to flee the city after the Diet of Augsburg in 1518 AD. By 1520 AD he was excommunicated, his teachings condemned, and he was finally called to the Diet of Worms to face charges. After defending his views there without compromise, he left and went into hiding for a period of time.

Other Protestants faced persecution, as well. The St Bartholomew’s Day Massacre of French Huguenots (Calvinists) in 1572 resulted in the death of anywhere from 5,000 to 30,000 French Protestants.⁶⁷ Over 500,000 French Huguenots were eventually forced to emigrate from France in response to persecution.

That the Reformation survived at all is surprising when considering its humble beginnings and the violence done to previous Christian movements. Yet Jesus assures this church that he has the seven messages and the seven messengers. No opposition of man can thwart his plans.

(2) The Description of the Church – “I know your...”

No other church begins with such an abrupt and harsh criticism except for the seventh church (Laodicea). And the criticism is focused immediately and exclusively on works.

“I know your deeds, that you have a name⁶⁸ that you are alive, but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die, for I have not found your deeds completed⁶⁹ in the sight of My God.” This portrayal accurately depicts the Sardis period of the early Reformation. It is an era focused on the importance of holding correct doctrine and outward belief to the exclusion of the personal and devotional life. It is not a “complete” development.

⁶⁷ Pope Gregory XIII had a special hymn performed in Thanksgiving for the massacre and a special gold coin minted to commemorate the event.

⁶⁸ Or *reputation*.

⁶⁹ Or *...I have found your conduct far from perfect*.

An illustration of this can be seen in the experience of the Lutheran Church in Germany. A little over 100 years after the death of Martin Luther, a man named Philipp Jakob Spener became concerned with the lack of focus on the personal devotional life within the Lutheran Church.⁷⁰ Sunday sermons focused almost exclusively on doctrine – most particularly the doctrine of justification by faith⁷¹ – leading to a lack of urgency to follow Jesus by practice in daily life. This led to the local pastors leading very carnal lives.

Influenced by earlier authors who had addressed this issue,⁷² Spener began to chart a supplementary path. While still believing Lutheran doctrine and remaining a member of the Lutheran Church, he began to hold weekday meetings for devotional study and testimony and prayer. These meetings mark the beginning of the Pietist movement, a movement within the Lutheran Church rather than outside of it.⁷³ Others picked up this message and the movement spread. August Hermann Francke was one of the early proponents and leaders of the movement and was a mainstay of the movement after the death of Spener.

This movement developed at the very close of the fifth or Sardis period of the church and most of the impact was felt in the 6th church (Philadelphia). Other movements with similar messages were beginning early in the 6th period of the church including John Wesley's Methodism and the Society of Friends (Quakers) fostered by George Fox and William Penn. More on this when the Philadelphia church is reviewed, but the important thing at this point is the contrast with the 5th church.

The fifth church is one with a name (reputation) that appears alive is really very dead. It seems alive to those at the time and to many since because of the courage and impact of its leadership and the doctrine of justification by faith that provided righteousness and life to those that believed. Yet the surface impression of this period misses the lack of depth. The attraction of an alternative to the Roman Church – especially for Germans thoroughly sick Rome and entranced by the Lutheran teaching that the antichrist is the Roman Church – led many into the

⁷⁰ In fairness to Martin Luther, this does not appear to be the character of his own life. Unfortunately most of his writing centered on issues of theology and doctrine in defense of the Reformation, and this became the focus of the Lutheran Church after his passing.

⁷¹ This and other doctrines of the Lutheran Church that are essentially correct – including the Luther's teaching that the Roman Catholic Church is the Babylon and antichrist of the scriptures – fed the Lutheran belief of a special relationship to God based solely on their understanding of the Bible.

⁷² Including the book *True Christianity* written by Johan Arndt.

⁷³ I'm indebted to Carl Hagensick for initially pointing out this movement and its universal relevance for the Christian life to me.

Lutheran Church for political and societal reasons that had little to do with true Christianity.

The deeds or works of Sardis are the exclusive criticism of this church by the Lord. They are called to “wake up” from their complacency, to “remember” what they “have received and heard,” and to “obey” and “repent”. The revival of the church devotional life very late in the Sardis period compares well with the message to this church. They are encouraged to “...strengthen those who remain...”⁷⁴ even as the early progress of the Reformation begins to wane.

“But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. This further description follows the same path as the previous part of the message only in a more encouraging vein. The Sardis church saw themselves dressed in white robes because of their justification through faith (cf. Rev. 7:14, Matt. 22:11-13), but in reality their robes were soiled from living a life contrary to their profession of faith (Jude 1:23).

Yet there were exceptions to this rule. Some even in Sardis would walk in white with unspotted garments.

(3) The Promise to the Church – “He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before my Father and His angels.”

This is a promise made to a church thinking that it is alive, but in reality is a largely dead church without a passion to live the Christian life. True righteousness and eternal life is promised to the faithful. They know from justification that their name is already written in the book of life... but their faithfulness means it will never be erased. And Jesus will confess each one’s name before the Father. The Sardis church had a pretense to name that is alive, but the promise is to the faithful.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit
says to the churches.*

Rev. 3:6

⁷⁴ Aune makes a strong case that the wording here should not be impersonal or “things”, but that instead it refers to people or “those who remain.” See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (pp. 215, 216 note 2d, 219). Dallas: Word Books.

The Sixth Church of Revelation – Philadelphia (3:7-13)

The sixth church is the church of the late Reformation period. If the Reformation starts with Luther, the timing of both the fifth church and the start of the sixth church can be tracked with some precision. In order to do this, it is necessary to skip ahead in Revelation for a moment to the fifth trumpet (9:1-12). Assuming the fifth trumpet is concurrent with the fifth church and fifth seal, it is possible to get an exact span of time for the fifth church.

In Rev. 9:5 and 10 we read of a period of “five months,” a period of 150 years.⁷⁵ This length of time fits neatly into the prophetic picture of the fifth church of Revelation. A period of 150 years from 1517 (Luther’s 95 theses nailed to the door of the Wittenberg Church) or 1518 (Luther makes a stand for truth at his trial at the Diet of Augsburg) brings us to William Penn in the years 1667 and 1668.⁷⁶ Although either starting date seems appropriate, for reasons that will be explained later the date of 1518 will be designated for the start of the fifth church.⁷⁷

The end date of 1668 is the beginning of the ministry of William Penn and the sixth church. Along with others from his generation, he believed that they were in the Philadelphia period of the churches of Revelation. Moving to the new world and blessed with a wealthy inheritance from his father, he founded a new city – Philadelphia – and colony of Pennsylvania in which the (Quaker) principles of non-violence, religious freedom, civil rights, and equality for all were written into law along with other precepts for a just and compassionate government.

Assuming these conclusions are accurate, this provides us with a very specific span of time for the fifth church – 1518 to 1668 – and a beginning point for the sixth church at 1668 AD. The suggested end point of the sixth church is 1878 AD or 360 years later. Whether William Penn’s impact on religious and social issues is so significant that the beginning of the sixth church should be dated to the beginning of his ministry is a subject that will be considered briefly a little later on in this discussion of the Philadelphia church of Revelation.

⁷⁵ In other prophetic periods the months are 30 days each. This can be seen in the period of 3½ times (years), 42 months, or 1260 days, which at 30 days per month are all the same length. Each prophetic day equals one year of fulfillment as can be seen in the prophecy in Ezek. 4:1-6 (cf. Dan. 9:23-27). So at 30 days per month, 5 months or 150 days equals 150 years at “a day for a year”.

⁷⁶ The years 1667 and 1668 are both noteworthy periods in William Penn’s life, but the year 1668 seems the most significant. He converts to the beliefs of the Society of Friends (Quakers) in this year. He also writes and publishes two of his most important and most famous works *The Sandy Foundation Shaken* and *No Cross, No Crown*. Finally, he is imprisoned for the first of those two publications at the behest of the Bishop of London. The events of this year combined to made Penn’s break with the established churches irreversible.

⁷⁷ The year 1518 is significant in other ways. It is the year in which the Ottoman sultan Selim I completes the largest regional conquest (including Palestine) of any Ottoman sultan. It is also the year of a transit of Venus (the second transit of the pair occurring in 1526).

(1) The Title of Jesus – “He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens...”

The designations of “holy” and “true” feel especially appropriate for this church. With the exception of the second church (Smyrna), this is the only church without a criticism anywhere in the message. The latter Reformation was an extended period of emphasis on personal holiness, continuing challenges to the traditional dogmatic interpretation of the scriptures, and persistent evangelism.

The “...key of David...” is drawn from a passage in Isaiah 22:15-25 along with the remainder of the description of Jesus given to this church. The passage describes the passing of authority from the faithless steward of the household (Shebna) to a righteous and honorable man (Eliakim). This story has been suggested by some as a type or picture comparing the corrupt steward or “man of sin” (antichrist) to the true and righteous steward of God fulfilled in Jesus.

The reference to the key of David is not a reference to the keys of the heavenly kingdom given to Peter (Matt. 16:19), but instead refers to the authority of Christ in the messianic kingdom (cf. Is. 9:7) and his control over the affairs of earth at that time. The key of David is a reference to kingly authority. As such it is the first reference connecting this church directly to the period of the latter Reformation.

Just before this period the Treaty of Westphalia (1648 AD) set up the political principles that would guide much of European and worldwide to the present. Perhaps foremost among these is the principle of state sovereignty which gave each nation sole control over its own territory on the principle of non-interference in another nation’s domestic affairs. Since the aristocracy still largely controlled Europe at this time, it made the kings and queens of Europe the sole power within each kingdom and limited the power that papacy could exert between nations. A period of extreme nationalism follows.

Yet Jesus declares that he has the “key of David” or the authority over the nations.

The rest of this title, “...who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens...” is also drawn from the same verse as the reference to the key of David (Is. 22:22). It also references the very next verse of Revelation – “Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut...”

(2) The Description of the Church – “I know your...”

This church has been given “... and open door which no one can shut...” that is obviously connected to the symbols of a key and a door that can only be opened or shut by Jesus. So the meaning of these two symbols will be considered next.

Key – a symbol that occurs three other times in Revelation with varied applications. In 1:18 it refers to the keys of death and the grave (hades). In 9:1 and 20:1 it refers to a key to the bottomless pit or abyss. In the first of the last two instances (9:1) destructive forces are released from the abyss and in the second instance (20:1) Satan is rendered powerless after being sent to this abyss. In the title of Jesus given to the Philadelphia church the key refers to governmental authority. In fact in all instances a key refers to power and authority.

Door – is a symbol that falls into two different applications. In the more literal passages of scriptures a door is connected with opportunities for service (1 Cor. 16:9, 2 Cor. 2:12, Col. 4:3, perhaps Acts 14:27). However, when a door is found in parables or prophetic passages, it refers to one of two related interpretations:

- 1) A special provision of knowledge that accompanies the final period of the church (Luke 12:35-38, Rev. 3:20, cf. Heb. 5:12-14) when the door is connected with a meal.
- 2) The high calling or opportunity to enter into the kingdom of heaven (John 10:1-9, Rev. 4:1) before that door is closed (Matt. 25:1-13) and the kingdom reign begins the Millennial Age.

It is the second prophetic application that seems particularly appropriate for the Philadelphia church of Revelation. Two passages that specifically link the “door” to the opportunity for the high calling / heaven are helpful here:

- Luke 13:22-30 – Contextually a reference to the Jewish leadership who would not enter the kingdom of heaven and also prevented others from entering (Matt. 23:13). This passage refers to a time when they would realize that the opportunity passed them by and the entrance door is closed.
- Matt. 25:1-13 – The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (or Ten Virgins) speaks of a time when the door would be closed when the bride is ready for the marriage to Jesus (Rev. 19:7-9).

Of course this closing of the door to the high calling happens at the close of the final seventh or Laodicean period of the church. This suggests the meaning of the

open door that *“no one can shut”*. The door would not be closed during the sixth period, but closed at the end of the following / final period of the church’s sojourn on earth. Not only is this exceptionally appropriate from a timing standpoint, but it also addresses the evangelistic fervor of the Philadelphia church. They had an open door to the high calling and the results would be limited only by their own efforts. Thus the affirmation of the Lord to the church in this matter – *“I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept my word, and have not denied my name.”* No this church did not deny his name. Instead they took his name and his word everywhere throughout the world.

“...because you have a little power [or strength]...” The significance of this passage is the contrast to the power of the Roman Church in ages past. And here the impact of William Penn can be seen. The example of his views on just government would impact generations of colonials after his death and would be part of the inspiration for the Declaration of Independence (signed in Philadelphia), the American Revolution, and the Constitution and Bill of Rights.^{78 79}

“Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews and are not, but lie – I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.” The synagogue of Satan makes an appearance earlier in the message to the second church (2:9) as the first trends toward a different Christianity begin to develop from *“...those who say they are Jews and are not...”* (2:9 again). By the fourth church it becomes the dominant religion of so-called Christendom or *“the deep things of Satan”* (2:24).

By the Philadelphia period the power of the Roman Church is broken, and it is Protestantism that is on the upswing. The ability of papal power to persecute others ends with the French Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte (1789-1799). Shortly afterward the Bible Societies are launched beginning with the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804,⁸⁰ after which the Bible rises to great prominence as pictured in the sixth trumpet (11:12) through the *“two witnesses”* (Old and New Testaments) as they *“went up into heaven”* or into prominence in the religious world... much to the displeasure of the Roman Church.

⁷⁸ Although even here it required amendments to the Constitution to insure the rights and equality of minorities and women... meaning it would still be quite a few generations after the Constitution before the American government (first in law and then finally in practice) would finally catch up to William Penn.

⁷⁹ Alternatively, this language could have a spiritual application when contrasted to the message to the preceding fifth church to *“strengthen the things that remain.”*

⁸⁰ Bible Society. (2017). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved July 6, 2017 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_society

The contrasting rise of Protestantism to the weakening of Catholicism can be seen in the political arena, as well. The British Empire – a Protestant nation and colonial power – became the most powerful nation in the world for a period in the 18th and 19th centuries. Their biggest rival France underwent a revolution that ended Catholic power in that nation. In the western hemisphere Catholic Spain lost power and possessions and was eventually superseded in that part of the globe by the United States.

“Because you have kept the word of my perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.” This is the first of two successive statements on the nearness of the great tribulation and the return of Christ. The promise made to the sixth church is not seconded to the following or seventh church. The clear implication is that the seventh and last church – Laodicea – will not be spared this hour of testing or temptation.

The difficulty in determining an exact translation of the Greek word *peirasmou* (Gr. *πειρασμου*)⁸¹ translated “testing” suggests that the particular form of this testing may take the shape of some type of temptation. This would certainly fit with the seventh church who are overwhelmed with material wealth (3:17) in the final period of the church. But whatever the particular “hour of testing” is in this verse, it is clearly unique and expected to follow the Philadelphia church.

“I am coming quickly...” This is the second expression of warning that time is beginning to grow short. To the fifth church is the message that “I will come like a thief” followed by the message to this sixth church that “I am coming quickly” and finally the message to the seven church that “I stand at the door and knock”.

⁸¹ The word translated as “testing” in the NASB seems difficult to pin down by the translators. The margin of the NASB gives “temptation” as an alternate meaning. Aune uses “affliction” in his direct translation, but in the detailed discussion of this verse uses affliction, tribulation, testing, and temptation as all being possible meanings for the language. See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (pp. 228 and 239-240). Dallas: Word Books and Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under “temptation”, 1.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company.

(3) The Promise to the Church – “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my new name.”

The promise(s) to the sixth church initially do not seem to be as tied to the message as some of the promises to the other churches. Yet there are connections to the history of this period that appear very fitting and appropriate.

“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will not go out from it anymore...” This period is marked by new movements constantly moving the understanding of scriptures forward. These movements were most often formed outside of existing churches.

At the beginning of the Philadelphia Church we find the Society of Friends (Quakers) and the increasing presence of the Baptist Church (a movement which had begun a little earlier in the 1600’s). Within a few decades of William Penn is the beginning of the Methodist movement in the 1700’s with its emphasis on the Christian life that is in many ways similar to the Lutheran Pietist movement. By the early-to-mid 1800’s, this progression includes the Second Advent movement (from various churches and influential on some present day interpretations of prophecy), the Brethren movement (Plymouth Brethren and other Brethren Churches), and Alexander Campbell (Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ).

These were all movements of the spirit God pushing forward the understanding of scriptures, doctrine, and the Christian life. Yet they were not welcomed in the previous churches, were frequently persecuted for their beliefs, and forced to leave and begin anew repeatedly. Still they are promised that they would become *“pillar[s] in the temple of God”* and would not *“go out from it anymore”*. Comforting words for those from this period who were not accepted by their brethren.

“...and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my new name.” This second part of the promise to this church confirms the first part and marks their acceptance into the church whose “are enrolled in heaven” (Heb. 12:23) and not on this earth.

Yet there is another aspect of this part of promise to the Philadelphia church that also seems particularly appropriate for this period.

The spreading of a belief – particularly in the second half of this period – that the mission of the church is to convert the world and bring in the Kingdom Age by the church’s own efforts⁸² gained a great deal of popularity during this time. The rapid spread of Biblical Christianity encouraged this view. Augmented by increasing wealth resulting from scientific advancement and rapid industrialization – however unbiblical the theology – at the time this interpretation of scripture appeared to be a reasonable conclusion.⁸³

Many in the church of that time thought they were literally bringing about the “city of my God” and “the new Jerusalem” of the kingdom. The promise to the sixth of Philadelphia church affirms that the time will come when they will be a part of the government of the Messianic Kingdom (cf. 21:2-4). No doubt when that time comes they will enter into the work of restoring mankind with a great deal of passion and joy.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit
says to the churches.*

Rev. 3:13

⁸² Postmillennialism and Amillennialism – views of prophecy and Revelation that posited the return of Christ after the millennial Kingdom Age (Postmillennialism) or that the conversion of the world actually was the return of Christ (Amillennialism) were popular during this period.

⁸³ This view became largely discredited by (1) the rising tide of secularism in the late 1800’s and (2) one world war followed by another world war with all its related atrocities. While the postmillennial and amillennial views of the conversion of the world still exist today in various forms, they are no longer a significant force among the majority of Christians.

Appendix Notes on Philadelphia and the Revelation Churches

(1) Philadelphia means “brotherly love” ... a title that sounds odd for a period of the church with so many new movements and such contention among them. However, there are two aspects to the Philadelphian church in this regard that should be kept separate and distinct:

- First is the partiality of the many sects that make up this period. In fact this period can be noted for the ongoing conflict between various churches as each new movement rejects some tenets of the older Protestant denominations. Much of the conflict emerges from the challenges to the more traditional state churches such as the Anglicans and Lutherans.
- Second is the general belief of Protestants from this period that the hierarchy of the Roman Church created an artificial and unbiblical distinction between “clergy” and “laity”. Protestants were prone more and more to see others of their church as “brethren” and to treat all members of the church with respect... in contrast to Catholicism whose pope and bishops and the priests tended to lord themselves over the common people.

It is this second point that is the significance of the name Philadelphia or “love of brothers” for the sixth church of Revelation.

(2) Although all the churches of Revelation tend to share at least one or two traits or contrasting experiences with others, churches two (Smyrna) and six (Philadelphia) seem to have more in common than most.

- These churches have no criticisms in the messages to them.
- These churches are the only ones that are not asked to repent.⁸⁴
- These are the only churches with references to the synagogue of Satan.
- The second church is warned of testing. The sixth church is kept from the hour of testing.
- These churches are both given crowns if faithful.

(3) Comparing one aspect of churches five (Sardis) and six (Philadelphia) also points to a common thread of subject matter. The fifth church is considered nearly dead in personal devotion and is called to “...strengthen the things that remain...” The sixth church whose hallmark is personal devotion and Christian practice has “...a little power [or strength]...” setting up an obvious and unique contrast.

⁸⁴ Although church four is not technically called to repentance (2:24-25), either. However, it is criticized (2:20) and while the faithful are not called to repentance, the same is not true for the counterfeit church (2:21-22).

The Seventh Church of Revelation – Laodicea (3:14-22)

The seventh church is the church of the close of the Christian or Gospel Age and the time setting for the “harvest” period (Matt. 13:27-30, 39-40, Rev. 14:14-16)⁸⁵ and the great tribulation.

It is characterized by two developments in particular that affect the church of this period. The first is the increasing material wealth of this period accompanied by a certain self-satisfaction and complacency on the part of the church (Rev. 3:15-17). The second is the blessing of additional knowledge that comes the church’s way at this time (Rev. 3:20, Luke 12:35-38, Dan. 12:4, 9-10). Perhaps this additional understanding is intended to offset the rising tide of secular and social criticism of religion and of the Bible in particular.

(1) The Title of Jesus – “The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God...”

“The Amen...” Amen is a word translated directly from Greek that is in turn translated directly from Hebrew and occurs frequently throughout the Bible.

The word is used in similar but various ways.⁸⁶ The two most common are:

- ❖ At the close of a prayer, or hymn, or other scriptural language where it means “let it be so” or “so be it”.⁸⁷
- ❖ Jesus (and only Jesus) often uses “amen” to introduce a topic where it means “of a truth [I say to you]” and is often translated “verily” or “truly”.

Other meanings – particularly in the Old Testament – include faithful, trustworthy, and its usage as closure in the making of covenants.⁸⁸

In the Old Testament the word “amen” is also used as a personal description of God (e.g. Deut. 7:9 where it describes God as “faithful” and Is. 65:16 where it describes God as “truth.”

⁸⁵ (1) The Jewish Age also ends in a harvest period (Luke 10:1-2, John 4:35) that overlaps the start of the Gospel Age and ends in tribulation on the Jewish nation. The same is true at the end of the Gospel Age at which time the re-establishment of Israel and the “great tribulation” prepare for the way for the incoming Kingdom of God.

⁸⁶ Freedman, D.N. ed. (1992). *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (A-C, Vol. 1, 1st edition). (pp. 184-185). New York, et al.: Doubleday.

⁸⁷ A recent popular sci-fi television series that borrowed heavily from various religious ideas – including Christianity in particular – re-phrased the expression “amen” as “so say we all”. Very apt.

⁸⁸ For the covenantal use of “amen” see Deut. 27:15 (also Neh. 5:12-13, others).

In the New Testament this word is only used one time as a descriptor or title... here in the opening of the message to the Laodicean church. Jesus uses this word frequently in the gospels to emphasize the truth of his statements.⁸⁹ This use of the word “amen” to open a statement instead of closing one is unparalleled anywhere else in the Bible or Hebrew literature, and emphasizes that he spoke with truth. “They were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority...” (Mark 1:22).

The use of this word as a title for Jesus corresponds to the language in the rest of his title to this church. It also continues a progression from the title to the previous church where Jesus describes himself as the one “who is true” (3:7). The word “true” never occurs in any of the messages to the churches except the last two. In the history of the sixth church, a continuous drive for more understanding seems to continue on into the seventh church and is echoed in the offer of Jesus to enter and share a meal of truth (3:20, cf. Heb. 5:11-14, Luke 12:35-38).

Perhaps another reason for the particular emphasis on this word to the Laodicean church is its emphasis on *reality* in a time when reality is become increasing subjective. “Here our Lord Jesus styles himself, The Amen... one that is steady and unchangeable in all his purposes and promises.”⁹⁰

“...*the faithful and true Witness...*” The seventh church is beset by conflicting ideologies and secularism on all sides. This is yet another reason why the *Amen* should expand into an emphasis on faithfulness and truth. Not only does Jesus affirm the truth of his message, but also he reminds the Laodicean church that he is a witness to it, and his witness to the truth cost him his life (John 18:37-38).

The word faithful here most likely means trustworthy. And the title of *the faithful and true witness* implies possession of a singular truth that others do not own.

This language is echoed another place in Revelation where Jesus is described (in fact named) as “*Faithful and True*” (19:11). This particular expression occurs in a passage that immediately follows the marriage supper of Christ and the church

⁸⁹ In John’s gospel the phrase is always doubled, i.e., “verily, verily” (which some recent translations express in more modern English as “very truly”). This double pair of the word “amen” occurs 25 times in John’s gospel (15 during the period of his public ministry) meaning the word occurs 50 times in John’s gospel altogether. Amen is also doubled three places in the book of Psalms (41:13, 72:19, 89:52) with each occurrence coming in the last verse of the first three of five books that combine to make up a book of 150 psalms. These threes and fives are also found throughout John’s writings including the book of Revelation. Among examples from Revelation, there are three sets of amen paired in close proximity (1:6-7, 7:12, 22:20-21) and three single occurrences (3:14, 5:14, 19:4).

⁹⁰ Henry, M. (none). *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Acts to Revelation, Vol. VI). (p. 1135). McLean, VA: McDonald Publishing Company.

(19:7-9) when he makes an end of his enemies and assumes control of the government of the world as its rightful monarch (19:13-16, cf. Ezek. 21:26-27). As such this connection to the reign of Christ ties in neatly with the promise to the seventh that they would also reign with Christ in glory (3:21).

The words *“faithful and true”* also occur in one other setting in two verses of Revelation (21:5, 22:6). In nearly identical language is the phrase, “these words are faithful and true...” As Jesus is faithful and true, so his words are faithful and true. In fact he is the bodily representative of truth. The description of Jesus as the *“Word of God”* (19:13) is found just two verses after he is described as *“Faithful and True”* (19:11). The title of Jesus as the Word (John 1:1, 14) or logos (Gr. λογος) meaning *word* or *reason* is also used as a title for a monarch’s representative (i.e., the logos or “word” of the king). In this case Jesus is the representative of the Father and speaks the words of the Father (John 12:49).

There is yet another connection between the titles of Jesus and truth or the logos (Word) in just these few words of introduction to the Laodicean church. That is found in the last part of the title connecting Jesus to God’s creation. In John 1:1-2 where the Logos or Word is Jesus, he is also described as the agent of creation. There seems to be an obvious connection between the faithful and true witness, the faithful and true word or logos, and the logos as the origin of creation. Let’s consider this final description of Jesus to the Laodicean Church.

“...the beginning of the creation of God...” is a particularly interesting description, because the word arche (Gr. αρχη) can have three different translations,⁹¹ and all three of these meanings have relevance for the 7th church of Revelation, as follows:

(1) Chief or ruler of God’s creation seems a reasonable meaning considering the knowledge given to this church of the nearness of God’s kingdom and the blessings to come to all mankind on earth. This translation of the language describing Jesus also parallels the promise to this church that the church will “...sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne.”

(2) Beginning (in the sense of start or first) meaning that Jesus was the first act of God’s creation.⁹² This may require some explanation for many! To a traditional

⁹¹ See the following references for examples – Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (p. 256). Dallas: Word Books. *Thayer’s Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 17th Zondervan printing. (1976). pp. 76-77. Vine, W.E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under “begin, beginning, beginner”, B.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company.

⁹² If this uncommon yet historical and pervasive view of the Father and Son is always true, why should Jesus choose the seventh church as the one for which this title is appropriate? Yet from the late 17th century through the present day in particular, the

Trinitarian this might sound like a disturbing or even heretical possibility,⁹³ but many in the early church believed this to be the orthodox and apostolic view of the matter based on Col. 1:15-17 and Prov. 8:22-36 prior to the development of Trinitarian teaching. They also argued that the very concept of father and son must mean that one (the son) came from the other (the father). That Jesus created the universe and everything in it is beyond dispute (Jo. 1:1-3, cf. 1 Cor. 8:6), but whether Jesus always existed before that point in time is not explicitly stated anywhere in scripture.⁹⁴

(3) Origin (in the sense of the cause or first source) may be the true or most specific intent of the language. This is a particularly appropriate title of Jesus for a period challenged by secularism and Darwinism and a mechanistic origin of the universe. The subject of origins is everywhere today and the secular position is especially pervasive in current teaching and beliefs.⁹⁵ It is the under-pinning for the irreligious philosophy and academic challenges to the validity of the Christian message. When Jesus defines himself to the Laodicean church by the title(s) that he gives himself, it seems only fitting for Jesus to recognize the church's struggle against this rising tide of secularism.

doctrine of the Trinity continues to be under special scrutiny. There is a varied and mixed group of well-known Christians of the Protestant era that have taken exception to the Trinitarian doctrine in some form including Isaac Newton, Joseph Whiston, John Locke, William Penn, John Adams, and Henry Grew... among others... and the debate continues.

⁹³ Many Christians look back with a great deal of reverence to the Nicean Council of 325 AD when the initial debate took place and the council voted in favor of the early Trinitarian position (i.e. that the Father and Son are one... the holy spirit wasn't yet part of the discussion). Yet the decision of this council is fraught with a whole series of issues including:

(1) The word Trinity is not found anywhere in scripture and the concept is not clearly discussed in detail anywhere. The emphasis of the New Testament is found in repeated expressions like "God the Father" and Jesus as the "Son of God".

(2) The concept of the Trinity as expressed by the Nicean Council and early Trinitarians is not the same concept as most Trinitarians hold today. In fact originally the council did not deal with the holy spirit as part of a trinity.

(3) The argument that the Father and Son are co-equal, co-eternal, and con-substantial (of one substance) ignored a number of scriptural problems... with some being quite blatant. For example the definition of the Father and Son as co-equal is in direct conflict with scriptures such as "the Father is greater than I" (Jo. 14:28) and "the Son himself also will be subjected to the One [God] who subjected all things to Him [Jesus], so that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:26).

(4) The council was politically motivated by the presence of the Roman emperor (Constantine) who did not understand the academics of the discussion. Constantine was more interested in finding a consensus that would settle the issue throughout the empire than the truthfulness of any position.

(5) Over the following century the position of councils and emperors constantly changed and not until the emperors finally acceded to the Trinitarian position and enforced it throughout the empire did it become the dominant position.

⁹⁴ The concern of many Trinitarians today is the belief that if Jesus is not God, then that means he is "just another man" and no different from the rest of us. However, this is not the default position for many non-Trinitarians. What should be made of Christians who believe that Jesus was with God before all creation as His son in a way that no one else will ever be, that through him all things are created (1 Cor. 8:6), that Jesus came to earth as the only perfect human (1 Jo. 4:2-3, Heb. 4:15, 7:26, etc.) since Adam (Rom. 5:12-19) and died for our sins (1 Tim. 2:3-6), that he is resurrected at "right hand of God" (Matt. 26:64), and that soon he will rule the world as king of kings and lord of lords (Rev. 19:16, 20:4-6) as God's co-regent (Rev. 22:1)? Is this non-Trinitarian view so heretical that they should be denied church membership or treated as less than Christian? While there are various non-Trinitarian doctrinal views, it seems much more charitable to avoid stereotypes without a better understanding of each individual's opinion.

⁹⁵ There is no intent to imply a literal seven days of creation even when affirming the truth of the Genesis account. Yet the Neo-Darwinists and other secular positions of the present time are clearly at odds with a scriptural view of the origin of... everything.

Final Overview of the Title(s) of Jesus to the Laodicean Church

We've covered a lot of ground for just a few brief words of a verse, but there is a lot of meaning packed into just those few words.

The consistent themes in all of these descriptions are truth and authority. They develop from truth or "the Amen" to the character of the speaker as "the Faithful and True Witness" to the evidence of power and authority as "the Beginning [Cause] of the Creation of God." In a world of relativism and a lack of conviction of truth and the secular challenges to the church... a better title could not have been chosen. Of course, it's important to remember in general the greatness of the one choosing the titles.

Perhaps a few words from Geoff Moore's song *One Brand of Truth* will bring home the significance of these title(s) that Jesus uses to address this final Revelation church:

*I hear them saying you've just got to believe
Whatever's working for you personally
This is their brand of truth
I have to question a philosophy
What we envision is what God will be*

(2) The Description of the Church – "I know your..."

The name of this church – Laodicea – has an uncertain meaning. It is a compound name composed of the two Greek words laos (Gr. λαος) meaning *people* and dike (Gr. δικη) meaning either justice or judgment.⁹⁶ The meaning of Laodicea itself could vary from *judgment of the people to justice for/by the people*. The people are either being judged or they are bringing about justice.

Fortunately for our purposes, any of these translations are true for the period of the seventh church. The Laodicean church is not promised to escape the "hour of testing" (3:10) that comes upon the world, and this testing involves both demands

⁹⁶ Cf. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 1976 ed. (pp. 102 & 247). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 17th Zondervan printing 1976, (pp. 151 & 372). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, and *Liddell and Scott – A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1889 ed. (pp. 372 & 876). New York: Harper and Brothers. Liddell and Scott also define Laodicea as *tried [judged] by the people* (p. 876).

for justice by the people and a final judgment upon the institutions of this world – political, social, religious, and economic.

The seventh church is chastised for being neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. Jesus is not pleased with this lack of commitment. He would prefer that the Laodicean church be faithful and devoted, and if that is not the case he would like them to be honest in their evaluation. Either is preferable to a nominal Christianity that pretends that everyone who claims to be a Christian actually is a Christian (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).

He does not ask for the church to judge others, but that the members of the church examine themselves (1 Cor. 13:5). That this testing by the Lord of each member is directed at individuals and not the church as a group is suggested by our Lord's response. He says that he will spit them out of his mouth. He does not reject the whole church, but rather all those who will not examine their lives. They no longer speak for him (Matt. 7:21-23).

Yet the Laodicean church still has a place among the seven candlesticks. While the general trend is towards what one speaker disparagingly calls "religion as you like it," still the Lord encourages the church to be faithful and to overcome and to receive the promise to this church (3:18-21).

The description of Laodicea is the also narrative of a church that believes they are rich but in reality are poor (3:17-18). This church perceives itself as wealthy in both worldwide success and literal wealth. It does not see itself as spiritually impoverished. This description of the seventh church is the direct opposite of the portrayal of the second church. The church of Smyrna is perceived as poor (persecuted and literally impoverished) but rich in faith and devotion (2:9).

Since the message to this church is of particular relevance for all of the people of God in the present day, it is exceptionally worthwhile to spend some time reviewing the admonitions individually (3:17-19), as follows:

- *"I am rich, and have become wealthy..."* certainly does not reference the spiritual riches of which Jesus and the apostles speak (Matt. 6:19-21, James 2:5). At best it means a superficial Christian experience mistaken for true commitment and at worst a satisfaction with the material wealth of the Laodicean period or "hour of testing/temptation" described to the Philadelphian church. Many even in biblical oriented churches place more importance on personal wealth than spiritual wealth and are like the man who tore down his barns to build larger ones and became satisfied with his

increase in wealth (Luke 12:13-21). Yet if our lives are required the same night, where is the wealth then?

- “...and have need of nothing...” continues the theme of satisfaction with present attainments and more particularly pride of accomplishment. Better to be the repentant sinner than the proud and holier-than-thou Christian in need of nothing.

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18:10-14)

- “...and you do not know that you are wretched...” Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. “Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Romans 7:24-25a)
- “...and miserable...” This sounds like much the same thing as the “wretched” condition just mentioned,⁹⁷ but there is a suggestion of a subtle distinction between the two words. Wretched may express more of a state of being and miserable may suggest more of a condition of the heart.
- “...and poor...” Unlike the first two negative descriptions, the last three are figurative in nature. The Laodicean church is poor in faith and daily devotion and in treasures in heaven.
- “...and blind...” A new issue is introduced. Blindness is associated with those lacking spiritual insight (2 Cor. 4:3-4, Matt. 25:7-8, Matt. 15:14). Misunderstanding what God is doing in the world is a part of it. Self-satisfaction with the present life is another. Blindness in these areas results from a lack of zeal and humility (3:19, cf. also Matt. 25:1-13).
- “...and naked...” A second new issue is introduced. This is a concern that is particularly emphasized for this church. In the description of the seven last plagues it is mentioned again (16:15) just before Armageddon. The Laodicean church is counseled to get “white robes” that represent

⁹⁷ Aune translates these first two negative conditions as “miserable and pitiful” rather than “wretched and miserable” in his translation. See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (p. 259). Dallas: Word Books.

righteousness (19:7-9). Unlike the passage in Revelation 19 describing the “righteousness of the saints” when they are finally with the bridegroom (Jesus), the white robes of the Laodicean church on earth are the robes of justification through Christ. It is his righteousness we wear and not our own. Not only nakedness, but also garments spotted “by the flesh” (Jude 23) and in need of washing (7:9, 13-14) are an issue in the church of this period. Only in the fifth church (Sardis) and corresponding fifth seal is there a similar emphasis on white robes (3:4-5, 6:9-11).

How is the seventh church expected to respond after all this criticism? Jesus gives advice on what the Laodicean church should do:

- “...I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich...” Observe first of all that the Laodicean church is to buy gold from Jesus and not from elsewhere. The scriptures speak of being refined by a fire that purifies us like precious gold and precious metal (Mal. 3:2-3, Dan. 12:10, 1 Pet. 1:7). Those who do may not be rich beforehand, but may become spiritually rich now and receive exponentially greater riches in heaven.
- “...and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed...” The white robes have already been discussed earlier, but note that the opening condition is nakedness. Anyone that does not accept Jesus and commit to living the Christian life does not have a robe to wear, and in this church there must be many who unknowingly occupy this position. They are naked and this nominal version of the Christian faith may be revealed in time if they do not humble themselves under the mighty hand of God and stop assuming that they “need nothing.”

But this is the negative side of this advice. The positive side is that Jesus will provide robes of righteousness or justification to all who ask with a humble and contrite heart. We have no righteousness of our own, but Jesus was willing to die for us to provide it. He gives us clothes to cover our shame. For we are wretches in need of salvation. Do not think otherwise.

- “...and eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see.” This final metaphor of the Christian life expresses the need for the spirit of God. Without this the church is “blind” and cannot understand what is happening. The church needs the spirit to “see” the light of the gospel (Eph. 1:18, 2 Cor. 4:6). The use of the word anointing acts as a second symbolic confirmation that the subject of this phrase is the spirit of God (Is. 61:1-3/Luke 4:16-21, Acts 10:38, 2 Cor. 1:21-22, 1 John 2:21).

Amidst all the criticism and counsel to this church, the Lord points out the exceptions. *“Those whom I love...”* Yes, there are those in this church that he loves deeply. This church does have a place among the seven golden candlesticks, and the Lord will share a personal meal with those individuals who “hear” his voice open the door and he will give them the concluding promise of this message.

Those that Jesus loves he reproveth and disciplines. Those in the Laodicean period that believe the Christian life contains no trials and sacrifice and is nothing but blessings... and live accordingly... are not those that Jesus loves in this church. *“Therefore be zealous and repent.”* This is nothing different than the requirements of self-denial and daily cross bearing that Jesus sets forth from the beginning (Luke 9:23, 14:26-33). Still, he does not ask us to do anything that he has not already done (Heb. 13:13).

*A Few Thoughts from a Selection from the Laodicean Church (Revelation 3:17-20)
and from the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13)*

Jesus is **outside** at the door of the Laodicean church and asking to be let inside (3:20). While he does this with each individual member of the church, the key point here is that it is not those outside the church that are being addressed. It is **Jesus** that is outside this church and asking each one in this church to welcome him inside. We have to open the door and let him enter. What a contrast with the Philadelphian period and the open door promised to the sixth church!

Those who open the door through zeal and repentance gain a very personal experience. He provides a supper of knowledge and understanding promised for the time of his return. *“Be dressed in readiness, and keep your lamps lit. Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them. Whether he comes in the second watch, or even the third, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.”* (Luke 12:35-38)

There is a very strong connection between the Laodicean church, the passage just cited from Luke, and also the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13). Consider the parallels between them:

- ❖ In both the Revelation and Luke descriptions there is a door that Jesus knocks upon and the servants can open. In the parable in Matthew there is a door is shut after the wise virgins enter.

In the preceding sixth church in Revelation the door is already open and can't be closed. The message to the seventh church is the only other message to mention a door. However, unlike the message to the sixth or Philadelphia church with its open door, the door in the parable of the virgins – a parable that describes the period of the Laodicean church – is eventually closed.

- ❖ In all three passages there is a feast. The Luke and Revelation passages describe a feast that the Lord provides upon his return. The parable describes the greater feast when the church is gathered to heaven (cf. Rev. 19:7-9).
- ❖ In the parable of the virgins, the cry of the return of Jesus is given at midnight. In the passage in Luke, Jesus warns of his possible arrival in the second or third watch. Midnight is the time of the end of the second watch and beginning of the third watch.
- ❖ In the Luke account is an exhortation to each one to keep their lamps lit. The parable is a cautionary tale with the same message. In the parable the foolish virgins lack sufficient oil (the spirit of God) to keep their lamps (representing the scriptures)⁹⁸ fully lit. In Revelation lamps are not mentioned directly in the message to Laodicea, but this church has a lamp (4:5) and it is described as blind and in need of having the eyes anointed in order to see the light.
- ❖ The acquirement of oil by the foolish virgins of the parable is costly. They are encouraged to go and buy for themselves. In the message to the Laodicean church, the Lord encourages them to buy several things⁹⁹ including eye salve so that they may see.
- ❖ There are two groups of virgins in the parable. While two groups aren't spelled out in the message to the Laodicean church, it's the implication of (1) those who are lukewarm and rejected and (2) those who open the door to Jesus. It is also implied in the Luke passage where those the master finds on the alert when he comes are particularly blessed.
- ❖ Finally, while a white robe is only addressed in the message to the seventh church (and not the parable or the passage in Luke), another parables ties together a wedding feast with the importance of proper wedding garments (Matt. 22:11-12).

⁹⁸ Cf. Psalm 119:105.

⁹⁹ Rev. 3:18 – "...buy from Me gold... and white garments... and eye salve..."

Summary of the Message to Laodicea

Finally, a summary of the message to the church of the Laodicean period consists of some very specific advice:

- To return to the “old paths” (Jer. 6:16) of atonement through Christ and the leading of the spirit of God.
- To understand that the Christian life includes trials, discipline, and sacrifice.
- To be zealous and not discouraged.
- To challenge the spiritual malaise around them.
- To invite the Lord in for new truth and not cling to tradition as did both Catholics and Protestants in the past.

This is the time. This is the time to heed these warnings and accept these blessings. This is the message for the present day. This is the message to the last of the church just before the kingdom arrives.

Perhaps once again some song lyrics will help to summarize the extremes of the religious environment in which the Laodicea church finds itself.

From the song *Jesus He Knows Me*:

*You see the face on the TV screen coming at you every Sunday
See that face on the billboard, that man is me
On the cover of the magazine there's no question why I'm smiling
You buy a piece of paradise, you buy a piece of me
I'll get you everything you wanted, I'll get you everything you need
You don't need to believe in hereafter, just believe in me*

*'Cause Jesus he knows me, and he knows I'm right
I've been talking to Jesus all my life
Oh yes he knows me, and he knows I'm right
And he's been telling me everything is alright*

*I believe in the family with my ever loving wife beside me
But she don't know about my girlfriend or the man I met last night
Do you believe in God? 'Cause that is what I'm selling
And if you want to get to heaven, I'll see you right
You won't even have to leave your house or get outta your chair
You don't even have to touch that dial, 'cause I'm everywhere*

*'Cause Jesus he knows me, and he knows I'm right
I've been talking to Jesus all my life
Oh yes he knows me, and he knows I'm right
And he's been telling me everything's gonna be alright*

*You won't find me practicing what I'm preaching, you won't find me making no
sacrifice
But I can get you a pocketful of miracles, if you promise to be good, try to be
nice
God will take good care of you, just do as I say, don't do as I do*

*I'm counting my blessings, I've found true happiness
'Cause I'm getting richer, day by day
You can find me in the phone book, just call my toll free number
You can do it anyway you want, just do it right away
There'll be no doubt in your mind, you'll believe everything I'm saying
If you want to get closer to him, get on your knees and start paying*

*'Cause Jesus he knows me, and he knows I'm right
I've been talking to Jesus all my life
Oh yes he knows me, and he knows I'm right
And he's been telling me everything's gonna be alright*

by Collins, Rutherford, Banks

(3) The Promise to the Church – “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit with me on my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on His throne.”

One of the blessings that comes to the seventh church is the sure knowledge that now the world stands at the brink of the kingdom on earth. No longer some distant vision, the incoming kingdom is almost visible¹⁰⁰ in the re-establishment of the nation of Israel (Jer. 3:17), the bringing to light of things previously hidden in darkness (1 Cor. 4:5), and the increase of trouble in the world as the kingdom ideas of justice and equality take hold in a world still unprepared to respond without violence (Luke 21:24-26, Is. 40:3-5).

This change in government is also seen in the corresponding seventh trumpet (11:15-19) announcing that the cause of the increasing tribulation is the consequence of the fact that the rightful king is taking control of the affairs of earth (Psalm 2). The kingdom that follows will bless the world of mankind (Is. 2:2-4), and the church is offered a share in bringing this about (5:9-10, 20:6, 1:2-4).

It is this promise of participating in sharing in this glorious kingdom and the restoration of the world – so close at hand now – that is the promise to the final church of Revelation.

*He who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit
says to the churches.*

Rev. 3:22

¹⁰⁰ It even seems that the world is unknowingly being prepared for the resurrection of the dead. The ability to feed and house large populations of people, the movement to preserve the environment, the consciousness of the equality of all races and the need to work together, mass transportation, and the ability of people around the world to communicate with each other instantaneously all lay the groundwork for a kingdom on earth.

Brief Summary of the Messages and Historical Confirmations for the Seven Churches

1st Church / Ephesus – The first of the seven churches of Revelation has a name that actually means first or perhaps more accurately first in the sense of “choice”. Certainly those who lived during the apostolic period lived in a special time. Yet towards the end even this church began to lose their “first love” and drift away.

Historical confirmation is found in the position of this church as the first church, as “choice” or “special”, and as the church that tested those who claimed to be apostles and found them false. No other period historically can make these claims.

2nd Church / Smyrna – The church whose very name means bitter was a terribly persecuted church. Jesus identifies himself to them as the one “who was dead and has come to life.” To those of this church who are “faithful until death” there is a “crown of life” promised. Suffering and testing are each mentioned in the message, and tribulation is mentioned twice.

There is clear and evident historical confirmation for the prophesied persecution of this church. Also, the imagery of those who now begin to distort Christianity in this period for their own ends – the “synagogue of Satan” – is evident and contrasts unfavorably to the faithful church. Yet, the clearest historical evidence for this church is the prediction of 10 years of persecution (Diocletian / 303-313 A.D.). The Smyrna church ends precisely at 313 A.D. as the Roman Empire begins shifting from paganism to an outward and increasingly nominal Christianity.

Just two churches into the Revelation accounts of the seven churches, it is already difficult to see them as anything but a precise historical record that is written before the occurrence of the events described.

3rd Church / Pergamon – The message to the third church not only acknowledges that the Christian message is slowly being twisted by others, but now begins to criticize the church for permitting it to happen. For example Jesus twice addresses himself to the church as the one with the sword (a two-edged sword and the sword from his mouth) to emphasize the importance of the “sword” that symbolizes the Bible. Jesus also contrasts the increasing buildup of artificial authority to promises of a very personal relationship with each of his followers.

All of this tracks with the historical changes happening in the larger Christian world. As the hierarchy of the church becomes more and more entrenched as a

result of the increasing reliance on creeds and bishops and councils, the importance of the Bible as the guide to faith, knowledge, and practice begins to erode. Jesus warns of this with his references to the sword of scripture. The increase of power and position in the church is referenced in a few different ways in the message to this church, including the references to the Nicolaitans (perhaps meaning “conquerors of the laity”) and to the false prophet Balaam who prophesied for money.

Finally, a significant note is that this church suffers “where Satan dwells.” Along with the other indicators in this message, it marks a church that remains connected to the powerful religious systems developing indirectly from the original apostolic Christianity. There is no movement in this period of the church to separate from the counterfeit Christian authority “where Satan’s throne is” (cf. 2 Thess. 2:3-6).

4th Church / Thyatira – The church of the depths of the medieval period struggles at times just to maintain the foundations of a truly biblical Christianity. Yet they are praised for their devotion because of the circumstances in which they find themselves. They suffer under a powerful alliance of church and state that calls itself Christendom (or Christ’s kingdom), and they are promised that one day they will rule the nations with Christ in the true kingdom on earth.

The historical setting of this church is described in great and exacting detail. It fits the medieval period precisely, and the reference to deadly plague that falls during this period seems more than allowable as mere coincidence.

- It is the time of the corrupt woman (17:1-6, 18:2-4) who leads the people of God astray.
- It is the time of a church – the corrupt woman – that doesn’t wait like a bride for her groom (19:7-9, 21:2, Eph. 5:22-30), but instead takes matters into her own hands and commits adultery with the nations (17:2, 18:9) in a counterfeit kingdom on earth (17:18, 11:8).
- The woman is thrown onto a bed [of sickness] and her lovers also experience “great tribulation.” The “children” (or adherents) of this same adulterous church are killed by plague. The language in this instance suggests a literal pandemic and fits the singular most terrible plague in all of the history of mankind – the Black Death that erupts during this period of history.

The latter period of this church is commended over the earlier portion. This is yet another accurate portrayal of the period, because it was not until the second half of this period that the first Christian challenges to the church began (first with

Peter Waldo and the Waldensians, then John Wycliffe and the Lollards, and finally Jan Huss and the Hussites). The Waldensian Church still exists to this day, as do the Hussites in the form of the modern day Moravian Churches.

5th Church / Sardis – The church of the early Reformation is a church of change (and in this way is very different from the description of the fourth church). The Roman Catholic background of the early Reformation churches forced them to re-invent church almost from scratch. Despite the justifiable respect that the Reformation church receives in Protestant circles, the early part of this period struggled to find the balance between doctrine, the political issues it faced, and what it meant to personally follow Jesus on a daily basis.

Historically, the descriptions of this period fit the Lutheran and Reformed churches of continental Europe and the Anglican Church in England. The Lutheran stress on justification by faith led to a devaluing of the devotional and practical aspects of Christianity and the Calvinistic/Reformed dogma of election and “double predestination” and related teachings often resulted in an austere and selective outward form of Christianity. This is a church that names itself as “alive” but is really “dead” in reality. Historically, it is precisely as described in the message.

This is further illustrated in the statement of Jesus that “I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of my God.” The early Reformers made steps in the right direction, but their followers stopped short of what God intended. Although this lack of continued progress was common throughout the early Reformation churches, no place is this failure to advance more apparent than in the Anglican Church. Under Thomas Cranmer it began to make progress in the right direction. Yet change was soon stifled and dissenters (Puritans and Presbyterians and others who would come later) were eventually forced to leave the Anglican Communion.

The promise to this church of white raiment and life is for the few in Sardis (3:4) who truly live a life of devotion and obedience to God’s will. They achieve what others believe they will automatically receive without overcoming.

6th Church / Philadelphia – The church of the latter Reformation is a church without criticism anywhere in the lengthy message it receives. It is a time when the distinction between clergy and laity is increasingly diminished. It is a church of many movements and many new churches aimed at furthering Christian understanding and practice. It is a church of great missionary movements and the

spread of the Bible throughout the world. It is the time when Roman Catholicism's power to persecute others comes to an end.

The character and experiences of the sixth period of the church are depicted in great prophetic detail and are plainly evident in the historical record of the Philadelphian church.

- The name Philadelphia itself means “brotherly love” and defines the rejection of the supremacy of the clergy over the laity practiced in the Roman Church. This is a theme that began late in the fourth church and accelerated in fits and starts throughout the following periods. In the Philadelphia period it continues to grow in emphasis, as new movements underline the need for each member of the Body of Christ to take responsibility for the way they live their lives individually and as a community.
- It has an open door that cannot be closed (compare John 10:1-9 to Matthew 25:1-13). The sixth church is the period of great missionary efforts that took the Christian faith throughout the world. Places like Japan and Uruguay and Burma and Kenya were almost unknown to the Europeans of the early Reformation period, but that would increasingly change throughout the sixth church as missionary efforts spread Christianity everywhere. By the early 1800's missionary efforts were underway in nearly every corner of the world as the Bible was translated into the languages of common people everywhere.
- This church has a “little strength” through the spread of freedom of religion and freedom of speech, but even more importantly through the zeal and devotion of the church itself. (Contrast this with Sardis, the previous church, counseled to “...strengthen the things that remain...” The church of Sardis actually fulfilled this command at the very close of the fifth period and thereby helped to set the stage for the Philadelphia church.)
- The “little strength” of the sixth church is contrasted with the demise in power of the “synagogue of Satan” that was so strong just two churches previous in the Thyatira period. This synagogue of the Roman Papal Church is broken in its power over the nations during this period and must bow down to the Philadelphia church as Protestantism becomes strong and grows exponentially in numbers and influence.
- This church is also promised that it would be kept from the “hour of testing” coming upon the world. No such promise is made to the Laodicean church, and the clear implication is that those in the seventh church who follow the Philadelphia church will face the “great tribulation” coming upon the world.

- The continuing multiplication of new movements during this period continually refreshes this church with new insights into personal faith and church doctrine. Yet, each new vantage point is challenged by those that went before, and each new generation of Protestant leaders found itself forced to begin again outside the established churches. So this church is given a special promise... that they also would be pillars in the temple of God, part of the city of God or New Jerusalem, and would be known by the name of God and of Jesus.

The history of the sixth church identifies it with the later Reformation period when through the open door of the high-calling of God reaches throughout the world, when the power of the Roman Church to persecute is broken, and yet before the time of the great tribulation comes upon the world. One church left. Ours.

7th Church / Laodicea – The church of the last days is largely the church of hypocrisy and blindness, the church of spiritual poverty amidst material riches and outward success, the church of superficiality and sensationalism without the sacrifice and repentance and zeal of the earlier churches. Yet there are exceptions. *“Those whom I love, I rebuke and chasten.”* Those who open the door to Jesus will find riches of knowledge and of a closer relationship with the Lord.

The history of this church to the present day is the history of those clinging to the faith in an increasingly secular world.

The history of this church to the present day is the history of those clinging to the truth and authority of the scriptures in an age of relativism.

The history of this church to the present day is the history of faithful people during an age of “religion as you like it” with no real commitment. An age of lukewarm Christianity. An age of hypocrisy.

The history of this church to the present day is the history of a church surrounded by earthly riches and the outward trappings of spiritual success, but a church that is “wretched” and “impoverished”. A consumer Christianity.

The history of this church to the present day is the history of a church at the end of this age where Jesus is outside the door... outside the power structure of the institutional church (Rev. 18:2-4)... much as he was also on the outside also at the beginning of this age when he challenged the leadership of the Jewish religious structure (Matt. 23rd chapter, 1 Peter 4:17).

The history of this church to the present day is the history of those for whom the door to the high-calling is still open, but a door that will close forever with the end of this church (Matt. 25:10).

The history of this church to the present day is the history of Christians living in increasingly trouble times with prophecies of the last days being fulfilled around them, pictured as Jesus dines with them and serves them “food at the proper time” (Matt. 24:45, Luke 12:42).¹⁰¹

The history of this church to the present day is the history of people in an increasingly insecure world, yet with the promise to the faithful people of God to reign with Christ over the world when the incoming kingdom of God arrives in power and authority.

Everything in the language of this message shrieks out – to those that have an ear to hear – that we are living in the time of the Laodicean church.

¹⁰¹ Or “meat in due season” (Matt. 24:45 KJV).

Other Examples of the Seven Churches in the Bible

If the seven churches of Revelation are representative of the entire church and its history on earth, then it would not be surprising to find other illustrations of the seven churches elsewhere in scripture. A few small possibilities before moving on to several large and more significant examples:

- It's already been noted in Revelation that the candelabrum of the tabernacle and temple with its seven branches represents the seven churches (1:20). The light from the seven candles is also symbolic and represents the light of the spirit of God to the seven churches (4:5, 5:6).
- After the priests received atonement and are consecrated to God, they are to remain in the doorway of the tabernacle for seven days (Lev. 8:33-35) representing the seven periods of the church.
- In Ezekiel's temple (Ezek. 43:18-27), after the offering of a bullock (Jesus) there is a goat offered daily for seven days. After the seven days the people's offering can be received. So after Jesus completes the atonement on the cross, and after the church also sacrifice their lives for seven days representing the seven churches, then the offerings of the world in the kingdom are accepted represented by the following eighth day.
- It is thought that the historical fulfillment of Micah 5:5 will have a prophetic fulfillment in our day. Without a lot of explanation for this interpretation at the moment, consider the Assyrians to represent the nations of the non-Christian world. When Israel is attacked at the climax of Armageddon, the seven shepherds represent the church and the eight princes of men represent the ancient prophets and faithful of the past before Jesus.

Whether or not these are truly examples of the seven churches of Revelation, they are reasonable, although perhaps not always provable to the same degree in all four of these examples. However, there seem to be other illustrations of the seven churches with more detailed descriptions of these seven historical periods of the church. Three of these are briefly considered next. These other examples are:

- 1) The Seven Parables of Matthew Chapter Thirteen
- 2) The Seven Examples of Wisdom in James 3:17
- 3) The Seven Major Prophetic Books of the Old Testament Tanakh

(1) The Seven Parables of Matthew Chapter Thirteen and the Seven Churches

There are seven or eight parables in the 13th chapter of Matthew (although this depends on whether you define Matt. 13:52 as an eighth “parable” or a “saying”). Either way the seven parables found in Matthew 13:3-50 are parallel depictions of the seven churches of Revelation.¹⁰²

Note also that the first parable ends with the expression, “He who has ears, let him hear.” This expression is nearly identical to the one that closes *every one* of the seven churches. Undoubtedly, a big hint that should not be ignored (Matt. 13:9-17 and see also Matt. 13:43 which concludes the interpretation of the second parable).

Below is a brief summary of the parallels between the seven parables and the seven churches.¹⁰³

(1) *The Parable of the Sower* (Matt. 13:3-9, 18-23). This parable represents the beginning of the Gospel Age and connects us to the 1st church of Revelation (Ephesus). The gospel is being sown for the first time, and in some individuals it bears fruit. Compare it also the evangelism of the gospel as described in the first seal of Revelation (Rev. 6:1-2).

(2) *The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares* (Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43). This parable represents the period after the apostles pass from the scene (“while men slept” KJV, YLT, many others) as the church begins to gradually fall away from the faith and the “tares” or nominal Christians enter the church. This connects the parable to the 2nd church of Revelation (Smyrna) and its reference to “...those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.”

(3) *The Parable of the Mustard Tree* (Matt. 13:31-32). This parable represents the growth of the institutional church, which gives shelter to the birds of the air. Whether a bird is a positive or negative symbol depends on type of bird and context (cf. Rev. 19:17-18, 21 for an apparently negative example). Here it most likely represents those who take advantage of the growth of the church, i.e., the clergy class that is also specifically described in the message to the 3rd church of Revelation (Pergamon).

¹⁰² Note that these seven parables demonstrate the same four to three split seen in the seven churches, seals, and trumpets. This is illustrated in the earlier chart that precedes the commentary on Revelation chapters two and three. In the case of these seven parables, the first four parables are given to the public (Matt. 13:2 & 34) and the last three are given to the disciples alone (Matt. 13:36 & 51).

¹⁰³ While these parables apply across the entire history of the church in the same way as the messages to the seven churches, yet like these seven parables also bear a striking correspondence to the same seven consecutive time periods in the history of the church.

(4) *The Parable of the Woman and the Leaven* (Matt. 13:33). This fourth parable pictures the depths of the medieval church and counterfeit kingdom of Christ. As in the fourth church of Revelation (Thyatira) a woman is singled out unfavorably. This woman has leaven (symbol of sin and error)¹⁰⁴ that she mixes secretly in three measures of flour and corrupts all of the food, or as described in the message to the fourth church, they “...eat things sacrificed to idols.” The number three is a symbol of the atonement,¹⁰⁵ and the Roman Church corrupted the doctrine of justification by faith with a works theology and the doctrine of the Mass.¹⁰⁶

(5) *The Parable of the Hidden Treasure* (Matt. 13:44). This parable takes us to the early Reformation period and the public rejection of the doctrine of the Mass. The field is the world as in the earlier parable of the wheat and the tares (13:38) and the man who buys the field is Jesus who pays for it with his life or “all that he has.” This example of Jesus in the parable parallels the message to the 5th church of Revelation (Sardis) through a call to move beyond merely dead faith to action.

(6) *The Parable of the Pearl of Great Price* (Matt. 13:45-46). This parable takes us to the later Reformation period pictured in the 6th church of Revelation (Philadelphia), a church of single-minded purpose seeking just one thing... the gospel message and its worldwide evangelism (the pearl of great price).

Notice how similar the fifth and sixth parables are. This should not be surprising assuming they both collectively represent the entire Reformation period.

(7) *The Parable of the Dragnet* (Matt. 13:47-50). This parable takes us to the end of the age. This end of the age is already described in similar language in another parable in this chapter, saying, “...the harvest is the end of the age...” (Matt. 13:39) in which a separation¹⁰⁷ takes place, just as it does “at the end of the age...” (Matt. 13:49) in the parable of the wheat and the tares. Whereas the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares describes the entire age, this parable takes place exclusively at the end of the age and therefore connects it with the 7th and last church of Revelation (Laodicea).

Collectively these seven parables match the history and experiences of the seven churches of Revelation in the exact same sequence and with similar language.

¹⁰⁴ Matt. 16:6 & 12, Luke 12:1, 1 Cor. 5:6-8, Lev. 2:11)

¹⁰⁵ If this isn't readily apparent, just reflect on it a moment. Three denials by Peter, three times Jesus prays in Gethsemane, thirty pieces of silver, trials in three locations, three women named Mary at the cross, three languages for the sign on the cross, three crosses, three days in the grave, etc., etc., etc.

¹⁰⁶ The historic Roman Catholic doctrines of original sin and the sacrament of the Mass state that Jesus dies only for original sin and not those sins committed daily... and that he is crucified again in the “Sacrifice of the Mass” for the sins of the past week or however long since the previous Mass. This is why the Roman Church calls it a “mortal sin” to miss Mass.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Rev. 18:2-4.

(2) *The Seven Examples of Wisdom in James 3:17 and the Seven Churches*

The seven characteristics of the “wisdom from above” are the antithesis of the experiences of the seven churches of Revelation and the same order in James in which they occur in Revelation. The wisdom from above is:

(1) *First pure*, – the experience of the first church (Ephesus) is the challenge of “...evil men...” and “...those who call themselves apostles, and they are not...” or the challenge to remain pure against opposition.

(2) *then peaceable*, – the experience of the second church (Smyrna) is one of persecution and martyrdom and far from peaceable circumstances.

(3) *gentle*, – the experience of the third church (Pergamon) is one of increasing power in the hands of church leadership and persecution of those who disagreed.

(4) *reasonable* [or *willing to yield*], – there is certainly nothing in the experience of the fourth church (Thyatira) in the nature of a desire by those outside the faithful church to co-exist. The Inquisition, crusades, and bible burning became the order of the day.

(5) *full of mercy and good fruits*, – the experience of the fifth church (Sardis) dealt with the supremacy of doctrine over acts of public and personal works and character. It lacked a widespread mercy and fruitage of the spirit.

(6) *unwavering* [preferable translation *impartial* in many translations], – the experience of the sixth church (Philadelphia) is one of a party spirit by denomination and of persecution of those seeking a better understanding of the scriptures and the truest practice of the Christian life.

(7) *without hypocrisy*, – the experience of the seventh church (Laodicea) is one of lukewarm Christianity that is neither cold nor hot. A Christianity that believes itself to be rich, but a Christianity that is blind to its faults.

Point by point these seven traits of wisdom track the seven churches in the same order of occurrence and provide us with additional lessons for the Christian life drawn from these seven periods of time.

(3) The Seven Major Prophetic Books of the Old Testament and the Seven Churches

The Tanakh or Old Testament (the Bible of the Hebrews) was and is subdivided into three parts called the Torah (first five books of the Mosaic Law and early history of the Jewish people), the Nevi'im (the prophets), and the Ketuvim (the historical writings and poetic/wisdom books). There are seven major prophetic books in the Nevi'im or prophets:¹⁰⁸

- 1) Joshua
- 2) Judges
- 3) Samuel (I and II)
- 4) Kings (I and II)
- 5) Isaiah
- 6) Jeremiah
- 7) Ezekiel

...plus the Book of the [twelve] Minor Prophets (that are identical with the current books of twelve prophets that close out nearly all modern Bibles today).

The historical time periods already linked elsewhere to the seven churches of Revelation also seem to dovetail very nicely with the overall structure and themes of the books of the seven major prophets. This does not mean that everything that occurs in these books is typical or prophetic of the events of the seven churches. It just means that the overall themes of the book are parallel to the churches of Revelation. Consider the following similarities:

(1) The list of major prophets begins with the book of Joshua (Yeshua / Jesus) representing the savior at the first advent. Like the Old Testament Joshua, it is Jesus who opens the way to the land of promise and delivers the church from the enemies who oppose her.

(2) At the same time the last of these seven major prophetic books parallels the end of the New Testament. Ezekiel and Revelation both conclude with a final prophetic time of trouble followed by the Messianic Kingdom pictured first in a new building (Ezekiel's Temple / the New Jerusalem) and then by rivers of waters of life with trees of healing for the nations.

¹⁰⁸ If the first four books of this list do not seem like “prophetic” books, this is because the meaning of the words “prophet” and “prophetic” have changed over time to mean (only) a foretelling of future events. In both the Old and New Testaments the word “prophecy” had a much broader meaning and related to any public exhortation or admonition (written or spoken) to God’s people.

(3) As noted in the chart on the fours and threes of Revelation that immediately precedes the commentary on Revelation chapters two and three, the order of the seven major prophetic books breaks down naturally into the first four books (called the “Former Prophets” and more historical in nature) and the last three books (called the “Latter Prophets” and written more in the nature of a foretelling of future events).

This structure parallels the same division between the first four and last three churches, seals, and trumpets of Revelation, as well as the first four and last three parables of Matthew chapter thirteen. So the seven major prophetic books of the Old Testament are grouped into a set of four and then a set of three in the same way that the seven churches, seals, and trumpets of Revelation are divided.

(4) The seven major prophetic books in a broad sense seem to parallel the experiences of the seven churches.

- Joshua / Ephesus – the church goes forth to conquer¹⁰⁹ having themselves been led by Joshua / Jesus to the promised land through "a new and living way" by means of Christ's death and resurrection.
- Judges / Smyrna – the church meets resistance, but in the same way Israel was led by judges, the church is led by the early church fathers raised up by God to defend and strengthen the church against the persecution of the Roman Empire and the heresy of the Gnostics.
- Samuel / Pergamon – the church is not satisfied with God's arrangements and looks for stronger leadership in the same way Israel asks for a king to rule them like the other nations.
- Kings / Thyatira – as Israel becomes ruled by kings, the Roman church reaches the height of its power and authority.
- Isaiah / Sardis – the spread of the Reformation with its emphasis on salvation through faith in Christ without the need of a priesthood, without dependence on good works, and without the sacrifice of the Mass. It is from Isaiah that some of the most direct scriptures on the life and sacrifice of Jesus are found including Isaiah's 53rd chapter. Isaiah also describes the true kingdom of God at length in contrast to the Roman Church's assumption that it is the kingdom of God on earth.
- Jeremiah / Philadelphia – the church prophesizes of coming judgment against a symbolic Babylon and predicts the release of the people of God

¹⁰⁹ Although the interpretation of the seven seals varies, the rapid expansion of the early church seems appropriate for Rev. 6:2.

from Babylon's captivity (Revelation 3:9, 18:4). It is during this period that the Roman church is stripped of its civil power by Napoleon and the French Revolution. Near the close of this period the Second Advent movement restores the prophetic belief in the personal return of Jesus and a coming time of judgment on the world. Like Jeremiah the Protestant church is persecuted for its message of warning.

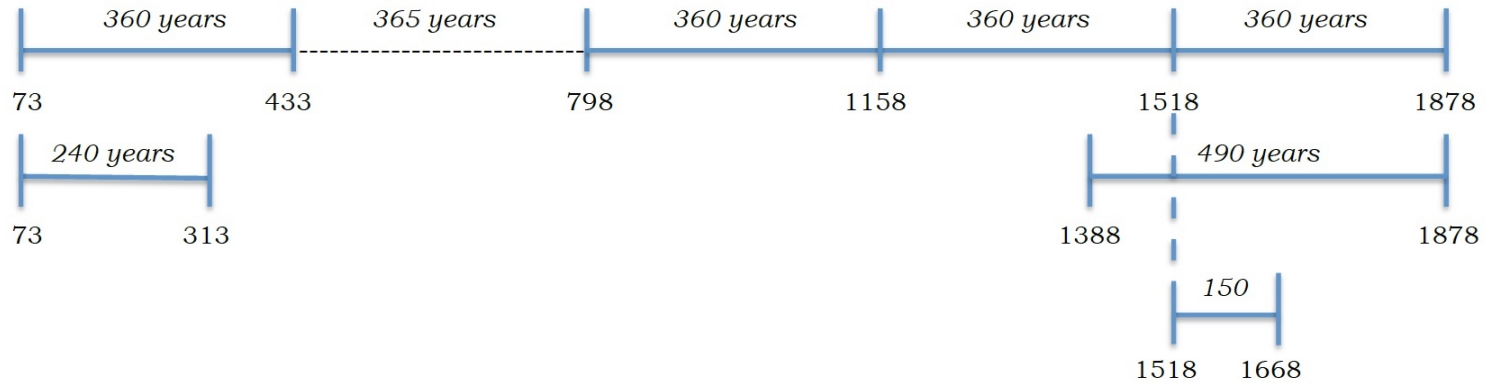
- Ezekiel / Laodicea – Ezekiel's prophecy represents the closing events of the gospel age, describing the restoration of Israel, the beginning of the time of trouble, and the following blessings of the kingdom age. It represents the church at the final crossroads of church history more appropriately than any of the preceding books.

Seven Churches, Seals, and Trumpets (Chronological Chart 1)

A chart that gives a pictorial image of the periods of the seven churches with some suggested dates and other data is shown on the following page. This may help some readers organize the preceding information.

360 Year and Other Periods in the History of the Gospel / Christian Age

“...your deeds of **late** are greater than at **first**... and I gave her [the corrupt church] **time** [360 year period] to repent [followed by an equal period of consequences]...” (Revelation 3:18-20, 21-23)



Explanation of the Dates:

- 73 AD – The fall of Masada and end of the Jewish harvest period (40 years from 33 AD to 73 AD) / Smyrna begins.
- 313 AD – Edict of Milan (persecution ends) following seven X forty or 280 years from crucifixion. (Arius and Council of Nicea in 325 AD after 252 years from 73 AD.)
- 433 AD – Patrick begins his ministry (circa 431-433) / Pergamos begins.
- 798 AD – Beginning of the events that lead to the coronation of Charlemagne by the pope in 800 AD / Thyatira begins.
- 1158 AD – Beginning of Peter Waldo’s ministry (shortly before 1160) – “time to repent” (360 years) at an end.
- 1388 AD – Publication of Wycliffe’s completed Bible.
- 1518 AD – Luther at the Diet of Augsburg / Reformation advances / Sardis begins (start of 150 years – Rev. 9:5 & 10).
- 1668 AD – William Penn writes most important tracts – imprisoned for his beliefs / Philadelphia begins.
- 1878 AD – Restoration of Israel begins / Harvest Work / 1335 years ends in 1874 (Dan. 12:12).

A 365 day Solar Year representing the sun is a symbol of Jesus and the Church (Psalm 46:4-5, Malachi 4:2, Matthew 13:43, 2 Peter 1:19, Revelation 16:12, and many others). The sun is also pictured in the innermost dimensions of Ezekiel’s Temple (Ezekiel 41:12-15), the dimensions of the Great Pyramid (Antechamber and King’s Chamber, cf. Isaiah 19:19-20), and in the outer dimensions of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:16). The Celtic Cross ~ symbol of the Celtic church (433-798 AD) ~ is the sun representing heaven (deliverance) bisected by the cross of the atonement for man.

Revelation Chapters Four and Five ~ the Throne Scene

The Structure of Chapters Four and Five

It is easiest to think of the first section of these chapters (verses 4:2b-7) that follow the introduction (4:1-2a) as if looking at a still life painting. Another large part of these chapters is similar to sitting in a worship service where praises to God are offered (4:8-11 and 5:8-14). Finally, between the two sections of praise there is an action sequence where specific events take place (5:1-7).

The structure of the chapters can then be summarized as follows:

- ❖ 4:1-2a – Introduction (John invited to see what follows)
- ❖ 4:2b-7 – The Throne Scene (like a picture on the wall)
- ❖ 4:8-11 – The Five Praises / Part One (first two praises of worship)
- ❖ 5:1-7 – The Search to Open the Seven Seals of the Scroll (activity sequence)
- ❖ 5:8-14 – The Five Praises / Part Two (last three praises of worship)

A Door Open in Heaven

There is an introduction that reveals the circumstances of the vision through which John is able to visualize the throne of heaven in symbols (4:1-2a). This introduction precedes the vision itself. As throughout the rest of Revelation, we should not think of this as if heaven literally has doors that open or that the rest of the description in these chapters is a literal description of heaven. The scriptures are clear that the reality of heaven is indescribable and impossible for us to understand at this time (1 Jo. 3:2-3, 2 Cor. 12:1-4).

The introduction begins with the expression, “After these things...” as though this is an event that follows the completion of the seven churches that precede it.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ A number of interpreters of Revelation believe this verse describes the rapture after the seven periods of the church on earth in the preceding verses. While this might initially appear to make sense in a general way, it poses a few problems. (1) As noted above, the language of the first couple verses is reminiscent of other passages that clearly refer to visions and not an actual visit to heaven. (2) As noted above the “door” is the door to enter into the Christian life in the present and not a door to heaven. An open door is not a symbol of the rapture. (3) The time setting of these two chapters [chapters four and five] and those that follow seem to conflict with the idea of a rapture of the church as this time.

All of this is based on the assumption that the “rapture” (not a scriptural word) takes all of the church to heaven at once, a theory with some scriptural challenges... some just within Revelation itself.

However, a number of translators outside the NASB express this phrase as simply, “After this...”¹¹¹ meaning simply, “the next thing I saw” which is a common way of introducing new visions in Revelation (cf. 7:1, 15:5, 18:1).

This same thought – that chapters four and five follow the events of the preceding two chapters in chronological order – might also be concluded from the phraseology at the intersection of the first and second verses. However, here the wording is even further complicated.¹¹² The transitional language between verses one and two might be better worded as, “I will show you what must take place. After this, immediately, I was in the spirit...”^{113, 114}

John is being invited to see a new vision and not a continuing vision from the earlier chapters. This new vision requires him to “come up higher” to gain a heavenly perspective above the limited view of this world. Therefore John must be “in the spirit” to perceive this vision. This is not inventive interpretation, but instead is strikingly similar to 21:10 which says, “And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city...” In this verse just cited, John is not seeing a literal city, but instead he is seeing a symbolic vision of the New Jerusalem that is still far in the future from John’s day.¹¹⁵

The door itself is also a symbol (John 10:1-9, Luke 13:24-25) of the opportunity to engage in the Christian life. When the door is open, the high calling (Phil. 3:14, Col. 3:1) to heaven is open *in the present life*. When the door is closed, the opportunity for the high calling is closed, also (Matt. 25:1-13).

This interpretation of the introduction (4:1-2a) to these chapters fits well in the immediate context, but it also fits within the larger context found elsewhere in Revelation and in other books, also. A comparison of 4:1-2a with three other passages of scripture is shown in the following table:

¹¹¹ See the NIV, KJV, many others.

¹¹² Particularly by the erroneous addition of the word “and” at the start of verse two in some later manuscripts and older translations. Virtually everyone now agrees that the manuscript evidence supports deleting the word “and” altogether at the start of 4:2.

¹¹³ A similar phrase occurs at the intersection of verses 1-2: “...I will show you what must take place after these things. Immediately I was in the spirit...” This is the choice of most translators, but a few suggest the translation should be restructured as, “I will show you what must take place. After this, immediately I was in the spirit...”. See for example *The Emphasized Bible* (J.B. Rotherham), *The Emphatic Diaglott* (Wilson), the *RVIC2000* (RV plus Parkinson in footnote), and the *Pulpit Commentary*.

¹¹⁴ The description of being “in the spirit” is also a common introduction to new visions (cf. 1:10-12, 17:3, 21:10).

¹¹⁵ Although the story of Revelation itself moves forward in time, John himself does not leave the Isle of Patmos (Rev. 1:9-12) and travel in time or geographical location to another place. Perhaps the clearest example of this is the description of the angel in Rev. 17:10-12, placing John still within the timeframe of the Roman Empire.

Rev. 4:1-2a	Rev. 1:10-12	Mark 1:9-12	Ezekiel 1:1
After this I looked, and behold, a door open in heaven...	Then I turned to see...	...He [Jesus] saw the heavens opening...	...the heavens were opened...
...and the first voice which I had heard, like a trumpet speaking with me...	...and I hear behind me a loud voice like a trumpet... ...the voice that was speaking with me...	...and a voice came out of the heavens...	...heard a voice speaking. [1:28]
...said, 'Come up here, and I will show you what must take place.		[river Jordan]	[river Chebar] ...throne, high up [1:26]
Immediately after this I was in the spirit...	I was in the spirit on the Lord's day...	...and the spirit like a dove descending upon him...	...there the hand of the lord came upon him.
...and behold, a throne standing in heaven...			...and I saw visions of God. ...above the expanse... throne... [1:26]

As can be seen above, there are several other passages that are clearly visions of God and of heaven, and which are never intended to be taken as literal descriptions. This will become even more obvious in the next section of Revelation describing the throne scene.

The Throne Scene (Revelation 4:2b-7)

This section of the chapter is solely a description of God and things associated with Him. Due to the exclusive focus on imagery in these verses, the most understandable way of relating this section to our minds is simply to list the various symbols and define them.

However, although chapters four and five of Revelation are commonly known as the “throne scene”, the throne itself is never actually described in these chapters. The throne occurs a number of other places in Revelation besides these two chapters,¹¹⁶ but the only place in Revelation that offers any description of the throne is in 20:11 where it is pictured as “a great white throne”. The greatness of this throne is quite self-explanatory and the whiteness of the throne illustrates the righteousness of the one that sits on it.

The One sitting on the throne “was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance...” There must be some significance to the meaning of these stones if they are used to picture God Himself.

- *Jasper* is opaque, multi-colored with various primary and secondary colors, and is marbled with unlimited patterns and designs. This seems to be the perfect illustration of God. There are way too many facets to God than can be illustrated with a single color or design. So why another gem?
- *Sardius/Carnelian*¹¹⁷ is red and therefore relates to blood and to sacrifice (John 6:52-59, Lev. 17:11)... and by extension to love and forgiveness, also. The significance of the use of the stone is better understood after considering the next symbol(s).

“... and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.”

- *Rainbow* is a symbol that relates to a promise or more specifically perhaps a covenant with humanity (Gen. 9:13).
- *Emerald* is a green-colored transparent gemstone and connects to life that is seen throughout the earth in the green chlorophyll of plants drawing energy from the sun and in the same way that trees (particularly evergreen trees) are a symbol of everlasting life.¹¹⁸

Stacking these four symbols together, we see our Lord pictured in symbol as vast and complex (jasper). He is also concerned for us and for the smallest of things like the sparrow (Luke 12:6-7), and so He is also pictured by sardius for love and sacrifice. The emerald rainbow suggests that God covenants with us to give everlasting life to the human race. Putting the red stone and the emerald rainbow together conveys a visual synopsis of God’s plan of sacrificial atonement and everlasting life... the foundations of His plan from creation (5:9-10, 13, 13:8 NIV).

¹¹⁶ For other occurrences of “throne” see Rev. 1:4, 3:21 [cf. 20:4], 6:16, 7:9-11, 15, 17, 8:3, [12:5], 14:3, 16:17 [cf. 16:10], 19:4-5, 20:11-12, 22:1-3.

¹¹⁷ Carnelian is the modern name for Sard or Sardius. The stone is reddish and partly translucent.

¹¹⁸ See for examples: Ps. 1:3 / Ezek. 47:12 / Rev. 22:2, Ps. 92:12-15, Is. 55:12-13, Prov. 11:30, Rev. 2:7, 22:14, 19.

The *Twenty-Four Elders*¹¹⁹ are the next symbol and they are combined with *thrones, white robes, and golden crowns*.

The term “elders” implies something with age or antiquity. There appear to be only a couple choices that combine both the number twenty-four with the word “elders” suggesting age.

One interpretation suggests that these 24 elders are connected with the 24 courses (24 “turns” or yearly two week periods of service) of the priesthood found primarily in the Old Testament (1 Chronicles 23:1 - 24:19, 2 Chronicles 8:14, Ezra 6:18, and Luke 1:5-10 and 23). Thus the “elders” would represent the predestined nature of the church (Rom. 8:29-30).¹²⁰ There is a certain appeal to this popular interpretation, but there are also a number of problems with this viewpoint.¹²¹

Still others have suggested that the 24 elders represent the angels or only certain angels, but no one has put forward any direct or indirect link between angels and the 24 elders.

Another suggestion – and one that is favored here – is that the 24 elders represent the final arrangement of the books of the Hebrew Old Testament.¹²² The number of books here differs from modern Christian Bibles because books like Kings, Chronicles, Samuel, etc. were each considered one book and the “minor prophets” after Daniel were considered one book, etc.

¹¹⁹ The 24 elders are found in the following verses in Revelation: (1) as 24 elders (4:4, 10, 5:8, 14, 11:16, and 19:4) and (2) individually and collectively unnumbered (5:5, 11, 7:11, 13, 14:3).

¹²⁰ Not predestined as individuals in the extreme Calvinistic model, but predestined as an intentional group selected by God. He planned for the church (1 Pet. 2:9-10, Eph. 1:4-14, 3:8-11, 1 Cor. 2:6-8), but He calls its members selectively and individually (1 Cor. 1:26-29, Acts 16:14, James 2:5) and they must be faithful in following Jesus (1 Jo. 2:24 NIV, 2 Jo. 1:8-9, Rev. 2:10, 17:14, 2 Tim. 2:12-13, Heb. 3:14, etc.).

¹²¹ The difficulty of assigning the 24 elders in some manner to the church or to individuals in the church like the apostles has a number of complications, as follows:

- (1) There are also 24 courses of “singers” in the Old Testament (1 Chron. 25th chapter). If the 24 courses of the priesthood represent a predestined plan for the church, then the 24 courses of the singers are left missing and unexplained.
- (2) The 24 elders “cast their crowns before the throne” (4:10) when in just the preceding chapter the church is admonished to keep their crowns (3:11).
- (3) They appear in association with the church in various passages. For example in 5:8-10 they are mentioned in context with the saints who are a separate group. Of course, this definition of the 24 elders describes them as representing a predestined “office” rather than the church itself, but the office seems to be exactly what is described in 5:9-10 separately from the 24 elders. Again in 14:1-4 the 24 elders are described as separate from the church. Even there the idea of an “office” is already reflected in the limited number of 144,000... whether or not we assume that 144,000 is the literal number of the group or only a representative number.

There are other reasons to think that the 24 elders represent the final complete number of books in the Hebrew Old Testament. Other reasons for thinking of this as a preferred interpretation can be found in the body of the discussion below on the 24 elders.

¹²² In Revelation 12:14 the woman (the church) is given two wings (Old and New Testaments) of the “great eagle” (God in His wisdom is the great far-seeing eagle). In the throne scene in Revelation chapters 4 and 5, each of the four living ones has six wings equaling 24 wings altogether (4:8). Since there are 24 elders in these chapters (and this is only other reference to 24 in the throne scene or elsewhere in Revelation as a whole besides the 24 elders), it is suggestive that the 24 elders are connected to the 24 wings and may represent individual books of the Bible (the Old Testament in this case).

Originally there were only 22 books to the Hebrew Old Testament matching the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. However, during the same time period that the New Testament was being assembled, the number of books in the Hebrew Old Testament was unwittingly being revised by the Jewish leadership to 24 books... and thus matching the number of letters in the Greek alphabet of the New Testament. These 24 books are still the number of books listed today in most versions of the Tanakh (i.e., in the Jewish arrangement of the Old Testament).

One reason to think the 24 elders represent the Old Testament books is the change in what they sing. The 24 elders first sing in 4:11, but then after the appearance of the Lamb in 5:5-8 they fall down to worship along with the four living ones and sing once again. However, the second time they sing, they sing a “new song” (5:8-10). This new song is the new understanding of their prophecies that follows the appearance of the Lamb and the opening of the door to the “high calling” (John 10:1-9, 1 Pet. 1:9-10).

As will be seen when the five praises are considered, these five praises follow a sequence from before creation to eternity. The point at which the 24 elders sing a “new song” is at the time of Jesus and the beginning of the church.

The rest of the description of the 24 elders then follows appropriately.¹²³ The use of *elders* suggests something from antiquity. The *thrones* represent a position of judgment. The principles of the books of the Old Testament and the Law they contain determine the rightness and wrongness of any course. The *golden crowns* represent the rightful authority of the books of the Old Testament and the principles they contain. The *white robes* represent the purity of God’s word in the Old Testament. All of these characteristics of the scriptures symbolized by the 24 elders can be found repeatedly in Psalm 119 as well as many other places.

The Seven Spirits and Seven Lamps and Seven Eyes and Seven Horns

The *seven spirits* are symbolic and are further described by two other symbols as *seven lamps* (4:5) and *seven eyes* (5:6). These two additional symbols represent more detailed aspects of the seven spirits of God.

The seven spirits illustrate the seven messages to the churches very well (cf. 1 John 4:1-6). This is evident from the seven lamps of fire, which is one of the

¹²³ See also Zechariah 6:9-15 where the activities of the four Hebrews seem to parallel those of the 24 elders in Rev. 5:9-10 & 4:4.

symbols applied to them. If the *seven golden lampstands* represent the seven churches as already noted in the preceding chapters, then the *seven lamps of fire* represent the light of the Holy Spirit that comes forth from the seven churches (Mark 4:21-23, Acts 2:3, 1 Thess. 5:19).

The *seven eyes* represent a different aspect of the same thing. Here they appear to represent the searching aspect of the Holy Spirit looking for God's people (John 4:23) as well as searching the heart (Rom. 8:27) and searching out the meaning of the Word of God (1 Cor. 2:10-16).

All of these symbols and their meanings – eyes, light, and the spirit – are linked compactly together in two verses in Ephesians (1:17-18): "... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know..."

To summarize so far, there are *seven spirits* of God that picture the messages sent to the seven churches. The seven spirits are represented by *seven lamps* that picture the light and understanding shining forth from each church by means of their respective messages. The seven spirits are also represented by *seven eyes* or the penetrating nature of the spirit sent throughout the earth to search out God's people in each period of the church... and to search their own minds and hearts to help them to know God.

These and other various symbols related to the spirit are intermixed throughout the scriptures as a means to convey the breadth of activity of the spirit of God. The following chart will show how all of these various qualities of the spirit are mingled together to provide us with an all-encompassing overview of the nature and character of the spirit of God.

The Spirit of God – Comparative Chart – Lamps, Doves, Eyes

Song of Solomon Revelation 11		Zechariah 3/4	John	Revelation 4/5	
Spirit		“Not by power or by might, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.” 4:6	“I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven...” 1:32	“...seven lamps of fire... the seven spirits of God... ...seven eyes... the seven spirits sent out into all the earth.” 4:5 / 5:6	
Doves	“His eyes are like doves...” 5:12 “...my darling, your eyes are like doves.” 1:15 / 4:1		“I beheld the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven...” 1:32		
Eyes	“His eyes are like doves...” 5:12 “...my darling, your eyes are like doves.” 1:15 / 4:1	“...seven eyes...” “...the eyes of the Lord that range to and fro throughout the earth.” 3:9 / 4:10		“...seven lamps of fire... the seven spirits of God... ...seven eyes... the seven spirits sent out into all the earth.” 4:5 / 5:6	
Lamp		“...lampstand ...and its seven lamps...” 4:2		“...seven lamps of fire... the seven spirits of God... ...seven eyes... the seven spirits sent out into all the earth.” 4:5 / 5:6	“...two witnesses...” “These are the two olive trees and two lampstands...” 11:3 and 4
Olive Trees		“...two olive trees...” “...two anointed ones... standing by the Lord of the whole earth.” 4:3 / 4:11-14			“...two witnesses...” “These are the two olive trees and two lampstands...” 11:3 and 4

Notice how the various symbols and terms are interchangeable throughout the passages.

Significance of the Chart:

The chart illustrates how the Old and New Testaments supply the Holy Spirit enlightening the church throughout all of the church's time on earth.

Significance of the Symbols:

Dove(s) = the Holy Spirit (its peaceable nature)

(Olive) Oil = the Holy Spirit (its elective and unifying purpose)

Eyes = Insight and Understanding

Two Olive Trees = the Old and New Testaments (providing the Holy Spirit)

Two Lampstands = the Old and New Testaments (giving light or knowledge)

Two Anointed Ones = the Old and New Testaments (the authority of the scriptures)

Seven (in Revelation) = the Seven Periods in the History of the Church

Seven Lampstands/Candlesticks = the Seven Churches

Seven Lamps of Fire = the Seven Messages to the Seven Churches (the illumination)

Seven Spirits of God = the Seven Messages to the Seven Churches (the messages themselves)

Seven Eyes = God's Oversight and Providence and Guidance Throughout Seven Periods of History

Scriptural Notes on Interpretation:

(1) *Oil* = spirit, see Isaiah 61:1-3 / Luke 4:16-21, Heb. 1:9, 2 Cor. 2:21.

(2) *Lamp/Lampstand* = the Word of God and by extension the church who has the word of God in them, see Psalm 119:105, 2 Peter 1:19, Revelation 1:20.

(3) *Eyes* in relationship to the Holy Spirit, see Ephesians 1:17 and 18.

(4) *Two Witnesses / Moses* = Old Testament Law, see Heb. 3:5, Matt. 23:1-3.

(5) *Two Witnesses / Elijah* = John the Baptist = New Testament Church, see Malachi 4:5 and 6, Matt. 17:10-13.

(Compare the acts of Moses and Elijah listed in the preceding passages with the description of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:6.)

The *seven horns* are the last symbol related (indirectly) to the seven spirits. Horns represent powers. See for example 17:12 where the ten horns represent ten kings or kingdoms.¹²⁴ Yet the seven horns in 5:6 are connected directly to Jesus. They can only represent one thing, and that is the seven churches of Revelation who will also one day be kings and priests to God and sit on thrones (3:21, 20:4).

¹²⁴ Cf. also Dan. 8:3-5 and 20-21 and many other examples.

The Four Faces of God on the Throne

“...and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living ones full of eyes in front and behind.”
Revelation 4:6

Among the symbols used in these chapters is a description of “four living ones” who are around the throne and on the throne at the same time (4:6, 5:6). Their position on the throne establishes that they represent God in some way.

Psalm 89:14 suggests that God has four primary character attributes: “Justice and judgment are the foundation of Your throne; mercy and truth go before Your face.” God is so much greater than this simple summary, but He has simplified His characteristics so that we can better understand Him.

Put in more modern language, these four characteristics would be defined as Wisdom, Justice, Love, and Power.

“...and before the throne there was, as it were, a sea of glass like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living ones full of eyes in front and behind. And the first living one was like a lion, and the second living one like a bullock, and the third living one had a face like that of a man, and the fourth living was like a flying eagle.” Revelation 4:6-7

The four “living ones” in Revelation picture the same four attributes of God from Ps. 89:14 that in Revelation are described in symbolic form, as follows:

Lion – **Power** – Judges 14:14 and 18, Proverbs 30:30, Revelation 5:5 (“*has overcome*”). Compare 1 Peter 5:8 as Satan’s only parallel character trait.

Calf (Bullock) – **Justice** – Hebrews 10:4 / Psalm 69:31 (Leviticus chapter 16).
The first animal sacrificed on the Day of Atonement representing Jesus. See also Leviticus 17:10 with John 6:51.

Man – **Love** – Genesis 1:26 with 1 John 4:16.

Eagle – **Wisdom** – Revelation 12:14 where the two wings represent the Old and New Testaments (cf. Isaiah 40: 31). See also Deuteronomy 32:11 and 12.

In one of the many parallels between Revelation and Ezekiel, both books contain a description of the four living ones early in the book. In Ezekiel this occurs in 1:3-

10. (There are many other parallels between these two books as noted in one of the appendices to Revelation.)

The four living ones occur one other place in Ezekiel (10:14) as a group. Here one of the faces is missing... a cherub replaces the face of the bullock. As *all* the faces are *on* cherubim, this suggests that the missing face is stressing the one particular aspect of God's character of importance here. In other words the faces of God in this vision are centered upon the bullock or justice. This is reinforced when one of the cherubim provides coals of fire for judgment (Ezek. 10:2-8 / chapter 11). In yet another parallel between Ezekiel and Revelation, one of the four living ones in Revelation in similar manner also provides the means for the executing judgment, this time through the seven last plagues (15:7) rather than coals of fire.

In Ezekiel's Temple (which represents the future Kingdom of God in power and authority), the faces of the lion and man on cherubim on the walls (Ezekiel 41:17-19) suggest that love and power are now free to act for all mankind. (Compare this to the two cherubim on the ark of the covenant in the tabernacle facing towards the mercy seat waiting for the blood to be sprinkled.)

The early church came to believe that the four living ones in Revelation chapter four represent the four gospels. In a roundabout way this is consistent with the above interpretation if each of the four gospels is understood as representing one aspect of God's character. The four gospels would represent in these four characteristics in the following manner:

- ❖ Matthew, who focused on connecting the fulfillment of the Old Testament law and prophecies to Christ, is represented in the bullock (justice).
- ❖ Mark detailed Jesus's works and actions and is represented by the lion (power).
- ❖ Luke focused on the humanity of Jesus and is (appropriately) represented by the face of a man (love).
- ❖ Then John, the most introspective and "spiritual" of the gospels, is represented by the eagle (wisdom).

In a similar picture there are also four "sweet spices" in the tabernacle arrangement used as a perfume and offered in the Holy on the incense altar directly before the veil at the entrance to the Most Holy (Exodus 30:34-38).

These spices appear to represent the same four character attributes of God that the four "living ones" picture based on the meaning of each name – frankincense

("white" for justice), onycha (from a root meaning "lion" for power), galbanum ("fat, rich, or choice" for love), and stacte (to "distill" or figuratively to "speak by inspiration" for wisdom). The use of some of these spices elsewhere under the Jewish law and in other passages of scripture seem to confirm this observation...

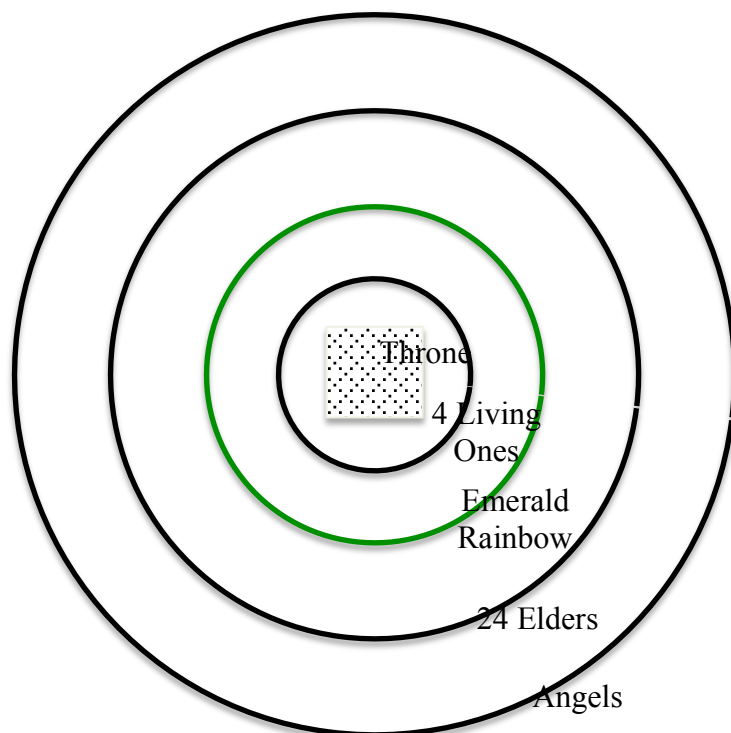
- ✚ For frankincense and its extensive relationship to justice, see Leviticus 2:1-15, Leviticus 5:11, Leviticus 24:7/Psalm 19:7-11, Numbers 5:15.
- ✚ Onycha comes from a root meaning "to roar" or a "roaring lion" suggesting the thought of power - Hosea 5:14. Compare this to 1 Peter 5:8 where the devil is also described as "a roaring lion". (Note that power is the only one of the four attributes of God that could be portrayed in Satan.)
- ✚ Galbanum means "an odorous gum (as if fatty)" and comes from a root meaning "fat (lit. or fig.), richest or choice part". The root is used with reference to the fattest and choices parts, as in Leviticus 17:6 where the fat of sacrificial love is a "sweet savor" to the Lord or Psalm 81:16 where the word is used to describe satisfaction from the richness of the "marrow" and fat. See also Genesis 45:18 (best) and Psalm 81:16 (finest). Surely love is the choicest part.
- ✚ Stacte meaning "an aromatic gum" is derived from a root meaning to "ooze", i.e. "distill" (gradually); by impl. to "fall in drops"; fig. to "speak" by inspiration. It is translated as "speak" in Amos 7:16 and in Micah 2:6 and 11. Distillation and speaking by inspiration both seem particularly appropriate for wisdom.

The Four Concentric Circles Around the Throne

There are four concentric circles that surround the throne:

- 1) In the center (of the throne) and surrounding the throne at the same time are the four living ones (4:6).
- 2) The next circle farther out is the rainbow like an emerald in appearance (4:3). In other words the various bands of the rainbow were all some shade of emerald green in appearance.
- 3) The 24 elders on their thrones are the next or third circle out from the throne (4:4).
- 4) Finally, there is a multitude of angels (5:11, 7:11) that form the (fourth) circle that is farthest out.
- X) The rest of creation seems to reside outside the farthest circle (5:13).

Interestingly the circle formed by the emerald rainbow is never mentioned again. It may be that it is automatically considered part of the throne area after its early mention. In contrast the four living ones and twenty-four elders and the angels are mentioned repeatedly as surrounding the throne after their initial description (4:8, 10, 5:8, 11, 14, 7:11). The encircling worshippers are shown below in simple form:



The purpose for this arrangement is uncertain, but it could be a similar concept to the tabernacle and temple arrangement, which portrays significance or status. The design of the temple and tabernacle both represent the progress of the Christian life from outside God's arrangement (the camp) to belief (the court) to a sanctified life through the spirit of God (the holy) and finally to the heaven (the most holy).

There may be some completely different purpose for this encircling arrangement pictured here in Revelation. There is little discussion or even recognition of this structure among commentators at present. However, whether these circles suggest something similar to the tabernacle and temple or not, this scene reverses the flow of those structures. From the throne, there is definitely a progression *outward*¹²⁵ rather than *inward* that will be explored in more detail when the five praises of this chapter are discussed.

¹²⁵ One familiar and appealing parallel from nature is the illustration of a pebble dropped into still water with ripples spreading outward.

Other Symbols in Chapters Four and Five

Partly as a result of jumping ahead to consider the four living ones and most of the various “sevens” (spirits, lamps of fire, eyes, and horns), a few other symbols were intentionally skipped over. We can go back now and fill in the blanks as well as considering the rest of the symbols in these chapters:

- *Flashes of lightning and sounds*¹²⁶ and *peals of thunder* come out from the throne (4:5). Light and sound symbolically refer to truth and messages (cf. “seven lamps of fire” and “the sound of a trumpet speaking with me). In this case the extreme nature of the events (lightning and thunder) indicate enormously powerful revelations, events, and controversies.¹²⁷ Our God is an awesome God.
- *Sea of glass, like crystal* is a symbol that first needs some clarification of the language. First, the sea is glassy or like glass. It is describing the appearance of the sea and not the material from which the sea is made.¹²⁸ The word for crystal here (krustallos, Gr. κρυσταλλος, from kruos or ice) means to be transparent and may include the thought of a crystalline structure.¹²⁹ The description of this sea is of a brilliantly clear “sea” of water.

Because so much of Revelation’s symbolism is drawn from the tabernacle and temple – including in these chapters – it is not surprising that most commentators (appropriately) recognize it here, as well. This sea is the “bronze” or copper “sea” (1 Kings 7:23-26, 2 Kings 25:13, 2 Chronicles 4:2, Jer. 52:17) where anyone entering the temple washed up before entering. It represents a willingness to practice righteousness, and therefore it is fittingly “before the throne,” much like the “seven lamps of fire” from the candelabrum of the tabernacle representing the spirit of God are “before the throne” (4:5) and the golden altar representing prayer and closeness to God is also “before the throne” (8:3).

¹²⁶ Alternate renderings for “sounds” in many translations include “voices” or “rumblings”.

¹²⁷ Like many symbols in Revelation, these are symbols that often continue in a logical (and often chronological) progression wherever they occur throughout the book. In this instance there is an increasing power and complexity to the impact of these symbols:

- 4:5a – “Out of the throne come flashes of lightning, and sounds, and peals of thunder...”
- 8:5c – “...and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.
- 11:19c – “...and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.”
- 16:18-20 – “And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake... and huge hailstones...”

¹²⁸ Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (p. 480). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

¹²⁹ Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under “crystal”, A.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company.

- The *lamb... as if slain* is one of the most universally understood symbols of scripture. The lamb represents Jesus, particularly as the sacrifice that pays for the sins of the human race individually and collectively (John 1:29, 1 Cor. 5:7, 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Later in Revelation the lamb is also in the “center of the throne” (7:17) like the four living ones that picture God’s character, showing that God shares His throne with Jesus (22:1) in the same way that Jesus shares his throne with the church (3:21). This lends further weight to the interpretation of the four living ones as a vision of God’s fundamental character.

- *Harps* (5:8, 14:2) are connected throughout the scriptures with worship of God. They also suggest harmony with God and agreement with His plans from the nature of the instrument and from its use in scripture.¹³⁰
- The meaning of the *vials of incense* is directly stated as “the prayers of the saints” (5:8). Since the lamb has just been slain and since it is the 24 elders that hold these vials, the vials may suggest the prayers of the faithful of the Old Testament rather than the prayers of the church.

The connection of the harps and the prayers of the saints in worship of God in this verse picture the closeness and harmony of God and His people.

- The *strong angel* and the *Lion... from the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has overcome...*¹³¹ together tell a miniature story. As noted elsewhere the word angel translates from a word meaning a “messenger” of any kind, and in this case it seems to represent the Mosaic Law. The Law was the standard of a perfect man, and before Jesus there was no one strong enough to keep the Law perfectly. However, Jesus was the promised Messiah from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10) and both the root (father/creator – John 1:3-4) and the descendant (Matt. 1:1, 6, 17) of David (22:16) and the inheritor of the messianic promises to David regarding his descendants (Is. 9:7).

Here is also another connection between the Lamb and the four living ones, because Jesus is the *Lion... who has prevailed* because he is able to overcome the *strong angel*. Among the four living ones the lion is the symbol of God’s power or mighty strength, and here the lion of the tribe of Judah prevails against the strong angel and is found worthy to open the scroll.

¹³⁰ It has been suggested that the harp is a symbol of the Bible as a whole. While this is certainly possible, and while there is an obvious synergism between the two, nowhere in scripture does the use of a harp connect directly to the Bible in symbol. Yet the word of God is often sung with a harp (e.g. 1 Chron. 25:1), so the two are not disconnected.

¹³¹ Other translations: “*has triumphed*” (NIV) and “*has prevailed*” (KJV).

A Couple Miscellaneous Notes Before the Final Section

(1) While a floor beneath the throne is never described in these chapters, elsewhere in Ex. 24:10 there is a flooring of sapphire beneath God. Blue is the color most commonly connected with sapphires (although they come in other colors), and this seems to be the intent in Exodus, which describes the pavement of sapphire “as clear as the sky itself.”

When skies are clear they are blue, so their relationship to blue sapphire seems appropriate. This gives us yet another illustration of God’s character since blue represents God’s personal faithfulness to us. “Your lovingkindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies” (Ps. 36:5).

(2) There are three things in these two chapters that are described as “before the throne” of God. These are the “seven spirits of God” (4:5), the “sea like glass” (4:6), and the “crowns” that the 24 elders cast (4:10)

The Throne Scene and the Five Praises

There are four groups that give praises to God in these chapters, arranged in order as the four living ones (God’s own character praises Him), the twenty-four elders (praise to God from His word), angels, and then everything (all of creation).

The five praises are noticeably outlined in many Bibles by indentation and/or italics, and they are located in 4:8, 4:11, 5:9-10, 5:12, 5:13.

The worshippers singing these five sets of praises in Revelation chapters four and five and the things they sing, are:

- Rev. 4: 8 The Four Living Ones (who was and who is and who is to come)
- Rev. 4: 11 The 24 Elders (creation)
- Rev. 5:9 The Four Living Ones and the 24 Elders (a “new song”)
- Rev. 5:12 Angels (worthy is the lamb)
- Rev. 5:13 Every Living Thing (to him on the throne and also to the lamb – and this song mentions “dominion” for the first and only time)

While the ones who are praising changes and seems to move outward from the throne, each succeeding praise also seems to move us forward in time, as follows: (1) from eternity past through all time, (2) creation and the Old Testament period, (3) the Gospel or Christian Age following the death of Christ, (4) the Messianic Age, and (5) finally to all eternity.

In agreement with this arrangement is the placement of the action sequence of these chapters (5:1-7) where the Lamb is found who prevails to open the sealed book. This introduction to the seven seals and the worthiness of the Lamb is placed between the first two and last three praises. Following the introduction to Jesus the Lamb in (5:1-7), the four living ones and the twenty-four angels sing a second time (5:8-10). This time they sing together and unite in a "new song" of praise for Jesus the Lamb and for the redemption of the church.

This "new song" follows the introduction to the Lamb at a further point in time from when they first give voice to praise (4:8 & 11). Only at this point in these chapters do we find the appropriate moment for each of these to sing a *new* song.

This new song is (1) the further revelation of God's gracious character as sung by the four living ones and (2) the new understanding of the Old Testament represented by the twenty-four elders... containing a message sung anew now that the Lamb is known. They sing it "when he had taken the book..."

The arrangement of these five praises moving outward with increasing participation in worship is analogous to the concentric circles noted earlier that progress outward from the throne. In each case the effect is like throwing a rock into a pond and watching the ripples spreading outward. As each of the five praises moves another step forward in time, new participants are added until... eventually by praise five... every living thing is praising God.

Appendix 1 to Chapters Four and Five – the Four Faces of God and the Opposition of Satan

Satan also has four character attributes, and his four are the corruption of God's four character attributes. This is shown in the four names given to him in Revelation, as follows:

The Four Opposing Faces of Satan in Revelation 20:2 (the corruption of God's Four Attributes)

Serpent – Deception – the corruption of Wisdom – Genesis 3: 1-4.

Dragon – Tyranny – the corruption of Power – Revelation 12: 3, 17
and 13: 2.

Devil – Slanderer, or False Accuser – the corruption of Justice – from
the meaning of the name.

Satan – Adversary, or Enemy – the corruption of Love – from the
meaning of the name.

The Leech's Four Daughters

There are a couple verses in Proverbs 30:15 and 16 that may very well illustrate Satan's four primary attempts to interfere with the plan of God. Satan's attempts are based on his four corrupted character attributes.

(The following is paraphrased from an article "The Leech's Four Daughters" written
by Carl Hagensick.)

The symbol of a leech in this proverb – a bloodsucker that drains the life from people as opposed to Jesus who gave his blood to bring us life – is particularly appropriate for Satan. Each one of these four attempts to interfere with God's plans pictured in these verses seems to focus primarily on the abuse of one of God's four basic character attributes, as follows:

Satan's first attempt to interfere with the plan of God as described in proverbs is "the grave". This is his deception in the Garden of Eden where Satan as the serpent or deceiver lies to Eve when he says to her "surely you will not die" if you disobey God. Thus the chain of death begins with Adam and Eve (Gen. 2:17, Rom. 5:12-13, 1 Cor. 15:22).

The second attempt is “the barren womb”, or Satan’s attempt to stop the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:14 and 15). Here Satan - as the dragon primarily - attempts to use his power (Revelation 12: 3, 13, 17) against the woman (the bride, the church – who is also the seed of promise Galatians 3: 16 and 29). This was pre-figured in the promise to Abraham and the story of Sarah’s barren womb in Genesis.

Satan’s third attempt to frustrate the plan of God is “the earth that is never satisfied with water.” This reminds us of Habakkuk 2:14 / Isaiah 11:9 - “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” (Compare this to other passages about the universality of the Kingdom on Earth in Psalm 22:27, Isaiah 2:2-4, Jeremiah 3:17, Zechariah 14:9, etc.). Here we don’t have a specific scripture, but the concept of Satan as the Devil or slanderer or false accuser fits nicely here. Satan in the present is attempting to corrupt the minds of people with unjust images of God and the greatness of mankind in order to prevent people from accepting God in the future Kingdom.

The fourth attempt to interfere in God’s plans is “the fire that never says ‘enough’”. This is Satan’s last act and his final attempt. At the beginning of the 1,000 year reign of Christ and the church in Revelation chapter twenty, all four attributes of Satan - “the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan” - are bound (20:1-3) so that he has no influence over the people of earth. At the end of the 1,000 years, only Satan (20:7) is loosed from his prison. Although he uses deception and false accusation as always, his primary attribute is now simply as the adversary of God (20:9), telling people to rebel directly against the Kingdom rule and leading people to their destruction in the “second death” (21:8), the fire that is never quenched (20:9-10).

Appendix 2 to Chapters Four and Five – the Dimensions of Heaven

This subject is considerably more speculative than others, which is why it's an appendix. Part of the issue is how we determine one of the numbers that we need. First, what we do know:

Four

- The number four occurs five times (although in 4:8 it seems to reference the four living ones individually¹³² rather than as a group and thereby leaving specifically four times that the number four references them strictly as a group). The number four is the only number used in connection with the “four living ones” (4:6, 8, 5:6, 8, 14).
- There are four groups that sing praise (the four living ones,
- twenty-four elders, angels, and all creation).
- Four times the “living ones” and the “elders” occur together in the same context (5:6, 8, 11, 14).
- As noted earlier, four is the number of concentric circles of the four living ones, the emerald rainbow, the twenty-four elders, and the angels that surround the throne.

Six / 24

- The number six occurs once in 4:8 where each of the four living creatures has six wings or *twenty-four altogether*.

Seven

- The number seven occurs seven times in these chapters describing the heavenly throne scene:
 - Seven Lamps of Fire (4:5)
 - Seven Spirits of God (4:5)
 - Seven Seals (5:1)
 - Seven Seals (5:5)
 - Seven Horns (5:6)
 - Seven Eyes (5:6)
 - Seven Spirits of God (5:6)
- The word “elders” also occurs seven times (4:4, 10, 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14) and is connected with another number (24).
- The words “living ones” (plural) also occurs seven times (4:6, 8, 9, 5:6, 8, 11, 14) in parallel to the “elders”.

¹³² The thought is that each of them (the four living ones) is described individually with the same attributes rather than collectively (e.g. NIV). Marshall's Greek-English Interlinear gives a clear translation of the original as: “And the four living creatures, one by one...” (or Gr. εν καθ εν) See *The Zondervan Parallel New Testament in Greek and English*, 1975 ed.

Rainbows have seven significant colors (three primary and four secondary). The emerald rainbow is completely emerald, but in order to be a rainbow there must be bands (strips? shades of green?) like a common rainbow.

Twenty-Four

- The number twenty-four in relation to the 24 elders and their 24 thrones occurs 4 times (4:4 twice, 10, 5:8).
- Twenty-four is also the number of “wings” in 4:8 where – individually – each of the four living ones has six wings totaling 24 wings.

Even a casual examination of these numbers and of these chapters of Revelation should make it evident that there is numerical pattern consisting of three numbers. The numbers four (4), seven (7), and twenty-four (24) occur repeatedly in various ways. Seven is common elsewhere in Revelation, but the other two numbers are not frequent. And even the most common number – seven – occurs in hidden ways in these two chapters of Revelation (as noted above) and emphasizes its special importance here.

The number that isn’t seen in this chapter – but is a logical consequence of the existing numbers – is the number 28. The number 28 is the product of 4 X 7 and is also the sum of 4 + 24. It occurs in combinations of the predominant numbers of the chapter. These same two combinations of numbers also occur *together* elsewhere in these two chapters of the throne scene.

Some examples of how these numbers appear in various combinations in these chapters (derived largely from the list of numbers cited above previously in this appendix):

- Four times the [4] “living ones” and the *twenty-four* “elders” occur together in the same context (5:6, 8, 11, 14).
- The words “living ones” (plural) also occur seven times altogether (4:6, 8, 9, 5:6, 8, 11, 14). There are *four* “living ones”.
- The word “elders” also occurs seven times (4:4, 10, 5:5, 6, 8, 11, 14) and there are *twenty-four* elders.
- Four is the number of concentric circles surrounding the throne and seven (should be) the number of bands in the emerald rainbow (similar to the seven colors of the natural rainbow).
- The number twenty-four in relation to the 24 elders and their 24 thrones occurs four times (4:4 twice, 10, 5:8).

At this point the reader is probably wondering why anyone would care about the number 28 as a consequence of the numbers in this chapter. However, it happens that 28 is the exact number of spherical objects that can occur in the 7th dimension. These spheres known as “exotic spheres” exist in dimensions that can’t be mapped in Euclidean geometry (our common geometry based on the three dimensions that are familiar to us from our world). These strange spheres are the key to understanding higher dimensional worlds.

Among the first seven mathematical dimensions per topologists, the number of possible [types of] spheres is mostly constant at 1 sphere per dimension. The exceptions are noted in bold in the simple chart below:

<i>Dimension</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>Number of Spheres</i>	1	1	1	?	1	1	28

The numbers outlined above – 4, 7, and 28 – are three numbers that dominate Revelation chapters four and five directly and indirectly by combination (understanding that the number twenty-four is a sort of special factor that creates another path to the resultant number twenty-eight).

The *fourth* dimension is the oddest of all dimensions because mathematically it should contain an *infinite* number of possible spheres. It is the only dimension (including known mathematical dimensions above the seventh dimension) with an infinite number of possibilities. This is the same number that represents God in this chapter through his four character attributes, so... of course... it is a dimension with infinite possibilities.

And the *seventh* dimension contains *twenty-eight* (4 X 7 or 4 + 24) possible exotic spheres or “shapes”.¹³³ The two principal numbers from the throne scene are connected to dimensions that are unique (4) or at least unusual and incorporate a pair of numbers from these chapters (7 and 28).

It’s reasonable to ask at this point if this is all just arbitrary... just a waste of time and thought. Possibly. In almost any other chapter of the Bible it would probably be just plain silliness to even start this line of thinking. (At least it is pushed back into a chapter appendix you’ll note!) However, the setting for the scene in these chapters is the heavenly throne. There is a door open to heaven at the beginning of

¹³³ All of this has been simplified down, and no doubt a mathematician specializing in this field (topology) would quibble with some of the terminology, but as I understand the subject it is essentially correct and just uses general conversational language.

the chapter. And yes, isn't it curious that fours and sevens plus the transitional number twenty-four are nearly the sole numbers in this chapter and through two different combinations result in the number twenty-eight. This occurs even within the language of the chapter, which in context combines the *twenty-four* elders plus the *four* living ones *four* times and includes *seven* citations of [or times] the *four* living ones.

These numbers used in the setting around the heavenly throne seem unique. So, is it making too much out of the numbers? Perhaps not after all. Is there more to it than just described? Is so, let me know.

Revelation Chapter Six and 8:1 ~ the Seven Seals

Introduction to the Seven Seals

The scroll (book) with the seven seals is first mentioned in the 5th chapter of Revelation, where Jesus is found worthy to remove the seals and open the scroll. The sixth chapter describes the process of opening the scroll seal by seal along with the events accompanying the removal of each seal and opening the scroll.

The events described in each of the seven seals parallel the events occurring during the seven churches and seven trumpets. In other words, the first church (Ephesus), the first seal, and the first trumpet represent roughly the same period of time. The same is true for the second church, seal, and trumpet, and so on. These parallels will be further demonstrated at the conclusion of comments on the seals.

The seventh chapter of Revelation is a break in the description of the seven seals occurs in (meaning that the first verse of chapter eight can be considered directly connected to the last verse of chapter six). However, this does not mean chapter seven is completely unrelated or out of sequence with the seven seals. The seventh chapter is more in the nature of a sidebar, which explains things that occur before the seventh seal is opened. So the construction of Rev. 6:1 thru 8:1 looks something like this:

- Rev. 6:1-6:17 – the first six seals.
- Rev. 7:1-7:17 – the completion of the church and great multitude.
- Rev. 8:1 – the seventh seal.

After the seventh seal, the description of the seven trumpets begins with a brief introductory segment in Rev. 8:2-5.

The seventh chapter of Revelation will be somewhat glossed over in the discussion of the seven seals in order to keep the focus on the seals. The overall lesson of the chapter is noted only briefly in relation to the opening of the seventh seal. Afterward there is a separate and extended description and commentary explaining the seventh chapter in detail.

The Four Horses and Horsemen of Revelation (1st Four Seals)

When the first seal is opened, the first of four horses and horsemen appears. A different horse and rider appear each time another of the first four seals is opened.

While the description of four horsemen is often portrayed very literally and/or as a sign of the “end times” in popular media, the horses and riders are very symbolic, and they “appear” during the same historical periods as the first four churches of Revelation. In other words they’ve come and gone long before the present day.

The symbolic use of the horse in scripture is connected with two related subjects. First, the horse represents the beliefs, doctrines, and ideology (Zech. 6:5, cf. 1-8) that motivate people to act (Is. 30:27-28 – cf. Is. 31:1-3 in the same context, Is. 37:29, Zech. 12:3-4). Second, the horse is connected to battle and controversy (Job 39:19-24, Prov. 21:31). These two subjects are related.

As an example of the connection between doctrine and battle, consider the Book of Habakkuk. At least some of this book (1:5-11, 14-17) appears to be a description of the rise of communism. In Hab. 1:8 this is connected to horses and those that ride them to battle. In this same book the Lord responds on horses of battle and “chariots of salvation” (Hab. 3:8, 13). In Habakkuk we see the contrast between what motivates the riders of the horses in chapter one to go to war (communism) and then what motivates God to go to war (the salvation of people).

To summarize, horses as a symbol in scripture picture the motivation (and consequences) representing the beliefs, teachings, and ideologies of those who ride the horses.

Each rider of the horses has an object of some sort. For the first two riders there “was given to him” a *crown* (first rider) and a *great sword* (second rider). The third rider has in his possession a *set of scales*, but nothing is given to him. The fourth rider has nothing in his possession and is given nothing, but that which names him and accompanies him (death and the grave) are given *authority* to kill.

Thus we see the deterioration in the nature of the horses (from white to red, to black, and then to death-like coloring) and in also in the nature of the riders (first granted a crown, granted a sword, then simply in possession scales of judgment, and finally possessing nothing except the name death). This regression outlines the gradual decline of the church as predicted by the Apostle Paul (2 Thess. 2:2-7).

The First Seal – Rev. 6:1-2

The description of the first seal gives us the imagery of triumph over opposition. The rider “went out conquering and to conquer.” Jesus and the early church go forth with the purity of the gospel (white horse) and its power to overcome opposition (crown).

The evangelistic passion and zeal of the early church is described as their “first love” in the message to Ephesus the first church (2:4-5). Here in the first of the seven seals it is pictured in the symbol of the bow and arrow.¹³⁴ Arrows and bows in scripture represent messages of truth or deception (2 Sam. 22:14-15, Ps. 45:4-5, 64:3-7, Prov. 25:18, Is. 49:2, Jer. 9:8, Hos. 7:16).

Additionally, this passage illustrates the partial fulfillment of Zech. 9:9-13, 16. Following the Lord’s first advent, the new religion that Jesus founds eventually conquers the Greek world and makes it Christian both nominally and as the foundation community of the true church... as the spiritual Israel of God spreads beyond Judea and Galilee and comes to dominate the Hellenistic culture of the Greeks. The crown, the bow and arrows, the horse and rider, and the conquering king are all pictured in this passage in Zechariah.

The Second Seal – Rev. 6:3-4

The description of the second seal turns to battle, blood, and slaughter. The rider is permitted to “take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another” in a description reminiscent of the words of Jesus in Luke 21:12-19:

But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.

¹³⁴ The Greek word for bow in this verse is *toxon* (Gr. τοξον). See Strong’s (5115) and NASB concordances, Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon, etc., etc. The word relates to our English word toxic or poisonous, because the original meaning of the word also included the arrows shot from the bow, and the arrows were later dipped in poison. However, the English use of the word toxin derives from the latter connection with poison, whereas the Greek word means bow and arrow rather than poison.

This is the hallmark of second period of the church... the Smyrna church defined by severe persecution (2:8-11). Even the horse from this period is the color of blood.

However, the “great sword” given to the rider is not ever used as a weapon of destruction. The “great sword” of the scriptures (Eph. 6:17, Heb. 4:12) is now “great” because now it also includes the gospels and the writings of the apostles (with the Old Testament) as they circulate in the church in ever increasing number.

This sword is the cause – but not the means – of the violence. The Luke passage just cited makes this point. The persecution is cause by their “testimony” for which Jesus will give them utterance and wisdom. Their hatred comes because of Jesus and for his sake.

The Third Seal – Rev. 6:5-6

The description of the third seal continues the downward trend of events. The horse is now black and the rider has a set of measuring scales in his hand emphasizing justice and judgment. Apparently the intent of the rider is to impose judgment in some form.

Yet this is the only one of the seals where God speaks directly to intervene. A limitation or boundary is set limited what the rider can do. A certain amount of justice will be maintained – a quart (Gr. choenix) of wheat (cf. Ezek. 4:16) for a denarius (or a days’ wage) and three quarts of barley for a denarius. And the oil and wine is not to be damaged.

It would seem that the church is becoming increasingly corrupt, but God limits the damage that it does. The wine (the blood of Christ) cannot be hurt, and neither can the oil (the spirit of God) be hurt. Justice demands that the faithful still receive the same reward of the high-calling for their faithfulness (cf. Luke 20:1-16) and that three measures of barley¹³⁵ (cf. Matt. 13:33) describing the atonement sacrifice of Christ is still available to those faithful to the high-calling in Christ.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Barley was the grain for the bread that Jesus used to feed the multitude in John 6:9-13. One suggestion is that barley represents basic truths of scripture that would be understood by most people. The connection of the number three representing the death of Christ and forgiveness of sin with barley seems to bear this out a little bit. A related observation is that a quart represents the minimum amount needed for daily sustenance, and three quarts represents comfortable eating. If the wheat represents the high-calling, then the quart of wheat illustrates that the way is difficult (Matt. 7:14, Luke 9:23). Yet the three quarts of barley indicated that forgiveness of sin is available in abundance. Wheat and barley were the two major items of the spring harvest period (with other produce in the fall).

¹³⁶ In contrast to the Catholic doctrines of original sin and of the Mass, which stipulate that the death of Christ accounts only for sin at birth and not sins committed weekly – sins that according to Catholic doctrine need to be atoned for again in the “sacrifice” of the Mass.

It is generally thought that the passage is a description of famine... and in this case not a literal famine, but a famine for the hearing of the word of God. This type of famine is described elsewhere in the Old Testament including a passage found in Amos 8:11-12:

*“Behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord God,
“When I will send a famine on the land,
Not a famine for bread or a thirst for water,
But rather for hearing the words of the Lord.
People will stagger from sea to sea
And from the north even to the east;
They will go to and fro to seek the word of the Lord,
But they will not find it.”*

The third church or the period of Pergamos (2:12-17) describes events that cause concern for justice and for the protection of the faith during this time. The message to Pergamos twice mentions a sword of God’s word (which – in contrast to the “great sword” in the second seal – now becomes an offensive rather than defensive weapon), while three times the word “teaching” occurs in an unfavorable light in relation to corrupt teachers. Balaam, who sold his gift of speaking for God for money, and the Nicolaitans whose name or title means “lords over the laity”, are the prominent names mentioned in the message to the third church.

The great “falling away” from the faith described by the Apostle Paul in 2 Thess. 2:3 is now in full sway and will only continue to worsen in the next period of the church and in events described in the fourth seal.

The Fourth Seal – Rev. 6:7-8

The description of the fourth seal finally brings these seals to their lowest point during these seven periods. This low ebb is illustrated in the color of the horse (a deathly pale color)¹³⁷ names of the rider (death) and his companion (hades).

The rider is given a terrible authority “over a fourth of the earth” to kill by various means. As elsewhere in Revelation, the “fourth” fraction does not seem to describe a quantity, but instead it describes a part of unspecified size. Here it may denote the fourth of the four beasts of Daniel 7:1-7 and likewise represent the area of the former Roman Empire and of the control of the present (at that time) Roman

¹³⁷ Other translations suggest “sallow” or “gangrene” as descriptions of the color. Not a pleasant sight.

Church. It is this area that is the region of the world in which the events of the fourth church primarily take place.

Like the other seals, the description of the fourth seal bears a strong resemblance to the fourth church (Thyatira) of that same period of time. In the description of the fourth church is the forewarning of “great tribulation” (2:22) and that “I will kill her children with plague” (2:23). The description under the seal is similar with “death” and “hades” killing by plague and by other types of tribulation. As noted in the earlier description of the fourth church, the latter half of this period was a time of great turmoil¹³⁸ and includes the period of the (literal) Black Plague that killed around a quarter to a third of the people of Europe. That literal death is intended here derives from the fact that death and hades are the responsible parties.

However, there is also a symbolic element to the language here. One of the killers listed under this seal are “the wild beasts of the earth,” and it would be difficult to press wild animals as a major cause of death (assuming these to be large animals as the expression is used elsewhere in scripture). In fact all the causes of death in these verses seem to have a spiritual dimension to them,¹³⁹ as follows:

- Sword – disputes over the importance of scripture forcing the separation of many of God’s people (e.g., the Waldensians and Lollards) from the Roman Church during this period and leaving others failing spiritually.
- Famine – a famine for hearing the word of God is noted under the third seal, and this famine only accelerates during the fourth period.
- Plague – is a form of trouble used frequently in Revelation to represent the various problems that come upon society as a whole in its rejection of God (cf. Rev. 18:2-4, 8, and 16:1-21).
- Wild Beasts of the Earth – picture the beginning of the invasions of Europe by “wild beasts” such as the Mongols and the Ottoman Empire... nations not under the control of the Roman Church and European powers.

In just two short verses, this terrible period – particularly the second half of this fourth or Thyatira period (2:18-29) – is described in great detail. The church has reached a low ebb of truth and life, but the Reformation is about to begin.

¹³⁸ Cf. Tuchman, B.W. (1978). *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*. Alfred A Knopf: New York.

¹³⁹ These four means of death are drawn from Ezek. 14:21 where these four calamities are predicted come upon Jerusalem at the end of the period of the kings. Inasmuch as literal events of the Old Testament are often drawn upon in Revelation for symbolic application, it suggests the same in this instance, also.

The Fifth Seal – Rev. 6:9-11

The description of the fifth seal recognizes a change of direction in the church by relinquishing the use of horses and riders to picture the downward spiral of the church. All is not well, but things are different and change is in the wind.

The most unique part of the language used in this passage must be the description of the souls [lives] under the altar.

Altar – Since the book of Revelation is littered with references to the tabernacle and temple,¹⁴⁰ it is almost certain that the “brazen altar” in the court for the offering or burning of animal sacrifices is the intended altar. A grate on the top of the altar (Ex. 39:39) allowed the ashes to fall through and pile up underneath the altar.

Souls [lives] Under the Altar – The word here translated souls should be more properly translated “lives”. It is not that these faithful Christian are alive in some incorporeal form and living under a symbolic altar somewhere. Instead the *stories* and *sacrifices* of these faithful Christians – remnants like *ashes* under the altar – who sacrificed their *lives* to witness to the word of God... those sacrifices are crying out for justice.

“How long, O Lord, holy and true, will you refrain from judging...” Yes, how long would it be?

“...for a little while [or “time”]¹⁴¹ longer...” Although highly speculative, perhaps the language here is describing a “time” of 360 years from the start of the Reformation in 1518 A.D. until 1878 A.D. In any event, it suggests an ongoing span of time until the resurrection of the sleeping saints (1 Thess. 4:13-15).

¹⁴⁰ See *Appendix E – The Tabernacle and the Temple in the Book of Revelation* for a multitude of symbols from these sacred spaces.

¹⁴¹ The Greek word “chronon” (Gr. χρόνον) from which we get the English word chronological is translated “while” in the NASB. This word is more accurately translated as a “time” in other Bible version. Chronon has the significance of either a point in time or a duration of time, and it is in the latter sense of duration that the word is used here. The entire expression “...for a little while longer...” occurs in different variations of word order in early mss. (In this regard see Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 6-16* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 384, 385, note 11.e-e). Dallas: Word Books.) The word translated little is the Greek word “micron” (Gr. μικρον) and means “a small space of either time or degree”. While extremely speculative, it may be possible that the sense of the passage is that the saints should “rest” for a “time” that is “yet little or brief” in comparison to what has passed before.

“...refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth.” Aune¹⁴² notes that there is some question in the translation as to whether the vengeance falls upon those who dwell on the earth or whether the blood is shed by those who dwell on the earth (cf. Rev. 19:2 margin, 18:24, etc.).

“And there was given to each of them a white robe...” The symbol of a white robe is also used in the description of Sardis the fifth church, where the Lord says “...you have a few people [even] in Sardis... they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy” (2:4). The imagery of a white robe or the righteousness of the saints (19:8) links the fifth seal and fifth church together. In fact the fifth church is the only church described as *having* white robes (although the seventh church is counseled to go and *buy* white robes).

“...would be completed also.” A number of early manuscripts¹⁴³ have the alternate translation “be completed in number” and still others read “shall complete their courses”. Whatever the translation, all of them suggest that God has always had a definite time limit in mind for the church on earth (7:3-4, Ro. 11:25).

The Sixth Seal – Rev. 6:12-17

The understanding of the sixth seal is often colored by one significant misperception. The last part of the description reads this way, *“...and they said... hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come...”*

At a glance it might be presumed that this seal describes the “great tribulation” that closes out the present age of the church, but there are several problems with making this assumption:

- The first item of note is that neither God nor Jesus is speaking in this instance, and the speakers themselves are making the presumption that the “great day of their wrath has come.” It isn’t possible from this one point alone to determine whether the speakers are correct. Certainly their language is suggestive as is the preceding language of this troubled time. Yet it is not definitive by itself. Yet, whatever this event is, it at least gives the appearance of being the final great tribulation.

¹⁴² Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 6-16* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 383-384, note 10.f). Dallas: Word Books.

¹⁴³ The *RVIC2000* (RV plus Parkinson in footnote) on this verse provides a good summary of the manuscript evidence.

- The second item of note is the timing. This event occurs during the sixth seal or sixth period of the church before the Lord returns. A futuristic view of Revelation would view this event as yet future, but if it has been established that the churches, seals, and trumpets are historical periods in the history of the church, this interpretation alone rules out the event as the true day of wrath.
- Perhaps the most telling point is the parallel to a description in the message of the sixth trumpet. The sixth trumpet also describes a “great earthquake” [symbolizing revolution through the shaking of the earth/established society] and also resulting in terror (cf. 6:12, 15 to 11:13).

Besides the parallel of the two earthquakes and the terror, the description in the sixth trumpet also adds “a tenth of the city fell”. In the context of the description of the sixth trumpet (9:13-11:14) the city is the “great city, which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt” (11:8) and elsewhere also is pictured by Babylon “...the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth” (17:18). A tenth of the city would be one of the ten nations (17:12) that support this apostasy. That nation would be France and the earthquake would be the French Revolution. Taken as a whole, the French Revolution and related events would easily appear to those living at the time to be the beginning of the great tribulation.¹⁴⁴

- Finally note that there are subtle differences between this tribulation and the final tribulation that changes the entire world once and for all. Two examples:

“...and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” The mountains and islands (kingdoms and lesser nations) are moved from the previous positions of power they once maintained to a lesser status. Contrast this with the great earthquake that removes the mountains and islands altogether (16:18-20).

“...as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.” The fig tree is a picture of the nation of Israel,¹⁴⁵ but as already noted throughout Revelation, Israel is a picture of spiritual Israel or the church – both true and

¹⁴⁴ Most people today have lost track of the power and influence of the French Revolution upon Europe. Peasant revolts had been ongoing almost continuously in small and large rebellions for hundreds of years, but none of them had ever been successful. Suddenly, one of the most powerful aristocratic houses in Europe is overthrown and its families executed. Not only that, but France mounted a powerful army behind a brilliant general named Napoleon. People from all over Europe flocked to his army as he rampaged through Europe and brought the revolution everywhere he went. The most dramatic event was the imprisonment of the pope. The following year after his capture the pope died in a French prison (1799 A.D.). The man revered as God’s direct representative on earth and who ruled the world as Christ’s absolute authority was humiliated in front of all the nations.

¹⁴⁵ Jer. 24:1-10, Hosea 9:10, Luke 13:6-9, Matt. 24:32-34.

nominal Christianity. However, these figs are unripe. This could suggest that this is an undeveloped spiritual Israel... an undeveloped Christianity... but also and more particularly it suggests that tagging this passage as a picture of the day of the Lord is premature. This passage contrasts with the final dissolution of nominal Christianity when the “vine of the earth” (in contrast to Jesus the heavenly “true vine” in John 15:1) is cast into the “great winepress of the wrath of God” when or “because her grapes are ripe” (14:18-20). The “great wind” of war that shakes the fig tree is too early to really be the great tribulation. These are unripe figs.

So this passage is an apt picture of the time of the French Revolution, and the rest of the description follows suit. The great people of that time ask for the mountains to fall on them and hide them from the terrifying events that make them afraid for their positions of power. The sun, moon, and stars are all affected. Their damage pictures the anti-Christian/anti-religious tenor of the revolution in opposition to not only the institutional church, but to all things Christian... symbolized in the sun (gospel), moon (Old Testament teachings), and stars (apostles).¹⁴⁶

There are similarities and differences in Biblical description between this description of the French Revolution and the final “great tribulation” that will end this present world and inaugurate the blessings of the kingdom. The differences and similarities – some very subtle – are intended to illustrate that while the events described in the sixth seal do not describe the great tribulation itself, they illustrate at least some of what to expect when it comes. In many ways the French Revolution is a microcosm of the tribulation during the great day of wrath.

The Seventh Seal – Rev. 8:1

The description of the seventh seal is unique from all the others. First, the location of the seventh seal skips an entire chapter (intentionally for reasons that will be noted in a minute). Second, nothing happens. Literally or symbolically.

The first subject to be considered is the issue of why an entire chapter of the book is inserted between the sixth and seventh seal. Nearly every interpreter of Revelation considers this chapter to be a sort of break or a form of intermission in the progress of the seven seals, but the key is to understand why it occurs at this point in the description of the seven seals.

¹⁴⁶ See *Appendix B – Bible Symbolology in Prophecy* for the scriptural identification of these symbols.

Fortunately the explanation is relatively easy. The intervening chapter describes two groups of Christians (more on this when the seventh chapter is discussed in detail in following pages), and these two groups are both “complete” by the end of the chapter. The 144,000 are “sealed” on their foreheads with the seal of God. They have faithfully finished their course on earth. They are followed by the “great multitude” sometimes known as the “tribulation saints.” They come through great tribulation to stand before the throne of God when their trials are over. They too have finished their course on earth and in the end are also faithful to God.

This brings us to the seventh seal and the “silence in heaven” that results *because the church is gone* and the kingdom is still coming into full effect. This is the purpose for the placement of the seventh chapter of Revelation between the sixth and seventh seals.

The second subject of note is the absence of any event when the seal is opened, but this non-event is an event in itself. As noted above, there is no one left on earth to break the silence in the spiritual heavens.¹⁴⁷

A confirming testimony for this symbolic meaning of the seventh seal is the literal experience of the Apostle John. At this point in the narrative of Revelation the visions completely stop. It could be construed that John somehow understood the visions were not at end yet, but for a period of about half an hour the visions were suspended. Much like the literal interruption of the prophecy, the symbolic visions or prophecy are for a brief period without direct witnesses to explain them.

Three Final Thoughts on the Seven Seals

(1) The messages of the seven churches and seven trumpets seem directed at the church, but the seven seals may be different. It has been suggested with some reasonable evidence from their interpretation that the seven seals are messages directed to the world in general.

(2) One suggestion regarding the seven seals is that they are fulfilled in the later portion or at the conclusion of each of the seven historical periods of the church. This seems to be the general tenor of all the interpretations of the seven seals given above. If the interpretation of the seventh seal above is correct, it certainly adds an exclamation point of affirmation to this possibility.

¹⁴⁷ See *Appendix C – Special Note on “Heaven” in Revelation* for an examination of how “heaven” is used in the book of Revelation.

(3) As repeatedly noted to the point of annoyance by now, this discussion relies on the view or model that the seven churches of Revelation represent seven periods of time paralleled by the seven seals and seven trumpets. The present point reached in the discussion of the churches, seals, and trumpets seems to be a good place to catalogue some of the similarities and to illustrate just how much correspondence there is among the parallel descriptions of these seven time periods. As follows...

- (1) The first of the seven churches (Ephesus) is described in glowing terms of great deeds, love for God, and commitment. The description of events under the first seal is also very positive with a crowned rider on a white horse that goes forth successfully.
- (2) The second church (Smyrna) is faced with persecution and death, and likewise the opening of the second seal describes a red horse with a rider that takes peace from earth. The second trumpet also describes a third of the sea becoming blood.
- (3) The third church (Pergamos) is the time of the rise of the paid clergy epitomized in the story of Balaam and in the class called the Nicolaitans. The third seal describes a black horse and a rider with balances weighing the true value of God's word. The third trumpet describes a star falling from heaven and bitter waters (like wormwood) that illustrates the poisoning of the gospel message.
- (4) The fourth church (Thyatira) describes death by plague. The fourth seal describes a sickly-colored horse and a rider identified with death that kills by plague. The fourth trumpet describes great darkness.

At this point a common pattern emerges tying the churches, seals, and trumpets together. The first four seals are united by four horses. The first four trumpets are united by the repeated references to a "third", the last three churches are united by warnings of the increasing nearness of the second advent, and last three trumpets are united by their description as three woes.

- (5) The fifth church (Sardis) wear white robes. The fifth seal also refers to white robes. In contrast to the four horses of the first four seals, the fifth trumpet describes locusts appearing like numerous horses prepared for battle. Also, the message to the fifth church describes them as having a name that is alive, but they are dead, the fifth seal describes sacrificed lives under the altar, and the fifth trumpet says men will seek death and not find it, but that death would flee from them.

- (6) The sixth church (Philadelphia) with its open door is forewarned of coming judgment after their period ends. The sixth seal describes an earthquake that prefigures the great tribulation the Philadelphia church is exempted from experiencing. The sixth seal and trumpet both describe a great earthquake. Successful evangelism and an end to persecution both seem to define the sixth church and the sixth trumpet.
- (7) The seventh church (Laodicea) is the last of the church and the door is to be closed at its conclusion. Likewise the seventh seal describes the silence that follows upon the completion of the church. The seventh church is promised they will share Christ's throne and reign and the seventh trumpet tells of Jesus assuming power over the nations and the onset of the tribulation and judgment as well as the blessings and judgments to follow the tribulation in the millennial reign.

"I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and the back, sealed up with seven seals." Rev. 5:1

Revelation Chapter Seven ~ The 144,000 and the Great Multitude

Prologue – the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins

There are two groups shown in Matthew chapter 25: 1-13, similar to the two groups of Christians depicted in Revelation chapter seven.

There are some very familiar symbols in the Matthew description, which make it easier to interpret who is being described and provide a good starting place to consider these two groups of Christian. First we have ten virgins with lamps in Matthew. The use of virgins as a symbol (2 Cor. 11:2) corresponds to those who've dedicated their life to Jesus the bridegroom (Revelation 19:7), and the number ten signifies that these virgins represent the sum total of all of the virgins. However, the virgins are divided into two groups – wise virgins and foolish virgins.

All the virgins have lamps representing the word of God (Psalm 119:105, 2 Peter 1:19) and all of them are awakened by the announcement of the bridegroom's presence outside the door (cf. Revelation 3:20). However, the foolish virgins have brought insufficient oil with them for their lamps. The oil is the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 6:1-3, 2 Cor. 1:21-22) and evidently the foolish virgins lack the same spirit of commitment as the wise virgins.

Matthew places this parable in the same context with signs (Matthew chapter 24) and with other parables (Matthew chapter 25) of Christ's return. That is the sense of this parable, also, for all of the virgins are waiting for the bridegroom to return.

The foolish virgins experience difficulties when the bridegroom arrives at the house at the stroke of midnight (cf. Song of Solomon 5:2-7). Their lamps are sputtering from a lack of oil, which suggests they are having difficulty understanding everything happening at the time. They go to get more oil in the marketplace (the parallel in Revelation seven would be the great multitude going out into the great tribulation). While they are gone the bridegroom takes the wise virgins to the wedding feast and the door is closed to the foolish virgins.

Note that throughout the parable they never cease to be virgins. They are genuinely loyal to Christ, but seem to lack the same degree or spirit (oil) of zeal and commitment that the wise virgins manifest, and they are shut out from going in to the wedding. So this parable suggests something different from the traditional view of the church... the understanding that all Christians are members of the bride of Christ. In the case of the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, there are two “classes” of Christians... and not all of them are part of the bride and the wedding.

So how do we account for these foolish virgins? Is the entire explanation for the existence of this group based solely on this parable? Consider some other examples from the scriptures –

- In Psalm 45 we have also a description of a wedding feast for the king’s daughter. In verse 14 we read “she will be led to the king in embroidered work; the virgins her companions who follow her shall be brought to you.” The Psalm is rich with metaphor, and if the bride is the wise virgins of the parable in Matthew, then who do the “virgins her companions who follow her” represent if not the foolish virgins?
- In 1 Corinthians 3:14 and 15 we have an example of two individuals that build on the foundation of Jesus Christ (verse 11). One of these individuals builds with quality materials and the other builds with inferior materials. The one who builds with quality materials receives a reward. The one who builds with inferior materials has their work destroyed, but they are still saved... although through the fire of trials (1 Peter 4:12).

These passages bear a striking similarity to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins in Matthew chapter 25 and the great multitude in Revelation chapter seven – in Psalm 45 we have the bride and then her virgin companions who are not the bride. In 1 Corinthians chapter 3 we have those who are rewarded as opposed to those who seem to be barely saved from destruction (1 Cor. 3:17).

Pictures of Two Groups of Christians in Revelation the 7th Chapter

Let’s compare what we’ve just considered with Revelation chapter seven and see if we can draw similar conclusions on this subject.

In Revelation chapter 7, the 144,000 are described as selected from the twelve tribes of Israel. Throughout the book of Revelation, the Israel described within its pages does not seem to represent the literal nation of Israel, but rather spiritual Israel or the church (cf. Romans 2:28-29, 9:6-8, Galatians 6:16, Philippians 3:3,

Colossians 2:11, Revelation 2:9). As in other places throughout Revelation, it makes much more sense to interpret the tribes in chapter seven as *spiritual* Israel.

As in Matthew chapter 25, there are two groups of people described in the chapter. In Revelation chapter seven they are described as the 144,000 (7:1-8) and the great multitude (7:9-17), and these two groups are readily distinguished from each other. In one instance the group has a specific number (the 144,000), and this is contrasted with the great multitude that is a group “which no man could number.” The first group is sealed before the winds of trouble are loosed (verses 1-3) and the other group experiences “great tribulation” (verse 14).

In addition we have descriptions of the bride of Christ from elsewhere that differ significantly from the description of the great multitude in chapter seven. For example the bride of Christ is everywhere described as seated on thrones and reigning (Revelation 3:21, 20:4), while in this chapter the great multitude are described as “before the throne” yet worshipping in God’s temple (verse 15). The bride of Christ is described as those “who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy” (Revelation 3:4). In contrast the great multitude is described as those whose robes were soiled and they “have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (verse 14).

The book of Revelation is not the only place where we have an example of those who need to have their robes washed. In the book of Jude we have a description of those who have not been completely faithful and who needed special repentance and cleansing. The book of Jude (verses 22-23) speaks of various examples of those who are straying in some way from the love of God (verse 21). It specifically makes mention of having mercy on those whose “garment [is] polluted [or “spotted”] by the flesh.”

This idea of cleansing from the actions of the flesh is elsewhere depicted in 1 Corinthians 5:5. Here we have the description of the unrepentant man whom the church had not confronted. Paul speaks of “the destruction of his flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” Paul is dealing with a specific individual rather than discussing a representative group in this instance, and he does not judge this man’s ultimate destiny. However, the verse does convey the idea of repentance and forgiveness and cleansing from the flesh as the outcome of suffering (tribulation).

Of course, our description of the great multitude could be criticized in our so-called enlightened age for not being properly egalitarian. Yet the scriptures do not shy away from the concept of reward (2 John 1:8) or even differing rewards. For an example, take some time to read and ponder the parable of the pounds in Luke 19:11-27.

The problem with our perception here seems to be twofold.

First there is a lack of humility on our part. The idea of accepting your place in the world (Luke 14:7-11) is a lost principle in our society and to a large extent in the Christian church. We tend to place ourselves at the center of our world. Christians in the past were much more inclined to see themselves as parts of a larger whole. They were more likely to see themselves as essential parts of a community that was greater than their individual importance.

Second, we have a tendency to accept a secular view that equates a person's role with their value or worth. This is not a biblical concept. The bible makes a clear distinction between someone's position and whether that person is valued as an important part of the community. Take some time to read and ponder another passage, this one regarding the body of Christ in 1 Cor. 12:4-26 (and on through 1 Cor. 13:7).

So then, maybe we should ask... if these foolish virgins, this great multitude, doesn't receive the same reward as the bride of Christ... what do they get?

From Revelation 7:15-17 "...and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the waters of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes."

Doesn't sound like such a bad deal to me.

Other Elements of Revelation Chapter Seven

So far the discussion on this chapter has focused on identifying the 144,000 and the great multitude. After identifying these two classes of Christians, the rest of the chapter becomes easier to understand. The following comments focus on the other

elements of the chapter that have been only considered peripherally up to this point.

- *Four Winds* – Winds are elsewhere symbolic of war, but here there are four winds from all directions are being held back. This imagery indicates trouble that is even more severe. Four winds coming together at once suggests a whirlwind, and the imagery of a whirlwind is typically associated with the final and most severe phase of trouble.
- *Earth, Sea, or Tree(s)* – This trouble will fall upon all elements of society, the earth (stable society), the sea (the “restless masses” not beholden to the current social order), and the trees (the leaders of society both good and corrupt).
- *Angel from the Rising Sun* – As noted a few times already, the “angels” in Revelation and elsewhere are not always that class of spiritual beings represented by “angel” in modern language. It is difficult to imagine this angel being anyone other than Jesus, who brings the rising light of a new day (2 Pet. 1:19, Matt. 13:36-43, Mal. 4:2, Ps. 46:4-5, 1 Cor. 4:5, Ps. 30:5).
- *Seal of the Living God* – The seal of God in the forehead is a symbol (Rev. 14:1, 22:4, Ezek. 3:8-9) of God’s ties and His promises to us evidenced the spirit given to His people as His pledge (Eph. 1:13, 2 Cor. 1:21-22).
- *144,000 and the Great Multitude Which No One Could Number* – The number 144,000 is commonly considered to be a literal number of people. The majority of evangelical Christians believe that it represents 144,000 converted Jews during the great tribulation. Others believe that *spiritual* Israel is literally numbered at 144,000. Still others believe that the number isn’t intended to be literal at all.

As already noted in preceding discussion on this chapter, Israel and/or the Jews in the Book of Revelation pictures *spiritual* Israel or the church. However, this still leaves open the question of whether the number 144,000 is literal or symbolic. Two views on the number are presented below:

- (1) Noting that at least a majority of numbers in Revelation appear to be literal (seven churches, 1000 year reign, etc.) although what they describe may be symbolic (ten horns or kings, 1260 days or years, etc.), it is at least reasonable to extend that same logic to the 144,000.

A second and perhaps stronger argument for a literal number is the way this chapter of Revelation contrasts the specific number of 144,000 for the first group or class of people against a group or class that “no one could number.” The suggestion – which most translators seemingly follow by their word choice¹⁴⁸ – is that the second group is too large to count by comparison to a literal 144,000.

- (2) Despite the evidence and popularity for a literal interpretation of the number, the evidence against is perhaps even more formidable.

In contradistinction to the argument that all numbers in Revelation are literal, there are examples in the book where numbers are used symbolically. The winepress of the great wrath of God is described as 1600 furlongs (14:19-20) or 40 X 40 and representing the climax of judgment. The New Jerusalem is pictured as a cube (21:16) that is 12,000 furlongs on each side and 12 edges equaling 144,000 (and yet the dimensions of the city must be symbolic since they describe a cube, and since the city itself is a symbol of the church (21:2). The seven thousand killed in the earthquake of the French Revolution (11:13 – as already noted in the previous discussion on the sixth seal) can’t be easily understood as literal since the earthquake itself is not literal. Even the 144,000 with the name of the Father and the Lamb on their foreheads (14:1) are contrasted with those who have 666 stamped on their foreheads in the previous verse (13:18)... and whether the 666 is something literal or not, it still is the number of imperfection (each six being one number short of spiritual completion or seven).

The number 144,000 is also a nice even number representing exactly 12,000 from each of 12 tribes. It has been suggested that the twelve tribes may represent twelve types of personalities or gifts, but exactly 12,000 of each seems problematic. If the 144,000 are the church (or anything else), it seems like there could be 144,001 or 143,999 of them. It’s hard to imagine why the number needs to be so specific.

The most challenging argument is the contrast between the exacting number 144,000 and the class “that no one could number.” However, if the number of 144,000 is symbolic, then it is reasonable that it is

¹⁴⁸ The NASB and many other translations use the word “count” here instead of “number” for the Greek word *arithmeo* (Gr. *αριθμεω*). It is possible that to some extent this is driven by context, since another Greek word *psephizo* (Gr. *ψηφιζω*) is used elsewhere for “count” in the sense of calculating a number (Rev. 13:18), although the grammatical sense of *arithmeo* means either “to number” (*Thayer’s* p. 73, *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, p. 51) or “to be numbered” (*Young’s Analytical Concordance*).

describing a pre-determined class¹⁴⁹ (the church – Eph. 1:4). In contrast to the church the great multitude doesn't seem to have a specific number that describes it. It is a result of other factors and not a pre-determined group.

Although the evidence can be argued either way, it seems to be more likely that the number is intended to be a symbolic representation of the church, as it is already used in a symbolic fashion elsewhere in the description of the New Jerusalem.

- *Great Multitude* – The great multitude is a group that comes out of “the great tribulation” and therefore is particularly described at the end of the age. However, the evidence of scripture favors the view that this class has also existing throughout the Gospel or Christian Age alongside the church.
- *White Robes* – The white robes represent purity as can be seen even within this chapter and elsewhere in Revelation (7:14, 19:7-8). The robes represent righteousness that covers our sin (16:15, 3:17-18) – in this case the righteousness in Christ – that justifies us before God.
- *Palm Branches* – Palm branches here and elsewhere represent victory or deliverance (Rev. 7:9-10, Ps. 92:12, Lev. 23:39-43, cf. Ezekiel's Temple 40:16-41:26 *passim*, where the temple is a symbolic illustration of the kingdom of God, and where the symbol of the palm occurs frequently).
- *Palm Branches, Robes, a Lamb, and a Multitude* – The symbols of clothes and palm branches are both used when the crowd or multitude greets Jesus in acclamation at the time of his entrance to Jerusalem less than a week before his crucifixion (Luke 19:36, John 12:12-13) as the (Passover) Lamb of God.
- *Temple and Throne* – The great multitude serves God in His temple, the church,¹⁵⁰ and they are before the throne. This contrasts with the church who is the temple (3:12) and who by the grace of God sit with Jesus on the throne (3:21, 20:6).¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ NOT individually but as a collective group... i.e., God wanted a heavenly family selected from the earth.

¹⁵⁰ See *Appendix E – The Tabernacle and the Temple in the Book of Revelation* for a multitude of symbols from these sacred spaces.

¹⁵¹ Interestingly, these same two images of the temple and the throne are also the promises made to the last two churches of the seven churches of Revelation (3:12, 21).

Epilogue 1 – The Twelve Tribes of Israel

There are multiple lists of the twelve tribes¹⁵² given in the scriptures. The original set in Genesis, the set listed in Numbers chapter 2 and chapter 34, and the set listed in Revelation 7:4-8 all reflect the changes among all of the various lists. These three sets of tribes taken as the example vary a little in their makeup. A side-by-side list follows below:

<u>Genesis 29, 30, 35</u>	<u>Numbers 2, 34:14-28</u>	<u>Revelation 7:4-8</u>
Reuben	Reuben	Reuben
Gad	Gad	Gad
Judah	Judah	Judah
Simeon	Simeon	Simeon
Benjamin	Benjamin	Benjamin
Zebulon	Zebulon	Zebulon
Issachar	Issachar	Issachar
Asher	Asher	Asher
Naphtali	Naphtali	Naphtali
Dan*	Dan*	
Joseph*		Joseph*
Levi*		Levi*
	Manasseh*	Manasseh*
	Ephraim*	

* The asterisks identify the tribes that do not remain constant.

Why the tribes changed in makeup seems only incompletely clear, but a partial list of suggestions follows.

In the case of Levi, that tribe became the priestly tribe and had no inheritance in the land. To maintain a twelfefold division of the land, the tribe of Joseph was divided between the descendants of his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim (the “double portion” of the firstborn Joseph). So it is clear why Levi is replaced in the list in the book of Numbers. It is also understandable why Levi would be included in the list of the twelve tribes of spiritual Israel in Revelation (cf. Rev. 2:11).

¹⁵² There are other places where the twelve tribes are grouped together related to Jacob’s description of the inheritance (Gen. 49:3-27), the division of the land (Joshua chapters 13-21 and Ezek. 48:1-29), the exodus (Ex. 1:2-4), the census in Num. 1:20-43, the blessings and cursings (Deut. 27:12-13), the prophecies of Moses (Deut. 33:6-27), and the gates of Ezekiel’s Temple (Ezek. 48:30-35).

The tribe of Dan descended into idolatry and eventually disappeared from the religious life of Israel (cf. Judges chapter 18). Dan seems to represent that class of people described in the book of Jude that turn back from following God. “Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path...” (Genesis 49:17) is one of the prophetic descriptions of this tribe. (Perhaps there is also a parallel between the twelve tribes and the twelve disciples of Jesus with Dan represented by Judas.) It is therefore understandable why his name would be eliminated from the rolls when it comes to the twelve tribes of spiritual Israel in Revelation (cf. Rev. 2:11).

What is less clear is why Joseph and Manasseh are both included in the list in Revelation. Why not Manasseh and Ephraim the brothers instead of Joseph the father and Manasseh one of the sons? If you’re going to include Joseph and one of his sons anyhow, why not include both sons and continue to exclude Levi?

Perhaps the answer lies in the way Ephraim came to represent the entire ten-tribe kingdom in the north of Israel after the split between those tribes and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (cf. 1 Kings 11:26). The name Ephraim becomes a symbol of compromise reflecting the character of the northern kingdom (Hos. 7:8-11, Isaiah chapter 28). If Ephraim elsewhere represents a symbol of compromise, then it is understandable that it should also be missing from the list in Revelation.

It is possible that Dan represents those who lose their salvation without hope of recovery and that Ephraim represents the class described as the great multitude just discussed above.

Epilogue 2 – Numbers Chapter Eight and Revelation Chapter Seven

One last suggestion regarding the great multitude in Revelation chapter seven relates to the parallel relationship of this chapter to Numbers chapter eight. (While this subject is also treated separately in a separate commentary on the tabernacle, temple, priesthood, and sacrifices of Israel, it is worth considering here also due to the striking manner in which it illustrates and confirms the preceding depiction of the foolish virgins / great multitude.)

In Numbers chapter eight is the description of the consecration of the Levites. The Levites are the tribe of Israel that eventually becomes the servants in the Tabernacle and Temple. The priesthood is selected from this same tribe. The

priesthood represents the church serving under the great high priest Jesus¹⁵³ and the Levites also represent an additional spiritual and heavenly class of people that serve God directly in His heavenly courts.

The Levites represent a distinct group from the priests... much like the difference between the wise and foolish virgins or like the difference between the great multitude sometimes known as the “tribulation saints” and the 144,000 of spiritual Israel. Their tribe is the priestly tribe, but the large majority of the Levites never became priests, although they serve in the tabernacle and temples of Israel. And even though the priests of the Old Testament sanctuaries and of Ezekiel’s Temple are drawn from the Levitical tribe, the priesthood is a separate group within Levi with a greater position and responsibilities (cf. Luke 19:11-27).

This is seen in more detail in Ezekiel’s Temple, where the Levites (Ezek. 44:10-14, 45:5) serve in the temple in the innermost court, but are a different class of people from the priests. Anti-typically this is a class of people that are in the spiritual realm (the inner court), yet they are not part of the priesthood, the church. And in this same passage these Levites “went astray” – much like the great multitude in Revelation seven – before they return to faithful service in the temple.

Returning to Revelation the seventh chapter, there are a number of parallels between this chapter and Numbers chapter eight with its description of the consecration of the Levites.

- The great multitude is a class that is not complete until after the Church is complete (Rev. chapter seven and 19:6-9).
- Like the Levites, the great multitude must wash their robes and purify themselves, and they do this through the blood of the Lamb... the same Lamb that is offered in Passover in the very next chapter of Numbers.
- The Levites and the great multitude both serve in the temple (the literal temple in the case of the Levites and symbolic temple in the case of the great multitude).

¹⁵³ The high priest – when in relation to the under priests – represents Jesus. Paul says to “consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession” (Hebrews 3:1) and that “we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God...” (Heb.4:14). See also Hebrews 2:17, 5:5-6, 6:20, 7:26-28, 8:1-3, 9:11, 10:19-21 for additional confirming scriptures. There seems to be little room for doubt on this matter.

The church is portrayed as a priesthood in additional passages of scripture. The church are “the royal priesthood” in 1 Peter 2:9 who serve as “kings and priests” to the world per Rev. 20:6 throughout the millennial reign under the high priest Jesus.

All of this can be seen in the parallels between the 8th chapter of Numbers and the 7th chapter of Revelation shown in the following table:

<p>Numbers 8:2-3 – Completing (and, it is reasonable,) lighting the seven lamps representing the church (Rev. 1:20).</p>	<p>Revelation 7:1-8 – Sealing of the church (or seven candlesticks) in their foreheads while the winds are restrained (Rev. 7:1-3).</p>
<p>Numbers 8:6-8, 12, 21 – The Levites wash their robes and purify themselves after offering the bullock for the sin offering.</p>	<p>Revelation 7:14 – The great multitude wash their robes and make them white (pure) in the blood of the Lamb during the tribulation.</p>
<p>Numbers 8:9-11, 22 – The cleansing prepared them for service in the tabernacle (and later in the temple services).</p>	<p>Revelation 7:15 – The great multitude is purified and serves in the (future) temple (the church – Ephesians 2:19-22).</p>
<p>The next chapter in Numbers (chapter 9 – the second Passover) applies to the great multitude as well as to the world of mankind in general.</p>	<p>Revelation 7:14 and 17 refer to the Jesus the Lamb (of the Passover) in whose blood their robes are washed and who delivers them from death into life.</p>

Revelation Chapters Eight Through Eleven ~ the Seven Trumpets

Setting the Stage for the Seven Trumpets – Frankincense and the Altar

The early verses of chapter eight introduce the time setting for the beginning of the seven trumpets (8:2).

Revelation 8:3-5 is a description of events that mark the end of the Jewish Age and the beginning of the Christian or Gospel Age.

First a sidebar regarding a small but significant aspect of these verses. The angel in these verses has a golden “censor” in his hand for burning incense. The original language for censor is quite literally a “frankincenser”¹⁵⁴ (a rather awkward sounding phrase in English, but the most accurate translation of the word). The fact that another word for censor could be used¹⁵⁵ suggests that the preference for frankincense is of particular importance here.

Frankincense represents “justice” or “righteousness” in the scriptures (Leviticus 2:1-3, Leviticus 5:11, Numbers 5:15, and Leviticus 24:7/cf. Psalm 19:7-11). It comes from a root word in Hebrew meaning “white”, which also suggests purity and righteousness.

There are two events described in the verses under consideration. The first event is the angel offering incense. The smoke (and by implication fragrance) of this incense ascends up to God from the censor. The second event is the use of the censor to throw fire to the earth with dramatic consequences.

The verses are complicated by the mention of altars and incense (both from the censor in the hand of the angel and by implication on the golden altar of incense).

¹⁵⁴ From the Greek word libanotos (Gr. λιβανωτος) from Strong’s Concordance 3131 (cf. libanos or Gr. λιβανος from Strong’s 3030). Vine comments that the word “denotes frankincense, the gum of the libanos, the frankincense tree; in a secondary sense a vessel in which to burn incense, Rev. 8:3-5.” He then adds that the word “...derives its significance... from that which was burned in the vessel” rather than from the act of burning. See Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under “censer”, 2). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company. See also *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 1976 ed., (p. 251), Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan. Since there is another word for censor (lit. “vessel for burning”) and another word for incense (or lit. “fragrance” or “odors”), it seems the use of frankincense here is an intentional reference to this particular spice or incense.

¹⁵⁵ See previous footnote.

It may help to demystify the language of these verses by identifying the altars and the locations found in this description:

- ❖ The “altar” is the brazen altar or altar of sacrifice in the court. There are only two altars in the tabernacle and temple arrangements, and only one altar (the sacrificial altar in the court) has fire. Additionally, Aune notes that the other occurrences of “altar”¹⁵⁶ all seem to relate to the sacrificial altar.¹⁵⁷
- ❖ The “golden altar” is in the “holy” compartment of the tabernacle and temple. Fire is brought to it from the brazen or sacrificial altar in the court. The incense from the golden altar represents the prayers of the saints as noted in these verses and in Rev. 5:8 and Psalm 141:1-2 (cf. Luke 1:9-11).
- ❖ The angel with the censer is in the court next to the sacrificial altar. The angel takes fire from this altar twice, and so by extrapolation never leaves this position. Notice also that the frankincense offered by this angel is added to the prayers of the saints represented by the incense from a censer located on the golden altar. They are two simultaneous but separate offerings of incense.

This frankincense in the censer in the hand of the angel is *not* the prayers of the saints, but this frankincense is offered at the brazen altar *with* the prayers of the saints that are on the golden incense altar... where they should be as pictured elsewhere in scripture.

If this is all sounding a little complicated and piecemeal, the net result is a simple and a beautiful picture. Remembering the two actions in these verses, the first of these actions is the offering of incense by the angel. Specifically, the angel is offering frankincense, which represents justice, and the angel does this while standing next to the *altar of sacrifice*. This is a picture of the death of Jesus, and how the smoke of the sacrifice of Christ that satisfies justice on our behalf ascends as a fragrance to God *in addition to* the prayers of the saints also rising (from the *golden altar*). It is the death of Christ that makes even our prayers acceptable.

The angel’s second action is to take fire from the altar and cast it into the earth resulting in thunder and sounds (controversies), flashes of lightning (revealed truth), and an earthquake¹⁵⁸ (revolution). This represents the rebellion against Rome at the end of the Jewish Age following the Jewish rejection of their Messiah.

¹⁵⁶ The Greek word is *thusiasterion* (θυσιαστηριον) and is found in 6:9, 9:13, 11:1, 14:18, 16:7.

¹⁵⁷ See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (p. 511). Dallas: Word Books.

¹⁵⁸ This earthquake is not described as a “great” earthquake in language used elsewhere in Revelation and indicating that it does not represent the great tribulation period or anything similar. Nevertheless, the Jewish revolt is a revolution or “earthquake.”

It is a judgment on the nation illustrated by the use of the “frankincense” picturing justice and “fire” characterizing the trouble and destruction that result...¹⁵⁹ and consequently resulting in the destruction of the temple and eventually the destruction of the Jewish nation.

As elsewhere in Revelation, the question of why this is important may arise among some readers. There are two reasons for this actually.

First, it gives us a beautiful picture of our relationship with God. Our prayers rise like fragrant incense along with the remembrance and saving grace of the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf.

Second, and particularly in connection to the context of the seven trumpets, it similarly sets the start for another series of seven – this time seven trumpets – at the beginning and not the end of the Gospel Age. They trumpets begin with a harvest period or overlapping of two ages at the sacrifice of Christ (the beginning of the Gospel Age) and accompanied chronologically by trouble and finally the destruction of the temple (the closing of the Jewish Age).

The first trumpet sounds at this intersection in time.

About the Seven Trumpets

Before beginning a detailed discussion of the seven trumpets, it’s best to first structure the description of the trumpets into four sections, as follows:

- (1) **Trumpets 1-4** – all of equal length and all using a “third” in their descriptions (8:7-12).
- (2) **Trumpets 5-6** – locusts and angels released, horses, etc. (8:13-9: all).
- (3) **Trumpet 6** – additional events during this trumpet (10: all, 11:1-13).
- (4) **Trumpet 7** – Christ returns (1 Cor. 15:51-52) / tribulation and kingdom (11:14-19).

The First Four Trumpets

As noted above, the first four trumpets are connected by the reference to a “third” throughout their descriptions. The propensity for interpreters and readers to identify the symbols of Revelation as literal events influences many to explain

¹⁵⁹ Josephus writes extensively about this revolt and conflict in his book(s) titled the “War of the Jews”.

these thirds as actual fractions (of whatever they describe). Yet nothing about the trumpets appears any less likely to be figurative than other parts of Revelation. For example, the message of the second trumpet includes a mountain burning with fire that is thrown into the sea and the message of the fifth trumpet includes a bottomless pit from which come locusts with crowns and hair like women and teeth like lions.

A more reasonable explanation is that the “thirds” represent three different divisions of human society that are relevant in Revelation. These three elements may change from one trumpet to the next as time progresses, but the institutions and the classes of people are still consistently divided into three parts.¹⁶⁰

This division into three parts is not unusual at all in Revelation and can be found elsewhere in the book. For example the opposition to God is both unified and then divided into three parts at Armageddon (16:13, 19). In the kingdom after the complete restoration of the world, one of the three divisions (heaven, earth, sea) of mankind (the “sea” class or the restless masses of people – Is. 57:20, Luke 21:25, etc.)¹⁶¹ no longer exists when all are at peace (Is. 2:2-4, Rev. 21:3-4, 22:1-2, etc.). And although they are never collectively seen in Revelation, there are three groups of people listed as the “saints, as “those that dwell on the earth”, and as “every tribe and tongue and people and nation.”¹⁶²

As for what the three parts in Revelation represent, they seem to represent the three parts of the religious, political, and cultural world. These three parts are illustrated in the following table (in no particular order):

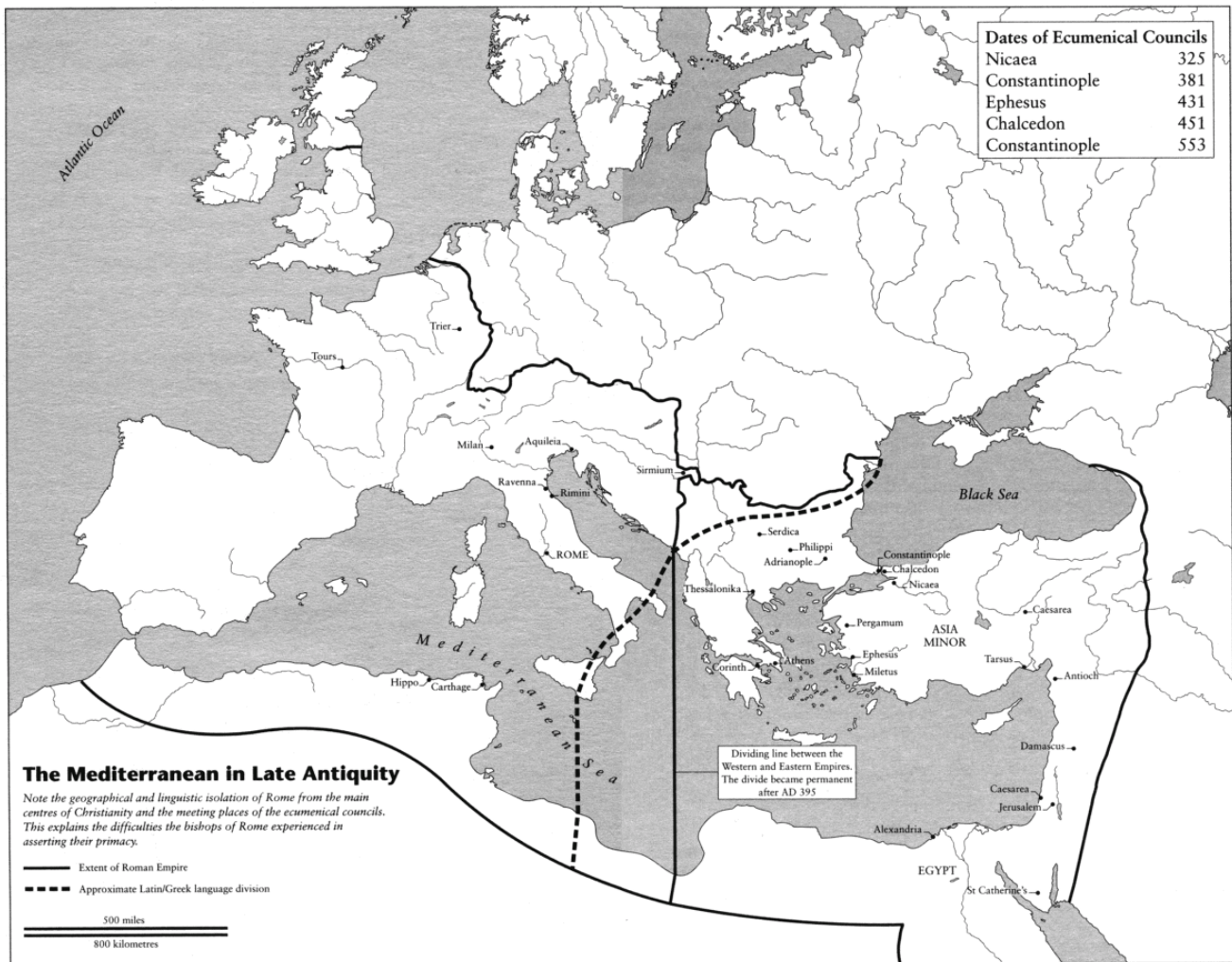
Trumpet	(1) People of God	(2) Eastern, etc.	(3) Western, etc.
1st	Natural Israel	Greek (Greeks)	Latin (Romans)
2nd	Faithful Christians	Christian Empire	Pagan Empire
3rd	Faithful Christians	Greek Orthodoxy	Latin Catholicism
4th	Faithful Christians	Orthodox Church	Roman Church

¹⁶⁰ This concept of a “third part” is found elsewhere in prophecy in Zech. 13:8-9. Cf. Is. 6:13 and (less obviously) Zech. 8:22-23.

¹⁶¹ As mentioned elsewhere, for other examples of the symbolic meaning of “sea” in prophecy, see *Appendix B – Bible Symbolism in Prophecy*.

¹⁶² See *Appendix D – Two Groups in Revelation Compared* for more details on the last two of these groups.

Two of these divisions between east and west, Greek and Latin, and eventually Orthodox and Roman Catholic, can be seen in the division(s) in the map below.



The First Four Trumpets (8:6-13)

Rev. 8:6 – The trumpets sound in chronological order beginning with the first and proceeding through time one after the other.

Rev. 8:7 – All three divisions represented in the “thirds” of the first trumpet can be seen in the three languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) written on the sign attached to the cross (John 19:19-20). These three languages represent the three elements of the religious and cultural world at the beginning of the church and are reflected in the “thirds” or three parts of the first trumpet.

Hail (hard difficult truths usually bringing judgment – Rev. 16:21, Is. 28:17) and fire (judgment and destruction (Zeph. 3:8-9, Mal. 4:1-3, Rev. 21:8) – are mixed into blood (presumably the blood of Christ at the first advent bringing life (Lev. 17:11, John 6:53-57) – and thrown to the earth.

The truth of Christianity quickly spread far and wide throughout the Roman Empire, so it might appear that a large portion of the empire converted to Christianity in short order, but nothing could be further from the truth. These were difficult truths to accept for Jews, Greeks, and Romans.¹⁶³

The earliest persecutors of the church were the Jewish people, and the first trumpet illustrates that the heaviest consequences fell upon Israel. A third of the earth is burned up (Israel is crushed by the Roman army), a third of the trees are burned up (the temple and Jewish priesthood are destroyed and the “trees” or Jewish leadership consequently loses its base of power, its ability to validate some of Jewish belief, and most importantly its standing before God), and all the green grass (humanity apart from Christ – 1 Pet. 1:24) is burned up (none of mankind has life or righteousness apart from Christ – Rom 3:9-10).

Rev. 8:8-9 – A great burning mountain falls into the sea. Mountains are kingdoms, and this kingdom or “great mountain” is the pagan Roman Empire.

As it comes to an end to be replaced by a so-called Christian Empire, a third of the sea becomes blood. This is a different use of blood than in the message of the previous trumpet. Here the blood is so omnipresent that it kills a third part of everything in the sea. This is another description of the world in three parts as the pagan empire ends and the so-called Christian empire and the true and faithful Christians continue on. A third of everything living in the sea dies (pagans gradually cease to exist) and a third of the ships (the pagan institutions) are destroyed.

Concurrently with the Christianization of the pagan empire, the empire is divided into two parts. The Roman Empire initially is still united, but the eastern and western divisions are managed separately. Eventually the empire completely divides in half, and eventually the western empire begins to crumble and then disappears completely (yet over time and centuries later to be replaced by the western Holy Roman Empire).

¹⁶³ Jews (Acts 5:17, 14:19, 17:6-9), Greeks (Acts 17:22, 32) and Romans (Rom. 1: all).

Rev. 8:10-11 – The primary event of the third trumpet is the “great star” that falls from heaven. Like the previous trumpet in which a “great mountain” or the pagan Roman Empire falls into the sea, this “great star” that falls from heaven is a momentous event.

The star is named “Wormwood” and is “used metaphorically in the Old Testament of the idolatry of Israel (Deut. 29:18); of calamity and sorrow (Jer. 9:15, 23:15, Lam. 3:15, 19); [and] of false judgment (Amos 5:7).”¹⁶⁴

The star is also described as “burning like a torch” as it falls upon the rivers and waters. The Greek word *lampas* (Gr. λαμπας) is translated “torch” rather than “lamp” in nearly every translation besides the KJV.¹⁶⁵

The star named Wormwood falls upon (or affects) the third part¹⁶⁶ of the rivers and springs of water rather than falling upon the earth. The rivers and springs represent the source of truth and knowledge, and these are made bitter as a consequence.

This falling star that creates the bitter waters is Muhammad, whose new religion of Islam “...exploding from Arabia in 622 AD... proceeded to conquer Syria, Iraq, Israel, Egypt, Persia, North Africa, and Spain... in less than 90 years.”¹⁶⁷ The rise of this religion became a bitter challenge to institutional Christianity’s rise to power and claims of representing the world’s one true religion. The institution and region of the Eastern Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire) and what would become the Eastern Orthodox Church were most strongly affected, as Islam encroached upon and conquered much of the region and decimated the eastern Christian churches in the areas it occupied like a burning destructive torch blazing through this period.

Thus the “third part” that is affected by the rise of Islam is represented in the eastern empire and church.

¹⁶⁴ Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (p. 506). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

¹⁶⁵ See *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 1976 ed. (p. 371). Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan and *Liddell and Scott – A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1897 ed. / 1996 supplement (p. 1027). Oxford: Clarendon Press, where the translation in each instance is *light* or *torches*. Vincent notes: “The origin of our *lamp*, but, properly, a *torch*; the word for *lamp* being *λυχνος*, a *hand-lamp* filled with oil (Matt. 5:15, Luke 8:16, John 5:35).” See Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (pp. 480 & 506). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

¹⁶⁶ Aune points out yet another difficulty interpreting these trumpets as anything other than symbolic: “Since a single star cannot fall on a third of the rivers and springs, this description cannot be construed literally; rather it means that the burning star *affected* a third part of the rivers and springs.” See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (p. 521). Dallas: Word Books.

¹⁶⁷ Doctor, R. *Beauties of the Truth*, Vol. 13, No. 4. (2002). Lisle, IL.

Rev. 8:12 – The fourth angel sounds and light is darkened from the sun (the gospel), the moon (the Jewish law), and the stars (the twelve apostles).¹⁶⁸

The darkening of the sun and moon and stars pictures the diminishing of the availability of the Bible and the reliance on ceremony and sacraments during the height of the medieval period. This darkening of light had already affected both the eastern and western churches (Eastern Greek Orthodoxy and the Western Roman/Latin Church), but now it also affected the remaining “third part” representing the true and faithful Christians attempting to carry on the apostolic message amidst the pomp and repressive authority of the institutional churches.

Trumpets Five and Six (Rev. 8:13-9:21)

With trumpets five and six the language and structure of the trumpets changes. The messages are lengthier and no longer emphasize the “third part”¹⁶⁹ in the three remaining trumpet messages.

As noted in earlier comments at the conclusion of the discussion on the seven churches of Revelation, the parables of the 13th chapter of Matthew seem to be an obvious parallel to the seven historical periods of the seven churches, seals, and trumpets described in Revelation. In particular the 5th and 6th parables are very similar (Matt. 13:44-45).

Likewise, similarities can also be found in the descriptions of the fifth and sixth trumpets:

- In the message of the fifth trumpet there are locusts released from the bottomless pit (9:2-3) and in the message of the sixth trumpet the four angels bound at the Euphrates River are released (9:14-15).
- In the message of the fifth trumpet the locusts appeared “like horses prepared for battle” and sound like “many horses rushing to battle” (9:7-9), and in the message of the sixth trumpet there is an army of horses and horsemen (9:16-19).
- The locusts under the fifth trumpet have power to sting like scorpions in their tails (9:3-5, 10) and the horses under the sixth trumpet have power in their tails (9:19).
- The descriptions of the locusts and horses both reference fire and smoke (9:2, 17-19), lions (9:8, 17), and breastplates (9:9, 17).

¹⁶⁸ See the discussion at Revelation 12:1 for an exceptionally detailed explanation of these symbols and their meaning.

¹⁶⁹ With one exception of the “third part” in 9:18.

Rev. 8:13 – This point marks the transition point between the first four trumpets (8:7-12) and the last three (9:1-11:19). As the first four trumpets are linked together by the use of the “third part” and the common structure of the verses, so that last three trumpets are now linked together in this verse and defined as “woe trumpets” (cf. 9:1, 12-13, and 11:14-15) in most modern commentaries.

This message is not conveyed by an unidentified messenger but by an eagle.¹⁷⁰ There are at least a couple possible reasons for choosing the eagle at this point.

- First is the connection of the eagle with swift and sure judgment (Deut. 28:49, Hos. 8:1)...¹⁷¹ an appropriate application for the message of this eagle.
- Second is the connection between the eagle and wisdom as noted in the 4th chapter of Revelation. Since the fifth trumpet is historically concurrent with the beginning of the Protestant Reformation movement, an eagle representing increasing wisdom and knowledge is a pointed symbol at the locus where the transition to the Reformation church gains power.

Perhaps both of these uses of eagle are relevant here.

This verse also more properly belongs as the opening verse of the 9th chapter of Revelation or perhaps as a continuation of chapter eight into chapter nine.

The Fifth Trumpet (9:1-11/12)

Rev. 9:1-11 – The fifth trumpet describes a change in the direction of the church. With the Reformation the church ends its long slow decline into “a form of godliness” while having “denied its power” (2 Tim. 3:5) in the life of the individual Christian. This abrupt and surprisingly successful change can be seen in the symbolic description contained in these verses.

The “star from heaven which had fallen to the earth” corresponds well to Martin Luther. He is excommunicated in the year 1521 or four years after he nails the “Ninety-five Theses” to the door of the Wittenberg Church.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Note that the KJV says “angel”, but virtually every other translation uses a different and older manuscript basis for this verse and inserts “eagle” for “angel”.

¹⁷¹ Note that in the Hosea verse the eagle is also associated with a trumpet.

¹⁷² The most common alternate suggestion that the “star from heaven which had fallen to the earth” is John Wycliffe is worthy of consideration since Wycliffe’s influence on the church was profound and he is often described as “the morning star of the Reformation” for his early work in bringing the Bible to the common people in English. However, his effect at the time is more diffused, and more tellingly – and unlike Luther – he is never excommunicated from the church.

Interestingly, the Roman Church did not realize the severity of Wycliffe’s impact on them during his lifetime, so many decades later they dug up his body and burned it.

The “bottomless pit” is a symbol of powerlessness. It is a descriptive term for death (Rom. 10:7) and is where Satan is imprisoned when he is “bound” and held powerless to deceive that nations any longer till the thousand-year millennium is complete (20:2-3, 7) “...and power was given to them...” (9:3, 10)

Out of the pit comes “smoke as if from a great furnace” and “the sun and the air” are “darkened” from the smoke.

- ❖ That the sun is darkened seems to be odd if the sun represents the gospel truth. However, the disruption caused by the Reformation also led to confusion within the church among the competing doctrines of Lutheranism, Catholicism, Calvinism, Anglicanism, and even lesser known movements such as the Anabaptists, Arminianism, and Unitarianism. What was once considered sure and uncomplicated truth becomes challenging and divisive.
- ❖ Yet not only is the sun darkened, but also the air,¹⁷³ which in this present time represents the abode of “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2) or Satan (cf. also Eph. 6:11-12). His control of the church begins to slip from his grasp now as the “air” is darkened.¹⁷⁴

The symbol of the locusts is elsewhere connected with communism or anarchism. Proverbs 30:27 says, “the locusts have no king, yet all of them go out in ranks.” Technically communism does not have a king, but instead it is united by an ideology. Anarchism is the ideology of no government at all. The prophet Joel describes the locusts as consuming everything in their path (Joel 1:4 and ff). At the time of the rise of communism, it seemed to be an relentless movement, and today’s protest movements and spirit of rebellion and anarchy also seem unstoppable and will perhaps prove appear to be all consuming in the future.

And while it seems unlikely that communism or anarchism is the intent in this passage of Revelation, yet certainly the era described under the fifth trumpet is fraught with other kinds of revolutionary spirit.

First there is the Reformation, a religious revolt against the Roman Papal “king” of Christianity. This begins fully in 1518 when Luther challenges the church at the Diet of Augsburg.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Strong’s Conc. #109 the Greek word *aer* (Gr. *anp*) meaning “air” and which is the only word translated air in the NASB from Acts 22 onward (seven occurrences).

¹⁷⁴ A confirming point on the “air” found in Revelation itself is located in 16:17 where the concluding plague of the “seven last plagues” is poured out “upon the air”... and so finally ending Satan’s control of the institutions of this world (16:17-20).

¹⁷⁵ Some would date the start of the Reformation movement a year earlier in 1517 AD when tradition says Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany. This certainly could be also considered as a reasonable start date, but it had little real

The beginning of Luther's protestant movement is followed almost immediately by the German Peasants' War – a revolution partially inspired by Lutheranism¹⁷⁶ – just six years later after Augsburg. Somewhere between 100,000 and 300,000 peasants are slaughtered during the years 1524-1525 as a consequence of their rebellion against the system of landholding and against the onerous burdens placed on the peasant population.¹⁷⁷ This event becomes the largest secular revolution in the history of Europe prior to the French Revolution.

Death is a theme in this passage, and we'll have to inquire as to what is meant by death, but first note its occurrences:

- “They were not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” (9:4)
- “And they were not permitted to kill anyone...” (9:5)
- “And in those days men will seek death, and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.” (9:6)

Death in scripture can also be sacrificial death (Rom. 6:3 ff., 12:1, Luke 9:23, Heb. 13:11-13, 20:4, etc.). This is probably the intent here. Those who are hurt by Luther's message do not have the seal of God in their foreheads and are only nominally Christian. Those who are not permitted to be killed and who long for death and who are tormented by the new teachings of the Gospel are those who cling to the Roman Church and cannot find true sacrificial death.

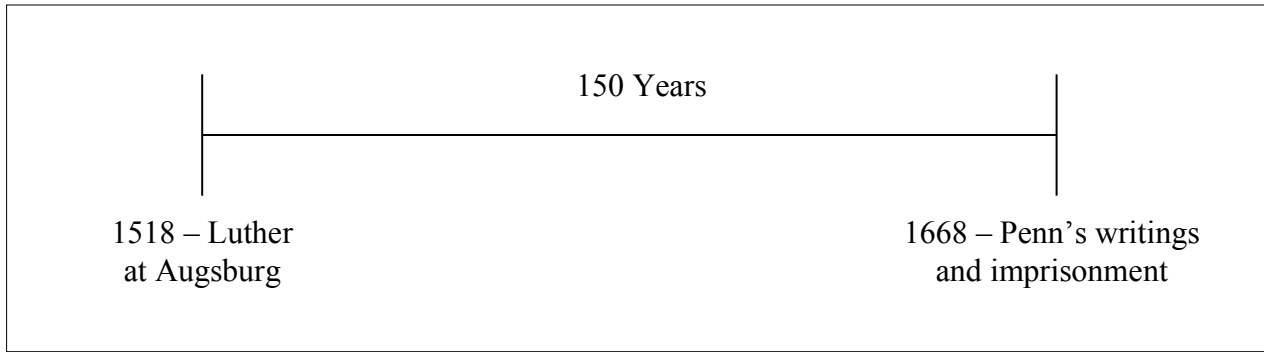
The torment of the scorpion-like locusts lasts for five months. Interpreted consistently with the other time prophecies of at 30 days per month¹⁷⁸ and a day for a year (Ezek. 4:1-6, etc.), five months gives us a time period of 150 years. 150 years from a start date for Luther and the Reformation of 1518 AD (Luther at Augsburg in his open challenge to the church) brings us to 1668 AD and William Penn's most significant writings, his open challenge to the Church of England, and his imprisonment as a consequence of these actions. That end of 150 years is the start of the sixth church and the sixth trumpet as the later Reformation begins.

impact on Germany outside of intellectual circles before Luther officially challenged the Roman Church at Augsburg. For this and other reasons not detailed here, the critical date will be considered as 1518 AD for the start of the Reformation and Luther's challenge to Catholicism.

¹⁷⁶ Although Luther did not personally approve of it or support it. However, some of his followers – most notably Zwingli – did support the revolution believing it to be based on biblical principles.

¹⁷⁷ Peasants' War. (no date). In *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved September 7, 2017 from <https://www.britannica.com/event/Peasants-War>

¹⁷⁸ See *Appendix B – Bible Symbolism in Prophecy* – under the section on time prophecy – for the scripture evidence for a prophetic month of 30 days.



“The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle...” As noted earlier, the symbolic use of the horse in scripture is connected with two related subjects. First, the horse represents the beliefs, doctrines, and ideology (Zech. 6:5, cf. 6:1-8) that motivate people to act (Is. 30:27-28 – cf. Is. 31:1-3 in the same context, Is. 37:29, Zech. 12:3-4). Second, the horse is connected to battle and controversy (Job 39:19-24, Prov. 21:31). These two subjects are linked in the symbol of the horse.

As an example of the connection between doctrine and battle, consider the Book of Habakkuk. At least some of this book (1:5-11, 14-17) appears to be a description of the rise of communism. In Hab. 1:8 this is connected to horses and those that ride them to battle. In this same book the Lord responds on horses of battle and “chariots of salvation” (Hab. 3:8, 13). In Habakkuk we see the contrast between what motivates the riders of the horses in chapter one to go to war (communism) and then what motivates God to go to war (the salvation of people).

Here in Revelation the locusts like horses are prepared for the battle of ideologies both religious and secular that proceed out of the Reformation movement.

The “crowns like gold” represent divine authority. In this war God is on the side of the locusts.

The “faces... like the faces of men” and “hair... like the hair of women” representing both genders suggests a synchronicity between these two images. Perhaps this parallels the symbolic picture of Christ and the church present in the marriage relationship between men and women (Eph. 5:22-33, Rev. 19:7-8). There men represent the love and authority of Christ and women represent the church. The “faces of men” may represent Luther and other respected leaders of the early Reformation churches and the women the new churches themselves. The specific

reference to “hair of women” would seem to reinforce this point (cf. 1 Cor. 11:2-15). The leaders and churches represented in this particular imagery of the locusts have certainly proven to be a torment to the Roman Church ever since.

The “teeth... like lions” and the “breastplates of iron” also have a common similarity. The lion represents strength and power (Rev. 4:7, 1 Pet. 5:8) as does iron (Dan. 2:40-42, 7:7, 19, 23). However, one symbol (teeth like lions) is offensive in nature and one symbol (breastplates of iron) is defensive in nature (cf. Eph. 6:14 – “breastplate of righteousness” and similarly the “shield of faith”).

The church of this period is encouraged to “strengthen the things that remain” (3:2) following the downward spiral of the church through the first four periods. The fifth period becomes the time to regather strength¹⁷⁹, and the church does so outwardly as pictured in the description of the fifth trumpet, although inwardly the church still struggles spiritually (3:1).

The king of the locusts is given two names – Abaddon and Apollyon – both meaning destruction. One name is Hebrew and the other is Greek, which identifies who the king of the locusts is... the Bible... as represented in Hebrew (the Old Testament) and Greek (the New Testament). If it seems strange the Bible should be described as a destroyer, bear in mind that this king of the locusts is destroying lies and falsehoods. The “locusts... like horses” – the teachings and beliefs of the early Reformation – are drawing from scripture and not from the doctrines of the Roman Church. Their king is the Bible.

Rev. 9:12 – The fifth trumpet is only the beginning of the spiritual change coming upon the church and the political upheavals coming upon the world. “The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things. Then the sixth angel sounded...”

¹⁷⁹ Ephesians 6:10-11 speaks of being “strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” An interesting and unusual number of references in the description of the fifth seal seem related to the book of Ephesians. In addition to the verses already noted, cf. 9:4 with Eph. 1:13 & 4:30, 9:2 with Eph. 4:18 & 5:7-14, and not as directly 9:7 with Eph. 1:22, 9:4 with Eph. 3:17 & 4:15-16, 9:3 with Eph. 1:19, and 9:1-2 with 4:8-10.

The Sixth Trumpet (9:12/13 through 11:14/15)

The description of the sixth trumpet is the longest description of all the trumpets by a wide margin. It begins in 9:12/13 and continues all the way through to 11:14/15 where the seventh trumpet (3rd woe) is finally described.

Sidebar – the Sixth Trumpet and the French Revolution

All of the description of the sixth trumpet in chapters 10 and 11 deals with the French Revolution and with events related to that period. This will become apparent when those chapters are considered in detail.

However, one quick example of this can be found in 11:13 when a “tenth” of the “city” falls in a great earthquake. The city is the one time “great city” (11:8, 17:2-5 & 18) of church and state Europe. The ten parts of the city are ten nations of Europe (17:12-13), the “tenth” part of the city is France, and the “great earthquake” is the French Revolution.

As noted, this application of chapters 10-11 will become more clearly apparent when these chapters are considered in detail.

The Sixth Trumpet and the Later Reformation (9:12/13-21)

Rev. 9:13-21 – The sixth trumpet continues the themes begun in the description of the fifth trumpet. As noted earlier, this passage describing the message of the sixth trumpet parallels the message of the fifth trumpet in many ways and continues the portrayal of the Reformation. Now, however, the picture is mixed with further judgments that culminate in the French Revolution.

There is a “voice from the horns¹⁸⁰ of the golden altar which is before God...” This is not the voice of God directly, but a voice from the golden altar or more specifically from the horns (corners) of the altar that is before God. The horns speak in a single voice¹⁸¹ of command.

¹⁸⁰ The number “four” as in “four horns” is missing in many older and more reliable manuscripts.

¹⁸¹ The NASB divides the voice (vs. 13) from the thought of “one” (vs. 14) singular speaker, but this runs contrary to most translations. See for example Marshall’s *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, which uses “one voice”, and M.R.Vicent who notes “Lit., *one voice*” (see Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (p. 510). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers). Cf. also *RVIC2000* (RV plus Parkinson in footnote) that gives a brief synopsis of manuscript evidence both ways in which it is clear that the strongest evidence favors “one voice from the horns of the golden altar”.

It is of interest that direct reference to the golden altar itself occurs only one other time in Revelation (8:3-5), and there it is also connected to trouble and revolution.

The four angels “bound” at the Euphrates River are loosed. The Euphrates is the river that flows through and supports Babylon, and the Euphrates also connects with the final judgment of the seven last plagues on Babylon (16:12, 19). In similar imagery, four angels are also connected to final judgment elsewhere in Revelation (7:1-3) as they withhold the loosing of the “four winds” until the appropriate time... as in this passage (9:15).

The timing of the loosing of the angels is a set point described as “the hour and day and month and year.”^{182, 183, 184} This suggests either the beginning of the sixth trumpet in 1668 (“five months” or 150 years from 1518) or the time of the French Revolution (1789-1799) and the end of 1260 years (1799) and the damaging impact of that event on the power and prestige of the Roman Catholic Church.

The horses again represent the teachings and inspiration of the Reformation. The riders wear breastplates with three colors – red (like fire), blue (like hyacinth), and yellow (like sulfur). These are the three primary colors of light from which all other colors are made (red, blue, and yellow) and represent primary truths. (Note that later in 10:1 still during the sixth trumpet, the rainbow represents an even greater diversity of revealed truths.) The horses represent true doctrine. The breastplates represent righteousness (Eph. 6:14) and that which is just and true.

The heads of the horses¹⁸⁵ are like the heads of lions and the breastplates are made of iron. Like the use of these symbols in the description of the fifth trumpet, they continue to symbolize strength and power.

¹⁸² Translation per Marshall’s *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*.

M.R. Vicent discusses this verse in detail, stating, “This rendering [in the KJV] is wrong, since it conveys the idea that the four periods mentioned are to be combined as representing the length of the preparation or of the continuance of the plagues. But it is to be noted that neither the article nor the preposition are repeated before *day* and *month* and *year*. The meaning is that the angels are prepared unto the *hour* appointed by God, and that this hour shall fall in its appointed day and month and year. (See Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (p. 511). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers).

¹⁸³ The terms hour, day, and year all refer to descriptions of judgment (cf. Rev. 3:10, 18:8, Is. 34:8, etc.).

¹⁸⁴ A suggestion regarding a *secondary* implication: it may be that these descriptive terms *also* represent specific periods: the hour representing the hour of testing, the day representing the (a) year 1878, the year representing a prophetic year of 360 days/years from 1518 to 1878, and the month representing a prophetic month of 30 days/years from 1848 to 1878. (The year 1848 is known as the “Year of Revolution”, the “Revolutions of 1848”, the “People’s Spring”, and the “Spring of Nations” when rebellion broke out across all of Europe. To this day it is the most widespread wave of revolutions in European history.)

¹⁸⁵ There is a contrast of the heads (which speak truth) and the tails (which do harm) in 9:19. The tails are like serpents with mouths and imply that these horses may not be completely pure. The tails do harm, but not to those killed by the truth and judgment plagues of the horses. Cf. Is. 9:15 – “The head is the elder and honorable man, and the prophet who teaches falsehood is the tail.”

The reference to “a third [part] of mankind” that are killed should be in keeping with the same use of “third” in the earlier trumpets as one of three parts of humanity. In this case the division is probably between Protestantism, Catholicism, and the kings and civil governments.

One possible interpretation of the third part killed is a continuation the same theme of *sacrificial* death begun in 9:5-6. The Protestant people of Europe are the third part that responds positively to the truths (red, blue, and yellow) from the mouths of the horses and to the judgments that follow as a result (9:17-18).

The 200 million¹⁸⁶ horsemen is probably not significant of an actual number,¹⁸⁷ but instead represents that those on the horses are all those represented by the spirit of God symbolized in the number two (11:3-4, Heb. 4:12/Eph. 6:17).¹⁸⁸ The number suggests that a large multitude of people would follow the teachings of the spirit, and this is precisely the case in the later Reformation period as the Protestant movement grows dramatically across Europe and also throughout the colonial empires by means of the outbound missionary movements from the Protestant nations.

All of this contrasts with “the rest of mankind” that continue to worship false religion (9:20-21) with all of its corrupting influences (the Inquisition and persecution of others,¹⁸⁹ the adulterous relationship of church and state,¹⁹⁰ etc.).

The Overviews of the Sixth and Seventh Trumpets

It's easier at this point to temporarily bypass the 10th and most of the 11th chapters of Revelation – which are still under the sixth trumpet – and go directly to the seventh trumpet. This gives a more continuous flow of the history of the trumpets without the nearly two chapters that deal with important aspects of the French Revolution and fall between the overall description of the sixth trumpet in 9:13-21 and the overall description of the seventh trumpet in 11:15-19.

¹⁸⁶ Literally *twice ten thousand times ten thousand*. Similar language – ten thousand times ten thousands (lit. myriad of myriads) is used in 5:11 regarding the number of angels, where it is clearly not meant to be the actual number of angels. M.R. Vincent states with references [e.g. Heb. 12:22, Luke 12:1, etc.] that when used in the plural this way “it is used for an unlimited number.” Vincent, M.R. (no date). *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (pp. 492 & 512). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers).

¹⁸⁷ It has been suggested that there may be a total of 200 million Protestants altogether throughout the sixth or Philadelphia period of the church. This could be no more than an approximation at best, however, and it is not in keeping with the way the same phraseology of the number is used elsewhere in Revelation and the NT.

¹⁸⁸ In this case the exponents of 10 that are multiplied by the number 2 are just multipliers that illustrate how this is a large multitude

¹⁸⁹ 17:6, 18:24.

¹⁹⁰ Rev. 17:1-5.

Rev. 11:14-15a – “The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Then the seventh angel sounded...” As noted previously, the last three trumpets are collectively known as the “woe trumpets” tying together the last three trumpets (cf. 8:13, 9:1, 12-13, 11:14) in another example of the split between the first four and last three churches, seals, and trumpets. Most likely they are considered “woes” because all three illustrate the change in direction and challenge(s) to the institutions of the world... ending in the “great tribulation”.

The Seventh Trumpet and the Seventh (Harvest) Church (11:15-19)

The sounding of the Seventh Trumpet is simultaneous with the seventh church¹⁹¹ and seventh seal. It is the point of intersection between the Christian or Gospel Age and the incoming kingdom of the Messianic Age.

The message of the seventh trumpet is structured in three small parts:

- **11:15-17** – the reign of Christ begins,
- **11:18** – a description of the consequential events of Christ asserting authority in the order that they occur that extend beyond the seventh trumpet and into the 1000 year reign, and
- **11:19** – a second summary of events that describe the beginning and end of the seventh trumpet,

and they will be treated separately and in that order.

Rev. 11:15-17 – “Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because you have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.’”

The kingdom of this world – the usurped authority of Satan the “god of this world and “prince of the power of the air” (2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 2:2, Matt. 4:8-9) – changes hands as Christ assumes rightful control of this world.

¹⁹¹ As the church at the beginning of the age fell during the “harvest” of the Jewish Age (Matt. 9:37-38, 3:12, John 4:35-38), so the church at the end of the age falls during the “harvest” of the Gospel Age (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-49, Rev. 14:14-16).

It is the kingdom of the Lord¹⁹² and of His Christ [anointed]. As described in similar language in the 2nd Psalm, when the reign of Christ begins the earth is not at peace. In fact it is in opposition, and this aspect of the beginning of the reign of Christ is initial subject of the next verse.

Rev. 11:18 – “And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

When the reign of Christ begins the nations are “enraged” or in the language of the psalms, “Why are the nations in an uproar and the people devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear their fetters [bonds] apart and cast away their cords [chains] from us!’” (Psalm 2:1-2)

Yet His “wrath has come” as the Father and Son retake control of this rebellious world. “He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His anger...”

The time has come for the dead to be judged in the same order or progression in which God first begins to deal with their eternal position.¹⁹³ First to be rewarded are the prophets and worthies of the past,¹⁹⁴ then the “saints” or the church or people of the Gospel Age, then the “small and great” representing all of the world of mankind in the Messianic Age who come to “fear Your name”, and finally the destruction of those who “destroy the earth” (20:7-10).¹⁹⁵

A couple verses from the letters of the Apostle Paul provide a fascinating correspondence on this point. In 1 Cor. 15:51-52, Paul says, “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be change, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

¹⁹² Specifically *Jehovah* for “LORD” in Psalm 2:2 “and... His Anointed”.

¹⁹³ New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia. (2010). *The Revelation Notebook*, 1st bound ed. (p 153). Louisville, Kentucky: New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia.

¹⁹⁴ Heb. 11:35, 39-40.

¹⁹⁵ And these terms “the small” (Joel 3:9-16) and “the great” (Jam. 5:1-6) apply equally to those in the present time that destroy the earth and who will be unwilling to obey the laws of that kingdom (Is. 26:9-10).

The particular point of interest with regard to the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the reference by Paul to the resurrection of the church at the “last trumpet”. A last trumpet implies other trumpets, and only one place in prophecy describes a series of trumpets.¹⁹⁶ Here in Revelation there are seven consecutive trumpets, and it is here in the seventh or last trumpet that the dead are resurrected.

Rev. 11:19 – “And the sanctuary¹⁹⁷ of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His sanctuary,¹⁹⁸ and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and great hail.”¹⁹⁹

The opening of the sanctuary or “Most Holy” compartment reveals the ark of the covenant inside. The ark of the covenant is the only piece of furniture inside the Most Holy of the tabernacle or the temple of the Old Testament. In a several more chapters (15:5-8), there are quite a few more particulars about this picture of the opening of the sanctuary that are revealed at that point, but those will be explained in detail when that chapter is considered.

The focus for the moment is on the manner in which this one verse covers the entire period of the seven last plagues of Revelation chapters fifteen and sixteen. As mentioned above, the opening of the sanctuary or Most Holy is described in 15:5-8, and while the appearance of the ark is not specifically mentioned in those verses, the smoke from the glory of God that fills the sanctuary indicates it.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ In fact, within the Bible there are only two other series of trumpets outside of Revelation, but these is of interest, also.

- (1) In the OT Jewish feast cycle, trumpets are blown at the beginning of every month (Num. 10:10, cf. Num. 28:11-15, Is. 1:13, etc.) and this is continued until the seventh month and the feast of trumpets (Lev. 23:24, Num. 29:1) when trumpets are blown throughout the first day of the month (seven days of trumpets for seven months altogether). Trumpets are also blown on the 10th day of the month or the Day of Atonement. On the 50th year this day also began of the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25:8-10). The Jubilee Year is a picture of the restoration of mankind in the kingdom (cf. Acts 3:21). The seventh month is also the month of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is another feast related to the world of mankind in the kingdom of God on earth (Zech. 14:16, cf. 14:6-9). These are events of the seventh trumpet of Revelation.
- (2) The other OT occasion of seven trumpets is found in the story of the battle of Jericho (Joshua 6:6-21). For seven days they marched around the city blowing trumpets and on the seventh day marched around the city seven times blowing trumpets. The people gave a great shout and the city walls collapsed. This is exactly what is happening today and has been ongoing for some time. The seventh trumpet is sounding, the people of all lands are giving a great shout demanding rights, and the city walls of this world are crumbling.
Also, the people were led around the city of Jericho by the priests bearing the ark of the covenant. A sighting ark of the covenant is also mentioned prominently in connection in the brief description of the seventh trumpet of Revelation in 11:19.

¹⁹⁷ See NASB margin, others.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ NASB margin, *lit.*

²⁰⁰ For those who want a glimpse ahead, the opening of the sanctuary and the installation of the ark of the covenant inside are always accompanied by the filling of the tabernacle (tent) in the wilderness or the temple with smoke from the glory of God. This occurs in the Old Testament whenever the Ark of the Covenant is brought into the Most Holy (Exodus 40:20-21 and 34-35, 1 Kings 8:6-11, 1 Chronicles 5:7-14). It also happens in prophecy, as in Isaiah 6:1-13, Ezekiel 10:4, Ezekiel 43:1-6 and Ezekiel 44:1-4, and Haggai 2:7. The significance of this continuing portrayal of the ark is connected first with the resurrection of the sleeping saints and then later with the completion of the church.

The important object of note here is that:

- 1) The opening of the sanctuary and the appearance of the ark here in the first half of 11:19 immediately precede the pouring out of the seven last plagues in 15:5-8.
- 2) At the same time the events described in the second half of 11:19 – flashes of lightning, sounds, peals of thunder, earthquake, and great [severe] hail – are all part of the description of the seventh or last of the seven last plagues (16:17-21).

This combination above suggests strongly that the description of the seventh trumpet in this verse is defined as a period that (1) starts when [or shortly after] the seven last plagues begin and (2) ends when the seven last plagues end.²⁰¹

The seventh trumpet takes us to the time of the completion of all that God has promised. More specifically:

11:15-17 tells us that Christ – by the power and will of God – has assumed his rightful place as king.

11:18 summarizes the entire reign of Christ. Initially Jesus is at war when he takes back the kingdom of this world (Ps. 2:1-9). However, the outcome of his reign is never in doubt and he proceeds to reward all who come to him (the prophets, the church, and the world) with eternal life, and then finally removes from the scene all of his opponents forever (1 Cor. 15:24-25).

11:19 narrows the focus to the actual time period of the seventh trumpet and the troublous events that accompany of the last days of the church. It summarize this period as the time of the seven last plagues.

Final Note regarding the last three trumpets and the seven last plagues.

Only one other place in the Bible is a *series* of plagues described, and that is the plagues on Egypt leading up to the Exodus of the Hebrew people (Ex. 7:14-12:32). There are ten of these plagues, and the first three are on both the Egyptians and the Hebrews (Ex. 7:14-8:19) while the *seven last plagues* are only upon the Egyptians (Ex. 8:20-12:32).

This same numerical pattern is paralleled in the only other place – the book of Revelation – that describes a sequenced series of plagues. Each of the last three trumpets is described as a “woe” or severe difficulty followed by a series of

²⁰¹ Since the seventh and final plague is poured out on the “air” (16:17) – as already noted Satan is the “prince of the power of the air” per Eph. 2:2, 6:12 – the seventh plague marks the end of Satan’s power to deceive the nations as before (cf. 20:2-3, Is. 14:12-17).

plagues. In particular, the description of the seventh trumpet (the third woe trumpet) is accompanied by a final verse that briefly ranges across the entire period of the seven last plagues in just one verse.

Taken altogether, this means that – like in the Exodus account – the events of Revelation begin with *three* “woes” that - like the Exodus account again – are followed by *seven last plagues*.

Revelation Chapter Ten ~ Daniel and the French Revolution

It may seem odd to those not familiar with historical interpretation of Revelation to associate any part of this prophecy with an event such as the French Revolution. Yet the relationship between this event and the 10th and 11th chapters of Revelation seems obvious upon close examination and easily fits within the context of traditional Protestant interpretations of the book.

Daniel 12 / Revelation 10 Parallels

The many parallels and connections between Revelation and Daniel – as noted elsewhere in this commentary on Revelation²⁰² – are especially significant in helping to identify the events of this chapter. There are particularly obvious connections between this chapter of Revelation and the 12th chapter of Daniel. Note the parallel passages:

Daniel 12

“...the man... who was above the waters of the river...”

“...he raised his right hand and his left hand to hand toward heaven,”

“and swore by Him who lives forever”

“that it would be for a time, times, and half a time...”

“...conceal these words and seal up the book until the time of the end...”

Revelation 10

“...the angel... whom I saw standing on the sea...”

“...the angel... lifted up his right heaven,”

“and swore by Him who lives forever and ever,”

“that it should be time no longer (or “shall be delay no longer”)”

“...and he had in his hand a little book which was open.”

Notice that the Daniel account of these events describes a time period of “a time, times, and half a time,” but in the revelation account – which is otherwise very similar – renders parallel language as there “should be time no longer.” Clearly the Revelation account is taking us to the conclusion of the 3½ “times” described in the

²⁰² See Appendix G - Parallels Between the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation.

Daniel passage. Therefore if end of this 3½ times can be identified, we will be able to locate when the events of this chapter are found in history. Once the time setting located we can determine the rest of the events described Revelation chapter ten. No doubt that is the purpose of the parallels and the time period from Daniel chapter twelve.

1260 Years

Determining the completion date of the “time, times, and half a time is a very lengthy process, so in order to not disrupt the flow of the discussion of the chapter, the explanation of the 3½ times is delay until *Revelation Chapter Ten Appendix 1 – 3½ “Times” and 1260 “Days” or “Years”* found at the end of the discussion to the rest of the chapter.

However, this significance of this prophetic period of 3½ “times” can be summarized as 1260 years in fulfillment.²⁰³ This 1260 years is the period of papal power and persecution. It begins in 539 A.D. when the Roman Church gains control of the city of Rome and begins a long gradual rise to civil and religious authority. It ends 1260 years later in 1799 with the death of the reigning pope in a French prison at the hands of Napoleon and following the French Revolution.

Now furnished with a definition for the period of 1260 years and knowing the event(s) that culminate this period, this chapter as a whole can be interpreted. This chapter ends at the time of the French Revolution, it is about events surrounding the French Revolution, and as unlikely as it seems to anyone that is familiar only with a futurist or preterist view of Revelation, it is the interpretation of this chapter that seems to best fit the description and message of this chapter and Daniel chapter twelve.

The Angel and the Little Book

The 10th chapter of Revelation is built primarily around two subjects: the “strong angel” and the “little book.” So the first thing is to understand the symbolic descriptions surrounding them.

²⁰³ This conclusion is arrived at in two steps in this instance: (1) determining the means of a “time” and (2) determining what the resulting “days” mean. The same period is described as 1260 “days” elsewhere eliminating one of these steps.

The period of 3½ “times” is the equivalent of 3½ years, 42 months, or 1260 “days” found elsewhere in Revelation and Daniel. At “a day for a year” (Ezek. 4:1-6) this period is 1260 years. These and other interpretative elements that allow us to arrive at this conclusion, as well as the dates for beginning and ending this period, are all described in detail in the first appendix to this chapter.

[It will take quite some time to thoroughly demonstrate this in the appendix, but it is a key point in understanding Revelation chapters 10-13.]

(1) Angel

The word “angel” comes from the Greek word *angelos* (αγγελος), meaning “messenger”. It can be an angel in the sense we normally think of the term, i.e., a spiritual being, but doesn’t necessarily have to mean this. For example, the word is applied to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:10. The seven churches of Revelation representing historical periods each have seven “stars” or “angels” (Rev. 1:20) that are *messengers* to these churches, perhaps as individuals (perhaps Martin Luther for example) who are entrusted with a specific message for that period of the church.²⁰⁴

It cannot be escaped that “angel” or “messenger” is used symbolically in Revelation. For example, in Revelation 20:1-3, we have a description of an angel that binds Satan for 1,000 years, but from other places in the New Testament we know that this activity is really performed by Jesus... and so the angel coming down from heaven in that instance is actually Jesus. Why He is described in symbolic terms of a messenger in that instance is uncertain, unless perhaps God is providing us an indication for the interpretation of *angelos* or “angel” elsewhere in the book of Revelation.

“Angel” or messenger in Revelation does not even necessarily signify a person in all cases. It can represent anything that gives a message or provides information of any type. An earlier example noted in Revelation 5:2-4 reads, “and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” and one of the elders said, “...the Lion of the tribe of Judah... has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals...” Here in this passage, the “strong angel” (strong messenger) is probably representative of the Jewish Law. The Law is the standard of a perfect man and therefore “strong”, and only someone perfect and sinless like Jesus would be able to keep it.

This “strong angel” must have a powerful message, and as part of the message the text says, “there will be time no longer,” meaning that this angel appears here at the close of the 1260 years or “time, times, and half a time,” that is in 1799 at the time power is stripped from the Roman Church.

²⁰⁴ This does not mean that no other interpretation of “messenger” is possible in Revelation, nor (at least in the original experience of John when writing the book if nothing else) that messengers couldn’t actually be angels (some or most of the time) in the same sense that we normally think of angels.

The suggestion here is that the “angel” here in chapter ten represents Jesus with a new message to the world or perhaps the French Revolution itself is the angel. If the interpretation of the time prophecy of 1260 years is correctly interpreted in an appendix to this chapter, then this chapter is connected either (1) to the major event of this time period in the closing years of the 1700’s, or (2) to Jesus who is the cause of the revolution. Also, there are other symbolic aspects of the angel²⁰⁵ that further suggest this relationship. The angel is described as...

Clothed with a Cloud ~ Clouds are typically related to divine judgment and the trouble that accompanies them (Ps. 97:2). This is seen in the Lord coming with “clouds” at the time of his return. Here the angel or messenger (cf. Ps. 104:3-4) sends its message through the means of the French Revolution.

A Rainbow was upon His Head ~ This rainbow is different from the emerald rainbow that surrounds the throne of God (4:3). This must be a rainbow of many colors. The rainbow signifies two things:

First, the rainbow is made up of many different colors of light, and the many truths about the rights and equality of men and women leading to the French Revolution are presented in the variety of colors.

Second, the rainbow is a symbol that relates to a promise, or more specifically, a covenant with humanity (Gen. 9:13). The first rainbow covenant is God’s promise never to destroy the “world” again as he did with the flood. This rainbow covenant promises an end to the physical persecution of the Inquisition and the Roman Catholic Church.

His Face was like the Sun ~ The sun is a symbol of truth intense enough to scorch mankind with its power (16:8). Certainly the truth of the rights of man that drove the French Revolution scorched all that came into contact with it. And whatever the beliefs of those that promulgated these truths, the fact is that these rights are thoroughly represented throughout the Bible (the gospel sun) in abundance.

His Feet²⁰⁶ were like Pillars of Fire ~ The imagery of a pillar of fire is familiar to most from the account of the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 13:21-22, 14:19,24). The angel or messenger is also “clothed with a cloud” so that the imagery of the “a cloud by day” and “a pillar of fire by night” from the exodus

²⁰⁵ See Appendix B – Bible Symbolology in Prophecy for scriptural examples of the meaning for these symbols.

²⁰⁶ The thought of “feet” probably indicated both legs and feet as “pillars”. See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 548-549, note 1e). Dallas: Word Books.

account are both included in the symbolic description. At first glance it might seem easier to associate the angel with Jesus as this point – and perhaps it is difficult to disconnect Jesus from the prophetic picture in some way – but in the same way that the events of the exodus opened the way for the Hebrews to escape persecution in Egypt, so the events of the French Revolution lead to the escape of the Gospel Age people of God from spiritual Egypt (11:8, cf. 17:18).

It should be assumed that the feet are included with the legs. This point is considered further in the next symbolic element of this description (10:2).

His Right Foot [was] on the Sea and His Left on the Land ~ Feet as a symbol represent dominion,²⁰⁷ and here the dominion of land and sea favors the sea under the right foot which is the position of primacy.²⁰⁸ The sea as a class are those that are restless under the current social order and willing to rebel against it,²⁰⁹ and of course this class of people are favored in the French Revolution.

He cried out with a Loud Voice, as when a Lion Roars ~ In the notes on chapter four there is extensive discussion on how the lion represents power and strength, and regarding 1:15, there is a reference to how the “voice like the sound of many waters” is the Lord’s message in all the languages of earth.

There is another message given, and it is powerful “as when a lion roars,” and it is a cry heard far and wide as a “loud voice” would be heard. Today the truths of the French Revolution and the American Revolution that preceded it are heard everywhere in the world.

(2) Little Book

The other “symbol” that we need to investigate further is the identification of the “little book” that is referred to several times in this chapter.

We have at least two clues as to what the little book could represent. The first is part of the similarities and contrast between this chapter and Daniel chapter twelve. In Daniel 12:9 “the words are concealed and sealed up until the end time.” Here in Revelation 10:2, 8 we have the opposite... “a little book which was open.” Could this little book be the book of Daniel?

²⁰⁷ See *Appendix B – Bible Symbolology in Prophecy* for scriptural examples of feet representing authority, ownership, and dominion.

²⁰⁸ See *Appendix B – Bible Symbolology in Prophecy* for examples of this usage.

²⁰⁹ See *Appendix B – Bible Symbolology in Prophecy* for examples supporting this interpretation.

Our second clue is the simply the use of the word “book”. There are a limited number of references to “book” or “books” in Revelation, but one of them that may give us a clue is found in Revelation 20:12 “...And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and (the) books were opened; and another book was opened, which is (the book) of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”

Notice that the book of life is “another book”. So what are the “books” (plural) that are “opened” and that the dead are judged from them?

A reasonable suggestion is that the “books” which are opened are the books of the Bible. In the future kingdom on earth (Rev. 21:2-4), the books will be “opened”, i.e., they will be completely understood by the entire world (Hab. 2:14, Joel 2:28, Is. 2:2-4, Ps.72:8). It is the same moral teachings of the bible that will form the foundation of the laws for the new age, and it will be by *these same standards* that the world will be “judged” (John 12:48) during this time (Acts 3:19-23).

The parallel here is unavoidable – if the opening of the “books” represents the completion of the understanding of the bible and prophecy, then the “little book” would be one of these books. Based on the parallels between this chapter and Daniel, the only reasonable application of this “little book” is to the opening of the understanding of the book of Daniel following the French Revolution.

An Interpretation for Revelation 10

Now having established three points – the time setting of the chapter (French Revolution and the diminishing of the Roman Church), the messenger (Jesus bringing the truths epitomized in the revolutions), and the little book (the book of Daniel) – the events of the chapter itself can be identified.

Verses 1-3a give us the description of the strong “angel” or “messenger” with it’s message of truth (the rainbow crown, face like the sun, the open book, and loud powerful cry), the trouble and deliverance that results from this message (clothed with clouds of trouble, feet and legs like pillars of fire), and the favored group in this struggle (the less conservative “sea” class of restless humanity).

A little earlier in this discussion, the rainbow is noted as the sign of the covenant with Noah not to destroy the humanity again (Gen. 9:13, 8:21-22), and here it is a sign of a similar covenant contained in the prophecy of the 1260 years, namely that

God would end the persecution of the people of God at the hands of the Roman Church at the end of this period (Dan. 12:7, cf. Rev. 11:1-2, 12:13-17, etc.). As in Noah's day²¹⁰ the trouble²¹¹ ends and the rainbow is a sign covenant promise that follows, so here in Revelation the trouble ends and the rainbow appears as a sign of the prophetic promise in Daniel and here in Revelation.

Verses 3b-4 describe "seven peals of thunder" that speak. Thunder accompanies lightning (or truth), and as a symbol it represents controversies. More particularly it seems to represent the controversy and trouble that results from revealed truth of any kind. It's already been noted that the angel or messenger of this chapter is clothed in clouds of trouble, and these seven thunders are also most likely the result of this angel's message and actions.

Yet unlike the knowledge that is revealed elsewhere in this chapter, John is told not to write down the things spoken by these seven thunders and to seal²¹² the things they speak. Since the seven thunders have already "spoken", it seems that the message is actually revealed, which leaves the question of why John is forbidden to write down the things that the seven thunders speak.

A couple suggestions are possible. One is that it is either simply not time²¹³ or not permitted by God. Perhaps a preferred interpretation is that the knowledge of these seven thunders is now known – having been "spoken", but they are not spiritual truths that are relevant to the church. Therefore John is prevented from writing them in the Book of Revelation.

²¹⁰ The trouble is compared to Noah in one other place (Luke 17:26-27, cf. Revelation chapters 14-19) where there is one last trouble that also ends in peace (Revelation chapters 20-22).

²¹¹ Also described as "waters" in Daniel (12:5-7) and Revelation (12:14-16) and as the "sea" here in Revelation the 10th chapter.

²¹² There is some question regarding how the Greek word *sphragizo* (Gr. σφραγιζω) for "seal" in many translations should be rendered. W.E. Vine in *Dictionary of New Testament Words* (p. 331) in this verse defines the meaning as "secrecy and security and the postponement of disclosure." However as Vine notes, the word has a broader meaning elsewhere in scripture. *Strong's Concordance* (Str. #4972) defines the meaning as "to stamp, (with a signet or private mark) for security or preservation (lit. or fig.); by impl. to keep secret, to attest" which allows for a range of possible translation. A majority of translations phrase the language as "seal up" the thing the seven thunders spoke and do not write them. Other translations are more conservative such as Marshall's *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, which uses "seal thou", and the *UBS Greek New Testament* (from McReynolds' *Word Study Greek-English New Testament*) that simply says "seal" in the interlinear portion.

Aune has the most detailed explanation. He notes, "The aor. imper. verb σφραγιζων, lit. 'seal,' does not refer to the action of rolling up and sealing a partially written message; rather it is a figurative extension of the term meaning 'to keep secret, conceal' (Bauer-Aland, 1587; BAGD, 796). However, the prohibition μη σφραγισης, 'do not seal up' in 22:10 is in the literal (it is a τοπος connected with apocalyptic writings; see comment on 22:10), not the figurative use of tis verb, contra Bauer-Aland, 1587; BAGD, 796." He also says, "There is nothing in this verse to suggest that John wrote anything down revealed by the seven thunders. To suggest, therefore, that what the seven thunders said was intended to be revealed only later (Horn, *SNTU* 17 [1992] 226) is simply wrong." [See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 548 & 562). Dallas: Word Books.]

²¹³ One possibility is that the seven thunders represent seven specific truths that were about to be explained, but not understood quite yet (cf. Dan. 12:10-12). This idea finds both support (verse 7) and opposition (verse 8-11) within the 10th chapter of Revelation.

Verses 5-6 point to the end of the time prophecy in Daniel 12:7 as already discussed. The original prophecy states that the period would last for “...for a time, times, and half a time.” Here in Revelation the message is “...that there should be time (delay) no longer.” Time is up. The end of the 1260 year prophetic period has arrived.

Notice that in the Daniel passage the “man” lifts up both his right hand and his left hand to heaven, but here in these verses the angel lifts his right hand only. This harkens back to the right foot on the “sea” or sea class, and again indicates that the time has come for God to grant this revolution the authority to fulfill the prophecy.

Verse 7 is a parenthesis that qualifies the surrounding description. It interrupts the flow of the narrative to add a related piece of information. While the little book [of Daniel] in this chapter is opened in the sixth period during the sixth trumpet (9:13, cf. 11:15), it is not a complete revelation of the scriptures. In the seventh period this would change when “... the mystery of God²¹⁴ is finished...”

Verses 8 to 11 – The understanding of the book of Daniel or “the book which is open” (10:8) through the unfolding of prophecy and events has two effects on many Christian at this time. It brings delight and conviction and zeal to the church of the 1800’s following the French Revolution and in their mouths is as “sweet as honey.” However, it also brings persecution²¹⁵ as many in both the church and the world rejected the new prophetic insight that resulted, so their “stomach(s) was (were) made bitter” as they went forth to “prophecy again” (10:11).

Conclusion

The interpretation of prophecy we’ve suggested, although perhaps unexpected, fits well with the mosaic of scripture and history. However, for those who are (still) skeptical of the application to the French Revolution and the prophetic awakening that followed as suggested here, please consider this:

To some today it may seem strange to see an event like the French Revolution in the bible, but as recently as 100 to 150 years ago, this was a very common

²¹⁴ Some have noted that the “mystery of God” is an expression that refers to the church

²¹⁵ This is a perfect example of how often rejection of those with a different viewpoint is a matter of timing and culture rather than truth. Many of the prophetic viewpoints of the Second Adventist movement (the literal return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead at His return, a future literal kingdom on earth, a thousand year reign of Christ and the church, the return of Israel to the land, the coming great tribulation, the tribulation saints, and the increasing nearness of all of these events, etc.) are now commonly accepted in part or in whole by most evangelical Christians.

interpretation for the 12th chapter of Daniel and several passages in Revelation. As just one example, the French Revolution also seems to be described in Revelation 11:13. That interpretation will seem more evident when the following 11th chapter of Revelation is considered in detail.

Not until the appropriate time for the understanding of the book of Daniel could this knowledge be made available. It had a profound effect on the church at the time immediately following the French Revolution and the capitulation of the Roman Church to Napoleon. A number of Christians had predicted the fulfillment of Daniel chapter twelve and the 1260 years prophecy during the course of the century leading up to the French Revolution and the humiliation of the papal church.

While the popularity of an interpretation does not automatically make it correct, it is interesting that many of the well known leaders of the Reformation would be surprised at current literal interpretations of the 1260 days, and many Christian leaders of the 1700's and 1800's would have been astonished at the re-invention of something that seemingly had such a pronounced and obvious fulfillment in their time.

The application of the 10th chapter of Revelation and the 12th chapter of Daniel suggested here is not some new strange idea, but one that a good portion of the church has historically accepted. And why should that change today? The fulfillment of prophecies already completed can only strengthen our faith for the long fight ahead.

Revelation Chapter Ten – Appendix 1 to the Chapter

3½ “Times” and 1260 “Days” or “Years”

This period of 3½ “times” is the equivalent of 1260 years in fulfillment. This conclusion is arrived at in two steps. (It will take quite some time to thoroughly demonstrate this, but it is a key point in understanding Revelation chapters 10-13.)

(1) The first step is to determine what is meant by a “time”. This can be demonstrated by comparing this passage to others describing the same period:

3½ times (or years) of days - Daniel 7: 25, 12: 6 and 7, and Revelation 12:14
42 months - Revelation 11: 2, 13: 5
1260 days - Revelation 12: 6, 11: 3

If we calculate these periods at 30 days per month, then 3½ times, 42 months, and 1260 days are all the same period of time,²¹⁶ and a “time”²¹⁷ must be the equivalent of a year²¹⁸ in these prophecies.

(2) The second step is to determine if these 1260 days describe literal days or something else. Fortunately, the Bible is very specific in this regard.

In Ezekiel 4:1-6 there is a time prophecy that covers a total span of 430 years. This period is broken up into a period of 390 years and a period of 40 years. The passage has an immediacy of fulfillment. The 430 years of punishment begins at the time the prophecy is given. Ezekiel’s actions as commanded by God in these verses illustrated to Israel that this period would be a time of punishment that began immediately.

These verses are part of one continuous prophetic message that extends through the first seven chapters of Ezekiel. Since this is the case, the beginning of the 430 years of punishment is established at the beginning of these chapters. The prophecy of Ezekiel and the 430 years begins “on the fifth of the month [more likely the fifth month] of the fifth year of King Jehoiachin’s exile” (1:2). This is

²¹⁶ If these prophetic lengths of time are read in context, it will also be seen that they (consistently) describe similar events taking place during this period.

²¹⁷ Also note that some translations substitute “year” or “years” in place of the words “time” or “times”.

²¹⁸ It may seem strange to some that a year is 360 days long in these prophecies rather than a full solar year, but there is no other possible conclusion. There may be other reasons for this choice of numbers. For example, the Jews and Muslims both use a lunar calendar to count year with occasional adjustments, and 360 days is a very close midpoint between the two. (The lunar calendar year is 354.3829 days. 365.2425 (solar) + 354.3829 (lunar) = 719.61 days. Consequently, $719.61 \div 2 = 359.8$ days, rounding to 360.) There also appear to be other reasons that have to do with the way numbers are used symbolically in scripture and used in time prophecy.

precisely the year 594 BC.²¹⁹

The 430 years from 594 BC would end then in 164 BC. This is the date of the climax of the Jewish revolt of the Maccabees... at which point they expelled the Hellenistic (Greek-based) Seleucid Empire from Israel and became a semi-autonomous nation again and regained control of the temple. This is the first time the Jewish people had experienced this degree of independence since Ezekiel's day. This year of 164 BC also saw the cleansing of the Jewish temple from the pollution of the Syrian king Antiochus IV Epiphanes (who had erected a statue of Zeus inside the temple and sacrificed a pig on the altar in 167 BC).

One of the values of this prophecy is that it confirms the "day for a year" method of interpretation. Since its fulfillment is in the past, we can trace the prophecy and determine the accuracy of the interpretation. It gives evidence that "days" in time prophecy are to be understood as "years" in their fulfillment over time.

There are two other examples of instances where the "day for a year" rule is applied, although the examples are not time prophecies per se:

- The first is found in Numbers 13:25/14:34 and relates to the men sent to spy out the promised land and who bring back a false report of the challenges. They were gone for forty days, and the Lord punishes Israel for believing the false report. Each *day* the spies were gone was punished by a *year* of wilderness wandering.
- The second example is a little more complex. It is found in Daniel 10:2-4, where the angel who comes in answer to Daniel's prayer of mourning is delayed by 21 days.

Two years before these events in the first year of Cyrus's reign, he releases the Jews from captivity in Babylon to return to Jerusalem to rebuild their

²¹⁹ There are independent lines of evidence that identify this date for us. We know the lengths of the reigns of the kings of Israel and where they connect with the secular history of the reigns of the surrounding nations (Babylonian and Assyrian and forward through Persia and Greece to Rome, etc.). We also have other means of determining this date including astronomical tablets, historical writings, and commercial tablets.

The following is from Rice, David. (2004). *The Stream of Time*. (p. 61, footnote 1). San Diego.

"The scriptures are 2 Kings 24:8-16, 2 Chronicles 36:9-10. The Kings passage dates the surrender of Jehoiachin to year eight of Nebuchadnezzar (using Judah's non-accession year system), but Jeremiah 52:28 ascribes this to year seven (using Babylon's accession year system). Both actually describe the same year, namely 597 BC. This date is firm. The reign of Nebuchadnezzar is historically fixed by several means, among them lunar eclipse records in his years 1, 12, 13, 14, 15, 30, 31, 32, 41, 42. Therefore the scriptural references to the years of Nebuchadnezzar are anchors into history.

"The Babylonian record of the taking of Jehoiachin is in the royal annals for the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, and reads as follows. "The seventh year: In the month Kislev the king of Akkad {Babylon} mustered his army and marched to Hattu {Palestine}. He encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month Adar {month 12} he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice he appointed in the city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon" (Texts from Cuneiform Sources, Volume V, Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles, Chronicle 5, page 102, Grayson, 1975)."

temple (Ezra 1:1-4). In the second year the returned exiles lay the foundation of the new temple (Ezra 3:8-13), but then the adversaries of Israel, the Samaritans, “discouraged the people of Judah, and frightened them from building, and hired counselors against them to frustrate their counsel all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.” (Ezra 4:1-5)

If word of these delays and work stoppage came to Daniel it would have grieved him greatly, and maybe it was his concern over the temple that caused him to mourn and fast and seek after God in particular.

These events help us to understand what may be the hidden reason for the angel’s delay of 21 days in reaching Daniel.

The temple building “ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia” (Ezra 4:24). It was completed “the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king” (Ezra 6:15).

Cyrus reigned 9 years over his empire, his son Cambyses 8 years, his successor Bardiya or Smerdis a few months, and Darius Hystaspes²²⁰ reigned 36 years. Since the events of chapter 10 take place in the 3rd year of Cyrus,²²¹ king of Persia. This means that from the third year of Cyrus when Daniel prayed to the end of the sixth year of Darius when the temple was completed was 21 years.²²²

This seems more than coincidental when we recall that the angel is delayed for 21 days in answering Daniel and that a “day for a year” is often used in fulfillment of time prophecy.²²³

As if to confirm these deductions, there is a set of numerical parallels found amidst the details in the construction of the two temples.²²⁴ These

²²⁰ This is the Darius of immediate importance to this discussion, and he should not be confused with Darius the Mede of Daniel 9:1.

²²¹ This year can be dated with certainty to 536 BC.

The fall of Babylon took place in 539 BC. This date can be demonstrated from multiple independent methods including many links connecting this event to the chronological records of the rest of the Middle East, astronomical tablets, etc., etc. The fall of Babylon took place during the accession year of Cyrus. The first official year of his reign would be 538 BC and the third year of his reign would be 536 BC.

(An accession year is the part of a calendar year during which a king comes to power. It is not counted as a year of the reign, whereas the partial year at the end of a king’s reign is counted as a full year. This method of reckoning was way the years of the kingships were accounted for accurately in the calendar year. And was common not only in Persia but also throughout the empires of the Middle East.)

²²² Cyrus with 6 plus years remaining if we start from somewhere in the third year, Cambyses 8, and Darius’ first 6 must leave us somewhere in the 21st year.

²²³ In just the preceding chapter (Daniel 9) we had an application of this principle. Daniel’s prophecies in particular are renowned for this year for a day principle. (Compare Ezekiel 4:1-6) for a clearly stated interpretation of this rule.)

correspondences serve to emphasize the relationship between the two temples (as shown below in columns 1-3 for the second temple and column 4 relating to the first or Solomon’s temple) and connects the 21 days in Daniel to the construction of the temple(s).

DANIEL Chapter 10	HAGGAI and ZECHARIAH	EZRA and NEHEMIAH	SOLOMON’S TEMPLE and PALACE
Daniel begins praying for the work of the temple on the 3rd day (Dan. 10:2-4)		Temple complete on the 3rd day of the month (Ezra 6:15)	
		Refurbishing the temple begins in the <i>seventh</i> year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7)	Temple construction begins in 4 th year / <i>seven</i> years to complete (1 Kings 6:1, 37-38)
		Walls of Jerusalem rebuilt <i>thirteen</i> years later (Neh. 2:1-9, ff.)	Palace construction begins in 11 th year / <i>thirteen</i> years to complete (1 Kings 7:1)
		Construction complete in the <i>twentieth</i> year of Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:1-9)	Construction complete in <i>twenty</i> years (1 Kings 9:10)
Daniel’s prayers answered on 24th day , i.e., after 21 days (Dan. 10:2-4)	Prophets exhort the people about the temple on the 24th day (Hag. 1:15, 2:18, Zech. 1:7)		Construction complete in the 24th year of Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 9:10)

The Prophecy of the “Seventy Weeks” and the “Day for a Year” Rule

There is one final time prophecy that should be considered in regard to the “day for a year” rule of interpretation. This is the prophecy of the “seventy weeks” of Daniel 9:24-27. Seventy “weeks” is the equivalent of 490 “days”... or *years* following the day for a year rule.

²²⁴ The two temples being Solomon’s Temple or the first temple construction and the rebuilt temple constructed after the return from Babylon.

This prophetic period begins with the “decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” (Dan. 9:25). However there are multiple decrees described in the Old Testament from which to choose – the decree of Cyrus (2 Chronicles 36:22, Ezra 1:1) in 538 BC, the decree of Darius (Ezra 4:24. 6:1) in early 519 BC, the decree to Ezra (Ezra 7:7 and 11) in 458 BC, and the decree to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:1, 6-9) in 445 BC. Which one is the correct one?

The earlier decrees of Cyrus and Darius are directed at rebuilding the temple (only) and not the city of Jerusalem. Only the decree to Ezra in 458 BC includes the restoration of Jerusalem as its subject matter. The later support of the Persian king to Nehemiah also relates to Jerusalem, but it is provided in the form of “letters” that reaffirm the original decree to Ezra. It is not a new decree in its own right.

The period of 490 years from the decree to Ezra to restore and rebuild Jerusalem ends in 33 AD.²²⁵ This is the year of the crucifixion of Christ²²⁶ (which can be established from multiple lines of reasoning).

Note that the last week of the seventy weeks²²⁷ is also divided into three parts... the beginning of the week, the midst of the week, and the end of the seventy weeks

²²⁵ The careful reader may question our subtraction. Shouldn't 33 AD deducted from 490 years yield 457 BC? However, this conclusion does not take into account that we are dealing with *parts* of years, and the fact that there is no “zero year” (the day after Dec. 31 BC 1 is Jan 1 AD 1).

The reader can easily demonstrate this by charting out a 5 year time prophecy that begins in the middle of 3 BC. In written form this would be mid 3 to mid 2 BC, mid 2 to mid 1 BC, mid 1 BC to mid 1 AD, mid 1 to mid 2 AD, and mid 2 to mid 3 AD... five complete years. Going 5 years forward from 3 BC brings us to the middle of 3 AD (not 2 AD).

Therefore, whenever we cross the BC/AD dateline we have to add one year to the end date to arrive at the correct calendar year.

²²⁶ Including Luke 3:23 which dates the baptism of Jesus to 29 AD. Jesus is crucified on a “high sabbath” (John 19:31), a Saturday that also falls on the Passover. The closest combination of these high days is the Passover of Spring 33 AD, which also corresponds nicely to the approximately 3 to 4 year span of ministry indicated in the gospels.

The data for the year of the crucifixion and surrounding years is given in the table below. On month 1 (Nisan), day 14, *per* Ex. 12:6, and Deut. 16:1-6, when Nisan 14 (Passover) fell in the year:

AD 25	Apr 02	Mon
AD 26	Mar 22	Fri, <i>or</i> Apr 21 Sun
AD 27	Apr 10	Thur, <i>or</i> Apr 11 Fri
AD 28	Mar 30	Tues, <i>or possibly</i> Apr 28 Wed
AD 29	Apr 17	Sun, <i>or possibly</i> Apr 18 Mon
AD 30	Apr 06	Thur, <i>or possibly</i> Apr 07 Fri
AD 31	Mar 27	Tues, <i>or</i> Apr 25 Wed
AD 32	Apr 13	Sun, <i>or,</i> Apr 14 Mon
AD 33	Apr 03	Fri, <i>or possibly</i> May 02 Sat
AD 34	Mar 24	Wed, <i>or</i> Apr 22 Thur

Friday April 3, 33 AD is the only relatively certain Friday per the chart above, and – based on a 3½ year ministry that begins in the fall of 29 AD per Luke 3:1 and 23 – it is the correct date of the crucifixion of Jesus.

²²⁷ Many Christians with a “futurist” view of Revelation interpret the 70 weeks as a period of 490 years. However, almost inexplicably the last “week” or seven years of the prophecy is disconnected from the rest of the period and relocated to the “end times” period yet (a little) future from now. Then the 1260 days or 42 months or 3½ times are left unconverted as 1260 literal days. Finally these days become the last 3½ years of the seven “days” or years of the 70 weeks prophecy. The reader can easily see why this lack of consistency

(Dan. 9:27). There is also a reference to the eventual destruction that would follow the completion of this prophecy. All of the events of the last week of the prophecy have precise fulfillments including a 40 year period of trial and then judgment or “destruction” that follows the end of the of the prophecy. This can be seen in the chart below:

Date	1st Advent	40 Years Later	40 Years Later
26 AD Spring	Romans send Pilate to become governor of Judea.	66 AD Spring	Romans send Vespasian to suppress the Jewish revolt.
29 AD Fall	Christ is baptized, and in this sacrament He (symbolically) gives His life. Jesus begins his ministry.	69 AD Fall	Last (symbolic) Day of Atonement sacrifice celebrated in the Temple. Months later the Romans surround Jerusalem.
33 AD Spring	Christ is crucified.	73 AD Spring	Masada falls and the Jewish revolt comes to an end.

Not only does it confirm the last week of the seventy weeks, it is also a powerful example of the power of time prophecy. No human could arrange history to perfectly mirror the events of the last “week” of the seventy weeks prophecy exactly forty years later as the chart illustrates.

However, the key point in understand the 1260 day prophetic period is that here is another example of a time prophecy interpreted at “a day for a year” ... only in this instance the prophecy begins after the death of the prophet Daniel... and yet the day for a year rule is still the almost universally agreed upon interpretation.

1260 Years

Possibly because of its abuse over the course of history, time prophecy is not often considered to be of great importance, even though it’s there in the Bible in great detail along with all the other subjects. However, a correct interpretation of this time prophecy is of great value in interpreting this and other parts of Daniel and Revelation. Pinning down this duration is important, because the sealing of

creates a problematic interpretation and why Protestant commentators until recent times considered the seventy weeks as one continuous and unbroken period including the last week of the prophecy.

the book of Daniel (i.e., “the words”) is limited in duration (Daniel 12:4, 8-10, cf. Rev. 10:2, 8-10).

The detailed investigation of the terminology of this period just completed above confirms (1) that the 3½ “times” is the same as 3½ years or 1260 days and (2) that each “day” of the prophecy equals a year in the fulfillment of the prophetic language. The discussion can now finally turn to the actual interpretation of the 1260 “days” or years.

The beginning of the period is clearly defined in Rev. 13:2-5 as the point in time when the “beast” is given authority and power. The beast is identified with the Roman Church elsewhere and will be considered in more detail in the 17th and 18th chapters of Revelation. (However, for now it should be stressed that nothing in these pages is describing godly individuals anywhere... in or out of any church. Interpretations of the symbols of Revelation refer only to principles, doctrines, and institutions. Although these interpretations that criticize long-revered institutions might still seem offensive to some, yet let it be emphatically understood that individuals are not under discussion.)

Returning again to the time prophecy, establishing the date when the Roman Church first begins gaining authority provides a starting point. The 1260 year period begins in 539 AD with the overthrow of the Ostrogoths (who controlled Italy) by the Byzantine Empire... preparing the way for the rise of the Roman Church.²²⁸ This followed shortly *after* Emperor Justinian’s decree in 533 that the bishop of Rome was the chief or foremost bishop among all Christian bishops. By the time 50 more years had passed, Pope Gregory I (Pope 590-604) “raised armies, kept Rome inviolate from Lombard attacks, negotiated with both Lombards and imperial officials, and on his own authority made peace with the Lombards.”²²⁹

Following shortly after this starting date, Emperor Justinian I of the Roman Empire – now based solely in Constantinople – published a novella²³⁰ in 545 AD proclaiming that the “the holy pope of ancient Rome is the first of all the priests, [and] the archbishop of Constantinople, the new Rome, occupies the place next

²²⁸ At this point the Bishop of Rome effectively becomes the defacto government of the city

²²⁹ Latourette, K.A. (1953). *A History of Christianity*, Vol. 1 to A.D. 1500. p. 338. Harper & Row: New York et al.

²³⁰ Justinian. (trans. 2014). *Novel 131 Concerning Ecclesiastical Canons and Privileges*. (trans. Kearley, T. revised from Blume, J.) Retrieved May 27, 2017, from http://www.uwyo.edu/lawlib/blume-justinian/ajc-edition-2/novels/121-140/novel%20131_replacement.pdf

after the holy apostolic seat of ancient Rome, and has precedence over the others.”²³¹

The corruption of scriptural teaching accompanying the increasing power and prestige of the Roman Church eventually reaches its climax in the doctrine of the mass (which teaches that the sacrifice of Christ only takes away original sin, and not any sins committed after we’re born – hence the need to partake in the “sacrifice” of the mass weekly for recent sins to be covered). This point seems to be identified in Daniel 12:11²³² by the expression of the “taking away of the continual sacrifice” through the doctrine of the mass. This point is also identified as the time when “the abomination of desolation is set up” in power in 539 AD. The term “set up” seems descriptive of the starting point of the 1260 years.

If the beginning point of this period still appears somewhat tentative in the mind of the reader, the end point occurs 1260 years later with an undeniable crash. The end point is the year 1799 AD and the events leading to this date are:

(1) In 1789, the French Revolution takes place, and the Roman Catholic Church is attacked and eventually banned in France (for starving the peasants who worked their lands while the clergy grew rich).

(2) In 1798, Napoleon captures the pope and took him prisoner to France.

(3) In 1799, the period of 1260 years ends with the death of Pope Pius VI in a French prison (after Napoleon the invades Italy and humiliates the church).²³³ Even the Roman Church recognize point this as the low ebb of their power in recent times.

²³¹ Note that Justinian had already written a letter in 533 AD recognizing the Bishop of Rome as head of all other bishops. *Codex Justiniani*, lib. 1, tit. 1; transl. Littlefield, R.F. *The Petrine Claims*. p. 293. Cited from a secondary source: Smith, Uriah. (1944). *Daniel and the Revelation*. pp. 275-276. Review and Herald: Hagerstown, MD.

²³² This starting point of the period of 1260 years is also appears the starting point for the periods of 1290 years and 1335 years (Dan. 12:11).

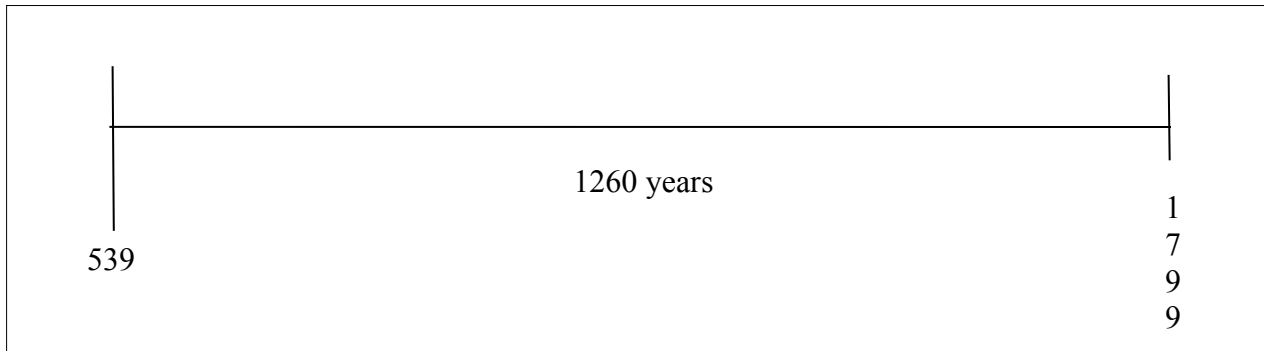
²³³ The beginning and ending points can also be expanded into parallel seven year periods, as follows:

533 – Constantine describes the Bishop of Rome as head of all Christian bishops in a letter – formalized by code in 545 AD
1793 – French Revolution takes control of government – execution of Louis XVI – France goes to war with Europe

539 – Rome left in the hands of the new Bishop of Rome – Ostrogothic capital Ravenna falls and Ostrogoths surrender
1799 – Pope dies in a French prison

540 – Belisarius returns to Constantinople
1800 – In March 1800 after 6 months without a pope, Pius VII elected

The period of 1260 years can now be depicted in the following simple diagram:



As a secondary confirmation of the correctness of this interpretation of prophecy, every single reference to this 1260 year period in scripture defines it as a period of the power of the “beast” of Revelation and/or the persecution of the faithful church:

Daniel 7:25 (where the beast is described as the “little horn” that becomes powerful)	Power and Authority Persecution
Daniel 12:7	Persecution
Revelation 10:5-6 (implied end of persecution described in Daniel 12:7)	Persecution (end of)
Revelation 11:2	Persecution
Revelation 11:3 (Authority of the Old and New Testaments, but a restricted authority)	Power and Authority Persecution
Revelation 12:6 (dragon operating under the authority of the beast – see 13:2)	Persecution
Revelation 12:13-14	Persecution
Revelation 13:4-7	Power and Authority Persecution

Revelation Chapter Ten – Appendix 2 to the Chapter
Elijah’s Wilderness Experience in Daniel and Revelation

There is a fascinating correlation of Daniel 12 / Revelation 10 with the experiences of Elijah in 1st Kings chapters 18-19. Elijah’s experiences in these chapters are type or picture of the same prophetic events described in the Daniel and Revelation chapters. A summary of the similarities in language as noted by Frank Shallieu²³⁴ is given in the chart on the following page.

²³⁴ Shallieu, F. (1993). *The Keys of Revelation*. p. 51. Revelation Research Foundation: Hamburg, NJ.

1 Kings Chapters 18-19	Daniel Chapter 12	Revelation Chapter 10
3½ years in wilderness (Luke 4:25, James 5:17)	3½ “times” of persecution of the “holy people” (12:5-7)	End of the same time of persecution (10:5-6)
Elijah on top of Mt Carmel (18:42)	The man [or angel] stands over the waters (12:6)	The angel stands upon [over] the sea and land (10:2)
Elijah sees a cloud on the horizon (18:44)		The angel is clothed with a cloud (10:1)
The cloud is little (18:44)		The angel holds a little book (10:2)
	Daniel is told the book is sealed till the time of the end (12:4)	The little book is open in the hand of the angel (10:2, 8)
The little cloud arises from the sea like a man’s hand (18:44)	The angel upon the waters lifts both hands to heaven (12:7)	The angel standing upon the sea and earth lifts up a hand to heaven (10:5)
Elijah goes to Beersheba [well of the oath], where Abraham called on the Lord, the everlasting God (19:3) cf. Gen. 21:22-33	The angel makes an oath, swearing by Him that lives for ever (12:7)	The angel makes an oath, swearing by Him that lives for ever and ever (10:6)
Beersheba’s well also connected to seven ewe lambs (Gen. 21:28, 31)		John hears seven thunders utter their voices (10:3-4)
The angel provides Elijah his first meal before his journey (19:4-6)	The wise understand at the end of 1290 days (12:11-12)	The angel gives John the little book to eat (10:8-10)
The angel provides Elijah his second meal before his journey (19:7-8)	Blessed are those who wait... 1335 days (12:12), like those waiting for their Lord / he will serve them (Luke 12:36-37)	When the seven angel sounds (the seventh trumpet) the mystery is finished (10:7)
Elijah sees the vision and then goes forth to preach again (19:11-12)		You must prophesy again... (10:7)

Revelation Chapter Eleven ~ the Two Witnesses and the Bible

A Brief Introductory Summary of the 11th Chapter of Revelation

This chapter from the start through 11:13 is a continuation of events under the sixth seal which begins all the way back in 9:13. In these chapters of Revelation the chapter divisions added later are very helpful at dividing up the various events and themes of the sixth seal. And while chapters ten and eleven both deal with events related to the time period of the French Revolution, they deal with those events from different aspects.

As noted previously, the descriptions of chapter ten deal with the revolution and the knowledge that causes it, and then that chapter describes the knowledge that results. The Book of Daniel is opened up as a consequence of the revolution.

Chapter eleven first describes the period of 1260 years leading up to the revolution and the weakening of the power of the Roman Church (11:1-6) and then proceeds to events during the period of the revolution itself (11:7-13). That the subject is the French Revolution²³⁵ is especially clear from verse 13 of this chapter.

This chapter focuses largely on the experience of the “two witnesses” during the 1260 year period and during the revolution that closes that period.

Parallels to Elijah in Daniel and Revelation

As noted just previously, at the close of the 10th chapter of Revelation there are parallels between the life of Elijah, the 12th chapter of Daniel, and the 10th chapter of Revelation. Now two more chapters from Revelation should be added.

The following chart copies the preceding chart, but adds the 11th and 12th chapters of Revelation to the parallels.

²³⁵ Not directly by name of course, but a tenth part of the “city” is one of the ten horns described elsewhere (cf. Rev. 17:12, 18), and an earthquake is a symbol of revolution or the shaking of the stable earth. The “tenth of the city” is France and the “earthquake” is the French Revolution.

1 Kings Chapters 17-19	Daniel Chapter 12	Revelation Chapter 10	Revelation Chapters 11-12
Rain would not fall during 3½ years of prophesying (17:1, 18:1, Luke 4:25, James 5:17)			Rain would not fall during the “days” (1260 days or 3½ years) of their prophesying (11:6)
3½ years in wilderness (17:1, 18:1, Luke 4:25, James 5:17)	3½ “times” of persecution of the “holy people” (12:5-7)	End of the same period of persecution (10:5-6)	3½ “times” or 42 months or 1260 days/years of same time of persecution (11:2-3, 12:6, 14)
Elijah fed in the wilderness (17:4-6) for 3½ years (Luke 4:25, James 5:17)			The persecuted woman or the church fed in the wilderness 3½ “times” (12:14)
Elijah on top of Mt Carmel (18:42)	The man [or angel] stands over the waters (12:6)	The angel stands upon [over] the sea and land (10:2)	Woman stands on the moon (12:1) Flood of river of waters (12:15)
Elijah sees a cloud on the horizon (18:44)		The angel is clothed with a cloud (10:1)	Two witnesses ascend in a cloud (11:12)
The cloud is little (18:44)		The angel holds a little book (10:2)	
	Daniel is told the book is sealed till the time of the end (12:4)	The little book is open in the hand of the angel (10:2, 8)	Sanctuary in heaven is opened (11:19)
The little cloud arises from the sea like a man’s hand (18:44)	The angel upon the waters lifts both hands to heaven (12:7)	The angel standing upon the sea and earth lifts up a hand to heaven (10:5)	
Elijah goes to Beersheba [well of the oath], where Abraham called on the Lord, the everlasting God (19:3) cf. Gen. 21:22-33	The angel makes an oath, swearing by Him that lives for ever (12:7)	The angel makes an oath, swearing by Him that lives for ever and ever (10:6)	
Beersheba’s well also connected to seven ewe lambs (Gen. 21:28, 31)		John hears seven thunders utter their voices (10:3-4)	
The angel provides Elijah his first meal before his journey (19:4-6)	The wise understand at the end of 1290 days (12:11-12)	The angel gives John the little book to eat (10:8-10)	
The angel provides Elijah his second meal before his journey (19:7-8)	Blessed are those who wait... 1335 days (12:12), like those waiting for their Lord / he will serve them (Luke 12:36-37)	When the seven angel sounds (the seventh trumpet) the mystery is finished (10:7)	

Elijah sees the vision and then goes forth to preach again (19:11-12)		You must prophesy again... (10:7)	
7000 faithful remaining in Israel (19:18)			7000 killed in earthquake (11:13)

A clear and intentional connection between the sequence of experiences in the life of Elijah and in the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation seems obvious. At least one of the reasons for this relationship is to make it evident that Elijah’s experiences represent the experiences of the church throughout most of its history. This relationship plays an important part in the symbolism of this chapter of Revelation and in the chapters on each side of it.

Yet another set of parallels – this time comparing the ministry of Jesus with the first thirteen verses of this chapter – will be considered a little further on in this discussion.

*The Detailed Commentary the 11th Chapter of Revelation
and the Two Witnesses*

11:1-2 – The first two verses of the chapter provide background for the church and for the two witnesses throughout the rest of the chapter. An easy place to start these first two verses is by addressing some of the components as separate points.

- There is a question regarding who is speaking at the start of these verses.²³⁶ The literal language would read this way – “I was given a reed like a staff [or rod]²³⁷ saying, “Go up and measure the temple...” The speaker is never identified. Either the speaker is the angel of the preceding verses in chapter ten, or the speaker is anonymous, or the speaker is the measuring reed itself.²³⁸
- The temple, altar, and worshippers are all measured.²³⁹ Although other things are measured for judgment (cf. Zech. 2:1-5), that does not seem the

²³⁶ See the NASB and Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 577 & 578 note 1c). Dallas: Word Books.

²³⁷ See also Ezek. 40:3-4 with 43:10, Rev. 21:15 & 17.

²³⁸ As a matter of personal preference, the measuring reed as the speaker seems most likely. This would suggest the idea that the principles of the scriptures are the reed and the desire of the measuring instrument to scale the temple is appealing.

²³⁹ Aune notes that the word translated measure can also mean count, so that the temple and altar are *measured* and the worshippers are *counted*. See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (p. 578 item 1e). Dallas: Word Books. However, the Greek word *metrein* (Gr. μετρεῖν) only occurs once and not a second time before the worshippers, so this seems unlikely. That Christians are “measured” is a NT concept found elsewhere, such as in Eph. 4:13, 2 Cor. 10:12-18.

most likely choice in this case or elsewhere in Revelation (21:15-17). The temple and the altar and the worshippers inside the temple are always positive images of the church.

- As an additional unexplained point, note that the temple is never actually measured in this passage unlike the measurement of the New Jerusalem later in Revelation (21:15-17)
- The court is left to the Gentiles²⁴⁰ or non-Jews. Consequently it is not measured because it does not live up to the standards of the Christian church. It represents the nominal and institutional church of the 1260 years that persecutes those faithful to God's word.
- The "holy city" in 11:2 would appear to be a deliberate contrast to the "great city" of iniquity in verse 11:8. The holy city is the faithful church or the "Jerusalem above" (Gal. 4:25-26).

Taken collectively, these verses set up a deliberate contrast between:

(1) the faithful church of the temple, altar, and worshippers which is measured and evidently approved and described as the "holy city", and

(2) the institutional church of the outer court of the "Gentiles" and the iniquitous city of 11:8 that tramples the "holy city" or the faithful for 1260 years (42 months).

11:3-6 – The first two verses of this chapter form the background for the story of the two witnesses which follows. The "1260 day(s)" time period (11:3) of the two witnesses prophesying in "sackcloth" is the same as the 42 month time period (11:2) for the treading underfoot of the holy city (the persecution of the church).

The two witnesses are unequivocally linked with the prophets Moses and Elijah. Consider the following parallels of these prophets to the two witnesses of Revelation (11:5-6):

- Elijah is in the wilderness hiding from persecution for 3½ years of drought (42 months or 1260 days). See I Kings 17:1, 18:1, Luke 4:25, James 5:17-18.
- Elijah caused "fire" to "devour [his] enemies" at his word. See 2 Kings 1:10.
- Moses had power from God to turn water to blood and to bring plagues on Egypt. See Ex. 7:17-23, 7:14-12:32.

²⁴⁰ The NASB and many other translations translate the Greek word *ethnesin* (Gr. εθνῶσιν) as "nations" and many others translate it as "gentiles". While in a broad sense both are correct, the preferred word in English in this instance is Gentiles as the temple had a court for the nations or more specifically gentiles in the sense of non-Jews.

These two prophets – Moses and Elijah – are connected throughout the scriptures in other ways, also. The following box contains a review of all these passages. It confirms the prophetic relationship between these two prophets and forms the basis of discussion for what they represent.

About Moses and Elijah

These two prophets consistently appear in connection with each other. They appear together by name in the vision on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9, which Peter says is a picture of the return of Christ – 2 Pet. 1:16-19). They are also seen together in a dramatic warning at the end of the Old Testament (Mal. 4:4-6).

While these are the only two passages in scriptures in which these two prophets appear together by name, at least two other passages refer to them by their actions. Revelation 11:6 describes two witnesses that have the power to prevent rain from falling (Elijah – 1 Kings 17:1, 18:1, James 5:17) and to strike the earth with plagues (Moses – Exodus chapters 7-12). Like the Mount of Transfiguration scene, Jesus appears with them once again in this same chapter (Rev. 11:8). [Also in this chapter, the two prophets are described in symbolic terms as two olive trees and two lampstands (Rev. 11:4).] And this theme of plagues and of no rain is combined yet another time in the last chapter of Zechariah (14:12 and 17) suggesting Moses and Elijah once again.

What then is the significance of the pairing of these two prophets in prophecy? One interpretation that fits all the circumstances identifies (1) **Moses** with the **Old Testament Law and by extension Israel** (Heb. 3:5, Matt. 23:1-2) and (2) **Elijah** with the **New Testament and by extension the church**... which is also pictured through John the Baptist (Mal. 4:5-6, Matt. 17:10-13, but cf. John 1:21). The Mount of Transfiguration is a picture of the return of Christ in glory and of his Messianic Kingdom when both heaven (Elijah - the church) and the earth (Moses - Israel and the world) will be transformed. This is the time when Jesus with Elijah (the church) “will restore all things” (Matt. 17:11, Acts 3:20-21) along with Moses (Israel).

The evidence from the regularity in which these two prophets appear together... and their frequent use in prophetic passages... suggest that they represent something more than just the two literal prophets appearing together everywhere.

Remember that this is Revelation where:

- Elijah's opponent Jezebel of the Old Testament corrupts one of the seven churches (2:20), as she did Israel with false worship.
- A woman flees from persecution into the wilderness like Elijah for 1260 days of years (12:7, 14) where she is miraculously fed like Elijah.
- Where the ark of the covenant (11:19) is seen in the sanctuary of the tabernacle (15:5-8) – constructed under Moses' leadership – prior to seven *last* plagues (16: all) that numerically parallel the seven *last* plagues poured out only upon the Egyptians in Exodus.

As noted above, these two prophets in chapter eleven are especially positioned to represent the Old Testament law and people (Moses) and the New Testament gospel and people (Elijah). This is borne out in the further aspects of their description from these verses of Revelation:

- The two witnesses are described as "*prophesying*" (11:3, 6) and that is certainly one of the recognizable characteristics of the word of God.
- The two witnesses have "*authority*" (11:3)... a sovereignty in matters of God that is found lacking in the "precepts of men" (Matt. 15:9).
- They prophesy in "*sackcloth*" (11:3) for 1260 years. This may seem like an odd addition to the description of the two witnesses if they represent the two testaments, but in fact there are multiple applications of the symbolism of "*sackcloth*" here. First, there is the thought of mourning, which is the natural consequence of the suppression of the scriptures and the persecution of the faithful people of God (12:6, 13-17). Second, there is the reality that for much of this period the scriptures were only in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew which were dead languages to most of Europe

The Number Two and the Two Witnesses:

Two is the number of the spirit of God. It describes the spirit particularly as contained in the Old and New Testaments. In Heb. 4:12 the "*word of God*" is described as a "*two-edged sword*" and Eph. 6:17 describes the "*sword of the spirit, which is the word of God*" and confirms the connection of a [two-edged] sword with the word of God.

The necessity of *two witnesses* is established directly by God in the scriptures themselves. Deut. 17:6 and 19:15 (cf. Heb. 10:28-29) describe the necessity for at least two witnesses in any court case, and both Jesus and the Apostle Paul extends this concept to the Christian church, as well (Matt. 18:16,²⁴¹ 1 Tim. 5:19). Elsewhere Paul links the necessity for two or three witnesses to his own visits and his exhortations to the Corinthian church (2 Cor. 13:1).

Other Symbolic Descriptions of the Two Witnesses

The two witnesses are given two other symbolic depictions within the same chapter and context (11:4). Those two descriptions of the two testaments are:

The *two olive trees*, which are symbols taken from a symbolic portrayal of the Bible and the church found in Zech. 4:1-5, 11-14. There the lampstand with seven lamps (the seven churches of Revelation) is fed by olive oil (the spirit of God) from two olive trees representing the Old and New Testament and also called the “two anointed ones who are standing by the Lord of the whole earth.”

The *two lampstands* are not specifically called out elsewhere, but in the same way that the menorah or lampstand with seven lamps represents the church giving light and understanding (Matt. 5:14-16, Mark 4:21-23), the scriptures through the Old and New Testaments also give light and understanding. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).

This pattern of two symbols representing the two witnesses is also picked up elsewhere in Revelation:

Rev. 12:14 – the woman clothed in light (the church – 12:1) is persecuted and flies into the wilderness on two eagle's wings to escape. The eagle is a picture of God's wisdom²⁴² and the two wings represent the Old and New Testaments.

Rev. 9:11 – the locusts (the powerful doctrines and testimony of the early Reformation) under the fifth seal have a “king over them” and this king becomes powerful during this Reformation period. This king is the Bible itself, which is beginning to regain power and authority. Its two names are given in both Hebrew and Greek... or in the languages of the Old and New Testaments.

²⁴¹ The following verses are also interesting with regard to the agreement of two or three upon a matter (Matt. 18:18:20). Hence the necessity for the two witnesses of the Old and New Testaments.

²⁴² See discussion of the eagle in commentary on the 4th chapter of Revelation.

Rev. 1:2, 9, 6:9,²⁴³ 12:17, 19:9-10, 20:4 – all of which everywhere combine two descriptions of the scriptures as “the *word of God* and the *testimony of Jesus*”²⁴⁴ suggesting the Old and New Testaments.

Outside the book of Revelation the two witnesses seem to be symbolized elsewhere, as suggested below:

Luke 22:38 – The disciples have two swords with them on their last night with Jesus. In response Jesus says to them, “It is enough.”²⁴⁵ The two swords suggest the Old and New Testaments once again, and the affirmation of Jesus that “it is enough” suggests that the Bible would be sufficient for Christians until his return.

1 Kings 7:15-22 – The two pillars outside²⁴⁶ of Solomon’s Temple seem to parallel the two witnesses and other sets of two symbols representing the Old and New Testament. The pillars are decorated at the top with two rows of 200 pomegranates around the circumference... emphasizing the number two.

Numbers 10:1-10 & 11:26-29 – The Book of Numbers contains several allegories of the Christian or Gospel Age. Within these allegories are the descriptions of two silver trumpets and two prophets that seem to represent the Old and New Testaments. The background for these interpretations is too lengthy to consider here, but see the commentary on the Book of Numbers for a detailed explanation.

11:7-12 – These verses take us to the end period of the 1260 years of prophesying in sackcloth and the death and restoration of the two witnesses.

At this point the beast that rises from the abyss makes war on them, overcomes them, and kills them. This beast is some sort of powerful empire in line with its use elsewhere in Revelation and prophecy (cf. Dan. 7:1-7, 8:20-22, Rev. 13:1, 11, etc.) that makes war upon the scriptures.

²⁴³ Although in this verse the reference is to the saints and “the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained...” The natural assumption is the testimony is the “testimony of Jesus” although the exact language isn’t used in this instance
²⁴⁴ The only exception to this rule in Revelation [of combining the two phrases “the word of God” and “the testimony of Jesus”] is found in 19:13 where “the Word of God” is applied as a title to Jesus (cf. John 1:1) rather than as a reference specifically to the scriptures.

²⁴⁵ Clearly Jesus is not responding to the presence of the swords in the sense of advocating violence. Instead he heals the servant's ear (Luke 22:52) after one of his disciples cuts it off and admonishes that disciple with the words, “Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take the up sword shall perish by the sword...” (Matt. 26:52), and follows this with a criticism of the crowd that came out against him for coming with “swords and clubs” (Matt. 26:47 & 55, Luke 22:52).

²⁴⁶ The use of the description “outside” the temple is intentional. These two pillars do not appear to be part of the supports of the building. (1) Their description (1 Kings 7:15-22) is included with the descriptions of the rest of the temple furniture in 1 Kings 7:13-51 rather than the temple building. (2) The height of the pillars (18 cubits + 5 cubits + maybe 4 cubits additional) is different from the 30 cubit height of the building and the porch (1 Kings 6:2-3). (3) A questionable translation has obscured the issue of the pillars. Devries in his commentary believes the correct reading of 1 Kings 7:19 should read “at” [i.e. in front of, or next to] rather than “in” the porch. Devries, Simon J. (1985). *Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 12, 1 Kings, 1st ed.* (pp. 104 & 110). Word Books: Waco, TX.

The first inclination might be to interpret this beast as the Roman Church due to the similar language found in 17:8 regarding the beast that “is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction.” There are some problems with that quick interpretation of the beast that will be considered in a moment.

But perhaps it is best to start from the beginning and first identify what can and what cannot be known for certain about this beast. There are three identifiers:

- 1) It is a beast.
- 2) It comes out of the abyss.
- 3) The time setting is at the close of the 1260 years of prophesying by the two witnesses.

The first identifier to be considered is whether it is safe to assume that this beast is the one and only beast found elsewhere in Revelation. However:

- There are other “beasts” in Revelation. For example there is “another beast” in 13:11 with two horns (instead of ten) and there are “beasts”²⁴⁷ plural in 6:8. Elsewhere outside of Revelation, there are examples in Daniel of still more beasts representing empires (Dan. 7:1-8 and 8:3-8, 20-22).
- This verse in 11:7 is the first mention of any beast [singular] in the book²⁴⁸ [excepting 6:8 with “beasts” in the plural], and this beast is given no other description other than its rise out of the abyss. Since it is the first mention of a beast, it does not allow the reader to connect to a previous beast of any description.

The second identifier to be considered is that... since the beast “comes up out of the abyss”... whether should automatically be identified it with the seven-headed beast solely because it also comes up out of the abyss in 17:8. The similarity of the combination of abyss and the beast coming up out of it is not definitive on its own. Other things come out of or go into the abyss:

- In Revelation 9:1-2 smoke and locusts come up out of the abyss.
- In Revelation 20:1-3 Satan is thrown into the abyss and the later released from it.

²⁴⁷ The NASB uses the adjective “wild” before “beast” in Rev. 6:8, but the Greek word *therion* (Strong’s Concordance #2342 – Gr. *θηριον*) in the original language is the same as for “beast” or “beasts” elsewhere in Revelation where the adjective “wild” is not used. It does mean a “wild” beast, but the adjective “wild” is not used consistently throughout Revelation.

²⁴⁸ The word translated “beast” here and in other similar prophetic passages is not the same word that is and should be translated “living one” in Revelation 4:6 and elsewhere. See Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent’s Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (pp. 519, 481, etc.). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

So the “the beast that comes up out of the abyss” could be intended to identify this beast with the beast²⁴⁹ of 17:8, *or* it could simply mean that there is an unidentified beast that comes up out of the abyss.

The third identifier to be considered is the time setting²⁵⁰ at the end of 1260 years and at the same time that the tenth part of city falls. This dates the time of 11:7 to the end of papacy’s power to persecute. If the beast in 17:8 is connected to the Roman Church, then it’s power to persecute has been taken away from it at the end of 1260 years. Yet, the two witnesses are persecuted and killed by a beast from the abyss in 11:7 at this same exact point in time. The time setting argues against this beast being the same as the beast in 17:8.

In summary, the first surface explanation identifies the beast with the beast in 17:8, but there are several problems with this explanation:

- 1) This is the first time a beast is mentioned in Revelation, so identifying this beast with a later beast would be confusing and not apparent to a first time reader.
- 2) Ascent out of the abyss is not necessarily limited to the beast in 17:8.
- 3) The time setting is the removal of the power of the beast to persecute... yet at this point the time the two witnesses are persecuted and killed.

But if this beast is not the seven-headed beast connected with the Roman Church in 17:8, this still leaves the identification of the beast that ascends from the abyss in 11:7 as an open question. However, there is a perfectly fit candidate for this particular beast rising of the abyss at this time.

A beast represents an empire, and this is an empire that comes out from the abyss or from a position of powerlessness. The beast is the French Republic that Napoleon leads at its height and that controls large areas of Europe and is very popular. Since it is the first republic in Europe ever – after centuries of countless failed peasant rebellions – that unexpectedly overthrows a monarchy, it is represented as coming out of the abyss or out of a powerless state. This is the first time the common people have had any semblance of authority in Europe.

²⁴⁹ Incidentally, note that Aune states that the beast of 17:3 [and presumably the rest of the chapter] is anarthrous, meaning that it appears in Greek without a definite article, i.e., it is a beast and not **the** beast.

²⁵⁰ “When they finish their witness...” (11:7a) seems to be the correct translation similar to the NASB. This indicates that a point in time has been reached. See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 577 & 580 note 7a & 616). Dallas: Word Books.

Significant Sidebar – Christianity and the French Revolution

The beast that comes out of the abyss or the French Republic slays the two witnesses. This interpretation may not seem apparent without an understanding of the history of the French Revolution. Two causes of the revolution directly impacted the Roman Catholic Church in France:

- The Enlightenment period and the rise of the French philosophers challenged deference and veneration to authority and tradition, and replaced it with reason. This impacted both the monarchy and the church.
- Economically the combination of increasing taxation, the deregulation of the grain market leading to higher prices for food, and compulsory tithes and high rent on land – much of which was owned by the church – contributed to the discontent of the common people.

France being almost entirely Roman Catholic at the time, the Bible and Christianity of all forms became equated with corrupted religion. During the high period of this opposition to religion, Christianity became outlawed in France. The persecution of Catholicism and Christianity by the government starts with the revolution in 1789 and reached a culmination with Napoleon's invasion of Rome, the imprisonment of Pope Pius VI in 1798, and his death on August 29, 1799.

11:7-12 (resumed) – The Beast and the Death of the Two Witnesses

The time of occurrence for the 3½ "days" or years in which the two witnesses lay dead in the street of the "great city" of Babylon is a subject of debate.²⁵¹ If the two witnesses represent the Old and New Testaments, then the time setting when they are "kill[ed]" and they lie "dead" in the street for 3½ years must be determined.

If the two witnesses are the scriptures, and if the beast out of the abyss is the French Republic at the close of 1260 years, then there is a general time setting for the 3½ years when the scriptures are killed and their dead bodies "lie in the street of the great city." However, the answer does not appear directly obvious... or perhaps it is more correct to say that more than one answer is promising. There are several possibilities for these 3½ years that are reflected in the chart on the next two pages.²⁵²











²⁵¹ Of course, all those with a futurist view of Revelation see this event as unfulfilled and relatively straightforward. Yet the futurist view is also very literal, and it fails to reckon with either (1) the question of "prophetic days" representing years in time prophecy or (2) the problems that result when the two witnesses are identified with the literal Moses and Elijah.

²⁵² These explanations of the 3½ do not assume accuracy to the exact day. Time prophecy typically deals in years to the same rough time of year, but generally not to the exact day.

TABLE OF DATES AT THE CLOSE OF THE 1260 YEARS

Including dates that may be relative to the 3½ days of Revelation 11

DATE	EVENTS
1789	French Revolution begins.
1789 <i>August</i>	The Declaration of the Rights of Man (Articles IV and X) proclaimed including freedom of religion.
1790	
1791	
1792	<i>August 18</i> - the Assembly abolishes the religious teaching orders and those running hospitals, the last remaining religious orders in France. <i>September 2-4</i> - September Massacres of clergy in Paris and elsewhere. <i>September 10</i> - government requisitions all church objects made of gold and silver. <i>September 20</i> - new law permitting civil marriage and divorce.
1793 <i>September 17</i>	Reign of Terror begins (ends July 1794).
1793 <i>October/November</i>	<i>October 5</i> - Christianity is abolished in France. <i>October 28</i> - religious instruction by clerics is forbidden. <i>November 23</i> - Paris Commune orders the closing of all churches and places of worship in Paris.
1794 <i>September 18</i>	The Convention stops paying priests that are officially sanctioned and stops maintaining church properties.
1795 <i>February 21</i>	The Convention proclaims freedom of religion and separation of church and state.
1796	
1797 <i>June 17 (July)</i>	Freedom of religion (not specifically the Papal authority which was still considered a menace to religious freedom) is reaffirmed, and this time it specifically includes Christian worship.

1797 <i>September 4</i> 	French Directory takes control of French governments and reinforces and expands laws against the Roman Church, clergy, and outward expressions of catholicism.
1798 	<i>February 11</i> - French general Berthier and troops enter Rome. <i>February 15</i> - French general Berthier proclaims a new Roman Republic under French protection.
1798 <i>February</i> 	Pope Pius VI taken prisoner from Rome to France.
1799 	<i>August 29</i> - Pope Pius VI dies in French prison. (Embalmed but not immediately buried.) <i>November 9-10</i> - Napoleon Bonaparte takes control of government from the French Directorate. <i>December 24</i> - Napoleon Bonaparte establishes the French Consulship government. Traditional histories typically mark this date as the end of the French Revolution.
1800  	<i>March</i> - New Pope Pius VII elected after six-month interregnum. <i>June</i> - new Pope Pius VII takes up residence in Rome and Papal States restored by France.
1801 	<i>July 14/15</i> - Concordat restoring Christianity to France takes place between Napoleon Bonaparte and the pope.
1802 	
1803 <i>September 16</i> 	Signing of Italian Concordat with the French Republic officially restoring Roman Catholicism in Italy as the religion of the state for the new Italian Republic.
1804 	<i>March</i> - First Bible Society founded (British and Foreign Bible Society).

There seem to be three possible resolutions to this question. They assume fundamentally different approaches. The first approach equates the 3½ years to a period after the close of the 1260 years in the wilderness and connects this to events between France and the Roman Catholic Church in Italy. The second and third approach connects the 3½ years specifically to religion in France near the close of the 1260 years and during the French Revolution. The fourth possibility ending in 1804 is not considered here, but it is noted above for another purpose.

First Possibility - This approach equates Christianity with the Roman Church in all of its extent and typically assumes that the 3½ year period begins at the end of 1260 years of persecution. This is a reasonable assumption, and the 3½ year period can be equated to a period beginning with the election of a new pope in March 1800 and with a concordat between France and the pope restoring Roman Catholicism as the official religion of the Italian states in September 1803.

The weaknesses of this viewpoint are (1) that it deals with Roman Catholicism in general Christianity and the Bible in general,²⁵³ (2) the 3½ year period begins arbitrarily with the election of a pope (more logically it would begin with the death of the previous pope in late August 1799, but which would extend the period to nearly four years), and (3) the resolution deals with Italy when the focus of the passage is on France.

Second Possibility - The second approach, that is one of two that are favored here, suggests that the 3½ years:

- Begin in October/November of 1793 when a series of laws are passed in France (by the revolutionary government of the French National Convention) outlawing the worship of Christianity. Eventually freedom of religion is declared in 1795, but Christian worship in churches is still restricted and persecuted.
- End in June/July of 1797 when the freedom of Christians to worship - which was still a question and still being debated - is affirmed 3½ years after the de-Christianization of France (by the newest revolutionary government of the French Directory), although the discussion explicitly excluded any special privileges to the Roman Catholic hierarchy.²⁵⁴

This viewpoint has the strength of relating to something other than the Papal church... the persecutors of those holding to the authority of the scriptures. It is the two witnesses that are slain and not the great city. It also has its entire setting in

²⁵³ However, note that there is some dispute over whether Protestantism suffered or profited under the French Revolution. An argument can be adduced for both sides. However, there is little doubt that while Protestantism in France was finally allowed open worship in France, it also suffered under the spasms of religious persecution (Sloane, p.239). See also: Poland, B.C. (1957). *French Protestantism and the French Revolution*, A Study in Church and State, Thought and Religion, 1685-1815. (pp. 201-209). Princeton University Press: Princeton, N.J.

²⁵⁴ (1) De Pressense, E. (1869). *Religion and the Reign of Terror, or the Church During the French Revolution*. (pp. 370-376, 405-408). Miami: Hard Press

(2) Sloane, W.M. (1901). *French Revolution and Religious Reform*. (pp. 229-230, 234, footnote 220). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

(3) Vuilleumier, J. (1940, July). Two Witnesses in Prophecy. *Ministry*, 9. Retrieved on Nov. 26, 2017 from <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/1940/07/two-witnesses-in-prophecy-3>

France where the beast from the abyss or the French Republic "make[s] war with them" and kills them.

However, this view faces one difficulty within the text itself. The time setting is "when they [the two witnesses] have finished their testimony" (11:7). This verse would seem to place the slaying of the two witnesses after the complete end of the 1260 years of wilderness testimony.

However, two observations from the passage seem to mitigate this objection.

- (1) Although the language in nearly all translations including the NASB suggests that the killing of the two witness occurs after the end of the 1260 years or "when they have finished [or completed] their testimony", the original language is not quite so specific. The Greek words translated "when they have finished" are *otan telesosin* (Gr. οταν τελεσωσιν) where the Greek word *otan* is in the subjunctive mood, and as Thayer's Greek English Lexicon describes this word:

"at the time, that, whenever... used of things which one assumes will really occur, but the time of whose occurrence he does not definitely fix..."²⁵⁵

At least a couple translators have struggled with the language. For example the *Concordant Greek Text* translates this as "whenever they should be finishing the witness of them" and *Young's Literal Translation* gives it as "and when they may finish their testimony." The *Benson Commentary*²⁵⁶ is one of the few commentaries to actually discuss the Greek language here and suggests an alternate translation of "when they shall be about finishing their testimony." And *Barnes Notes on the Bible*²⁵⁷ says, "And when they shall have finished their testimony - Prof. Stuart renders this, "And whenever they shall have finished their testimony."²⁵⁸

Clearly there are some issues with the precision of the language and whether an exact time that is meant. The second point below may help with that.

²⁵⁵ Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament, 17th Zondervan printing 1976, p. 458.

²⁵⁶ Benson, J. (1857). *Commentary of the Old and New Testaments*. Retrieved on Nov. 26, 2017 from <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/revelation/11-7.html>

²⁵⁷ Barnes, A. (no date). *Barnes Notes on the Bible*. Retrieved on Nov. 26, 2017 from <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/revelation/11-7.htm>

²⁵⁸ Cf. also New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia. (2010). *The Revelation Notebook*, 1st bound ed. (p 153). Louisville, Kentucky: New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia.

- (2) The language of 11:13 is indicative of the timing for the completion of the testimony. "And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell..." The tenth of the "great city" is one of the ten nations of Europe (cf. 17:12-13 and 16-18), and the fall of that nation is the French Revolution.

Defining the earthquake in this passage as the French Revolution helps to pinpoint the timing of the preceding verses. The phrase "and in that hour" must represent the period of the revolution (1789-1799) and would refer back to the same "hour" or period of the experiences of the two witnesses in the preceding verses (11:7-12). This means that at least some - and most likely all - of the closing experiences of the two witnesses should fall within the same "hour" as the revolution and just prior to the end of the 1260 years.

Taken altogether, defining the 3½ "days" or years from the death of the two witnesses until their resurrection as the period of Christian suppression in France from October/November 1793 until June/July 1797 seems a reasonable possibility.

Third Possibility - The other favored approach suggests that the 3½ years:

- Begin on September 4th of 1797 when a coup by the French Directorate takes control of government and re-introduces persecution of Christianity with deportation of priests, the re-affirmation of the tenth day sabbath law.²⁵⁹
- End on July 14th of 1801 recognizing the Papal authority over the Roman Catholic churches of France and restoring some civil privileges 3½ years plus 3 months after the government of the French Directory re-instituted the disestablishment of the Roman Church in France.²⁶⁰

From this perspective the attempt at ameliorating the suppression of the Roman Church in France in 1797 was a brief temporary intermission that did not last. It restarted in earnest for [another] 3½ years.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ (1) De Pressense, E. (1869). *Religion and the Reign of Terror, or the Church During the French Revolution*. (pp. xxx, 376, 380-383). Miami: Hard Press

(2) Sloane, W.M. (1901). *French Revolution and Religious Reform*. (pp. 230-231, 234, footnote 220). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

(3) McManners, J. (1969). *The French Revolution and the Church*. (pp. 120-121). London: S.P.C.K.

²⁶⁰ (1) De Pressense, E. (1869). *Religion and the Reign of Terror, or the Church During the French Revolution*. (pp. xxxi, 453-456). Miami: Hard Press

(2) Sloane, W.M. (1901). *French Revolution and Religious Reform*. (pp. 250, 262-263). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

(3) McManners, J. (1969). *The French Revolution and the Church*. (pp. 148-149). London: S.P.C.K.

²⁶¹ This relationship between two periods of 3½ years is interesting, though. In the appendix to this chapter – *Jesus and the Two Witnesses* – at this chapter's conclusion, the obvious parallels between the life of Jesus and the two witnesses in the chapters are displayed in a table. One aspect not shown in this chapter is the seven year period that closes Daniel's prophecy of 490 years (Dan. 9:23-27). In Daniel the seven years is split into two separate periods of 3½ years... as it is also experienced by the two witnesses in the French Revolution.

Of course, the difficulties in the translation of 11:7 and constructive guidance of 11:13 both impact this third possibility as they do the previous one.

11:7-12 - Final Overview including remaining Symbols

Having considered the probable dating of the 3½ years, the remainder of these verses falls into place. Here is the complete story piece by piece:

Beast from the Abyss (verse 7) - The French Republic becomes the first truly successful revolution in continental Europe. The people in France come from a condition of powerlessness to gain basic rights and a representative government.

Two Witnesses are Killed - This beast from the abyss or the French Republic outlaws Christianity and thereby kills the witness of the scripture in France.

Dead Bodies in the Street of the Great City (verse 8) - The "great city" is Babylon the institutional church (14:8, 17:1, 5, 18, etc.) in Europe or co-called "Christendom" of which France had been a tenth part (11:13, 17:3, 12). The "street" (lit. a broad street meaning or major thoroughfare or perhaps plaza) of the city is very public, and leaving the "dead bodies in the street" shows contempt. Thus Republican France illustrated its contempt for Christianity and the scriptures to all of Europe in a very public way.

"Great City" Mystically²⁶² called Sodom and Egypt - The language here ("mystically" or "spiritually") is clearly comparing the "great city" Babylon to two other symbols of oppression and corruption.²⁶³ Israel escaped from bondage in Egypt after the ten plagues and Lot and his family were forced to flee from the wickedness of Sodom at its destruction.²⁶⁴

Where also Their Lord was Crucified - The two witnesses by association with the Christian people of France are being persecuted. Here Jesus claims fellowship with the persecuted similar to his response to Paul's persecution of the early Christians... "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting..." (Acts 9:5).

²⁶² Translated from pneumatikos (Gr. πνευματικός). This word is found elsewhere only in 1 Cor. 2:14 where it is translated as "spiritually appraised" (NASB).

²⁶³ ...and thereby suggesting that the Old Testament stories of these places have a deeper "typical" significance. This is borne out by other passages of the NT suggesting the symbolic nature of stories related to these places.

²⁶⁴ Possibly veiled references to Rev. 18:2-4.

Response of Two Groups (verses 9-10) - The two groups of people²⁶⁵ that have opposing responses to the death of the two witnesses are "the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations" (the common people) and "those who dwell on the earth" (those with position and power).

Typically the common people of France did not reject Christianity or the local church. Their issue - to the degree they had an issue - was the abuse of power and wealth by the church's hierarchy. The continued popularity of Christianity in France was a driving force in restoring Christian worship in that nation. The people do not permit the bodies to be buried... in their case not as a sign of disrespect, but as a rejection of the final end to Christianity in France.

In contrast the leadership of the French Revolution originally equated Christianity with the institution of the Roman Church. The revolutionaries in power rejoiced over the conclusion of the abusive practices of the church in France and its power to control government.

Three and a Half Days (verses 9 and 11) - From the outlawing of Christianity in October/November of 1793 to its restoration in June/July of 1797. After the three and a half days Christianity - and by extension the two witnesses - is restored to life as Christian worship returns to France.

Two Witnesses are Raised to Heaven - In the following years and decades of the 1800's, the popularity of the Bible reaches new heights and begins to spread well beyond Protestant Europe and America. The British and Foreign Bible Society is established in March of 1804 and soon Bible Societies in other countries followed suit. Even in largely Roman Catholic and deistic/atheistic France, the 21 or more French Bible translations published in the century following the end of the 1260 years nearly equals the 22 translations from all of the preceding six centuries.²⁶⁶

11:13 - Great Earthquake of the French Revolution

That same "hour" or within the same general period of time, the earthquake of the French Revolution shakes the great houses of Europe with fear. It was the first successful European people's revolution. The "tenth part of the city" represents

²⁶⁵ See *Appendix D - Two Groups in Revelation Compared* for comparative lists of these two groups in Revelation. A review of these lists will demonstrate the symbolic significance behind each of these two groups.

²⁶⁶ Bible translations into French. (2017). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved November 27, 2017 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bible_translations_into_French

France, which is one of the ten horns of Revelation and the most prominent nation in Europe, which "fell" when it rejects the European state-church arrangement.

The "seven thousand people" killed in the earthquake is likely a reference to the seven thousand who would not bow the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). This would be dubious if it were not for the other references to Elijah's experiences in this chapter.²⁶⁷ The seven thousand represent the faithful Christians who suffered as a result of the anti-religious attitude of the revolution alongside the leaders of the Roman Church in France.

Special Note on 11:14-19 (the Seventh Trumpet)

Chapters ten and eleven of Revelation represent a detailed discussion of the French Revolution. The events of chapters ten and eleven occur during the sixth trumpet, so in Revelation they are located between the sixth and seventh trumpets in order to make the time setting clear.

The following discussion on the seventh trumpet (11:14-19) is previously included at the end of comments on the preceding six trumpets (i.e., at the end of the discussion in chapter nine). It seems to be the more logical place to place it for a continuity of commentary on the trumpets.

However, it seems reasonable to take the unusual step of repeating the exact same comments here, since there is where they occur within the Book of Revelation.

Rev. 11:14-15a – “The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly. Then the seventh angel sounded...” As noted previously, the last three trumpets are collectively known as the “woe trumpets” tying together the last three trumpets (cf. 8:13, 9:1, 12-13, 11:14) in another example of the split between the first four and last three churches, seals, and trumpets. Most likely they are considered “woes” because all three illustrate the change in direction and challenge(s) to the institutions of the world... ending in the “great tribulation”.

²⁶⁷ Some of the other references to Elijah's life in this chapter are the 42 months (or three and a half years), the power over rain to cause drought, and the ascension to heaven. While not specifically represented directly in this chapter, it is at least interesting to note (in a sad way perhaps) that the slaughter of the priests of Baal at the end of Elijah's 3 1/2 month wilderness sojourn is paralleled on a very literal level by the slaughter of Catholic priests during the French Revolution.

The Seventh Trumpet and the Seventh (Harvest) Church (11:15-19)

The sounding of the Seventh Trumpet is simultaneous with the seventh church²⁶⁸ and seventh seal. It is the point of intersection between the Christian or Gospel Age and the incoming kingdom of the Messianic Age.

The message of the seventh trumpet is structured in three small parts:

- **11:15-17** – the reign of Christ begins,
- **11:18** – a description of the consequential events of Christ asserting authority in the order that they occur that extend beyond the seventh trumpet and into the 1000 year reign, and
- **11:19** – a second summary of events that describe the beginning and end of the seventh trumpet,

and they will be treated separately and in that order.

Rev. 11:15-17 – “Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.’ And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, ‘We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because you have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.’”

The kingdom of this world – the usurped authority of Satan the “god of this world and “prince of the power of the air” (2 Cor. 4:4, Eph. 2:2, Matt. 4:8-9) – changes hands as Christ assumes rightful control of this world. It is the kingdom of the Lord²⁶⁹ and of His Christ [anointed]. As described in similar language in the 2nd Psalm, when the reign of Christ begins the earth is not at peace. In fact it is in opposition. This beginning of the reign of Christ is initial subject of the next verse.

Rev. 11:18 – “And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”

²⁶⁸ As the church at the beginning of the age fell during the “harvest” of the Jewish Age (Matt. 9:37-38, 3:12, John 4:35-38), so the church at the end of the age falls during the “harvest” of the Gospel Age (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-49, Rev. 14:14-16).

²⁶⁹ Specifically *Jehovah* for “LORD” in Psalm 2:2 “and... His Anointed”.

When the reign of Christ begins the nations are “enraged” or in the language of the psalms, “Why are the nations in an uproar and the people devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed, saying, ‘Let us tear their fetters [bonds] apart and cast away their cords [chains] from us!’” (Psalm 2:1-2)

Yet His “wrath has come” as the Father and Son retake control of this rebellious world. “He who sits in the heavens laughs, the Lord scoffs at them. Then He will speak to them in His anger and terrify them in His anger...”

The time has come for the dead to be judged in the same order or progression in which God first begins to deal with their eternal position.²⁷⁰ First to be rewarded are the prophets and worthies of the past,²⁷¹ then the “saints” or the church or people of the Gospel Age, then the “small and great” representing all of the world of mankind in the Messianic Age who come to “fear Your name”, and finally the destruction of those who “destroy the earth” (20:7-10).²⁷²

A couple verses from the letters of the Apostle Paul provide a fascinating correspondence on this point. In 1 Cor. 15:51-52, Paul says, “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be change, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

The particular point of interest with regard to the seventh trumpet of Revelation is the reference by Paul to the resurrection of the church at the “last trumpet”. A last trumpet implies other trumpets, and only one place in prophecy describes a series of trumpets.²⁷³ Here in Revelation there are seven consecutive trumpets, and it is here in the seventh or last trumpet that the dead are resurrected.

²⁷⁰ New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia. (2010). *The Revelation Notebook*, 1st bound ed. (p 153). Louisville, Kentucky: New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia.

²⁷¹ Heb. 11:35, 39-40.

²⁷² And these terms “the small” (Joel 3:9-16) and “the great” (Jam. 5:1-6) apply equally to those in the present time that destroy the earth and who will be unwilling to obey the laws of that kingdom (Is. 26:9-10).

²⁷³ In fact, within the Bible there are only two other series of trumpets outside of Revelation, but these is of interest, also.

- (3) In the OT Jewish feast cycle, trumpets are blown at the beginning of every month (Num. 10:10, cf. Num. 28:11-15, Is. 1:13, etc.) and this is continued until the seventh month and the feast of trumpets (Lev. 23:24, Num. 29:1) when trumpets are blown throughout the first day of the month (seven days of trumpets for seven months altogether). Trumpets are also blown on the 10th day of the month or the Day of Atonement. On the 50th year this day also began of the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25:8-10). The Jubilee Year is a picture of the restoration of mankind in the kingdom (cf. Acts 3:21). The seventh month is also the month of the Feast of Tabernacles, which is another feast related to the world of mankind in the kingdom of God on earth (Zech. 14:16, cf. 14:6-9). These are events of the seventh trumpet of Revelation.
- (4) The other OT occasion of seven trumpets is found in the story of the battle of Jericho (Joshua 6:6-21). For seven days they marched around the city blowing trumpets and on the seventh day marched around the city seven times blowing trumpets. The

Rev. 11:19 – “And the sanctuary²⁷⁴ of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His sanctuary,²⁷⁵ and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and great hail.”²⁷⁶

The opening of the sanctuary or “Most Holy” compartment reveals the ark of the covenant inside. The ark of the covenant is the only piece of furniture inside the Most Holy of the tabernacle or the temple of the Old Testament. In a several more chapters (15:5-8), there are quite a few more particulars about this picture of the opening of the sanctuary that are revealed at that point, but those will be explained in detail when that chapter is considered.

The focus for the moment is on the manner in which this one verse covers the entire period of the seven last plagues of Revelation chapters fifteen and sixteen. As mentioned above, the opening of the sanctuary or Most Holy is described in 15:5-8, and while the appearance of the ark is not specifically mentioned in those verses, the smoke from the glory of God that fills the sanctuary indicates it.²⁷⁷

The important object of note here is that:

- 3) The opening of the sanctuary and the appearance of the ark here in the first half of 11:19 immediately precede the pouring out of the seven last plagues in 15:5-8.
- 4) At the same time the events described in the second half of 11:19 – flashes of lightning, sounds, peals of thunder, earthquake, and great [severe] hail – are all part of the description of the seventh or last of the seven last plagues (16:17-21).

people gave a great shout and the city walls collapsed. This is exactly what is happening today and has been ongoing for some time. The seventh trumpet is sounding, the people of all lands are giving a great shout demanding rights, and the city walls of this world are crumbling.

Also, the people were led around the city of Jericho by the priests bearing the ark of the covenant. A sighting ark of the covenant is also mentioned prominently in connection in the brief description of the seventh trumpet of Revelation in 11:19.

²⁷⁴ See NASB margin, others.

²⁷⁵ *ibid.*

²⁷⁶ NASB margin, *lit.*

²⁷⁷ For those who want a glimpse ahead, the opening of the sanctuary and the installation of the ark of the covenant inside are always accompanied by the filling of the tabernacle (tent) in the wilderness or the temple with smoke from the glory of God. This occurs in the Old Testament whenever the Ark of the Covenant is brought into the Most Holy (Exodus 40:20-21 and 34-35, 1 Kings 8:6-11, 1 Chronicles 5:7-14). It also happens in prophecy, as in Isaiah 6:1-13, Ezekiel 10:4, Ezekiel 43:1-6 and Ezekiel 44:1-4, and Haggai 2:7. The significance of this continuing portrayal of the ark is connected first with the resurrection of the sleeping saints and then later with the completion of the church.

This combination above suggests strongly that the description of the seventh trumpet in this verse is defined as a period that (1) starts when [or shortly after] the seven last plagues begin and (2) ends when the seven last plagues end.²⁷⁸

The seventh trumpet takes us to the time of the completion of all that God has promised. More specifically:

11:15-17 tells us that Christ – by the power and will of God – has assumed his rightful place as king.

11:18 summarizes the entire reign of Christ. Initially Jesus is at war when he takes back the kingdom of this world (Ps. 2:1-9). However, the outcome of his reign is never in doubt and he proceeds to reward all who come to him (the prophets, the church, and the world) with eternal life, and then finally removes from the scene all of his opponents forever (1 Cor. 15:24-25).

11:19 narrows the focus to the actual time period of the seventh trumpet and the troublous events that accompany of the last days of the church. It summarize this period as the time of the seven last plagues.

Final Note regarding the last three trumpets and the seven last plagues.

Only one other place in the Bible is a *series* of plagues described, and that is the plagues on Egypt leading up to the Exodus of the Hebrew people (Ex. 7:14-12:32). There are ten of these plagues, and the first three are on both the Egyptians and the Hebrews (Ex. 7:14-8:19) while the *seven last plagues* are only upon the Egyptians (Ex. 8:20-12:32).

This same numerical pattern is paralleled in the only other place – the book of Revelation – that describes a sequenced series of plagues. Each of the last three trumpets is described as a “woe” or severe difficulty, and these woes are followed by a series of plagues. In particular, the description of the seventh trumpet (the third woe trumpet) is accompanied by a final verse that briefly ranges across the entire period of the seven last plagues in just one verse.

Taken altogether, this means that – like in the Exodus account – the events of Revelation begin with *three* “woes” that - like the Exodus account again – are followed by *seven last plagues*.

²⁷⁸ Since the seventh and final plague is poured out on the “air” (16:17) – as already noted Satan is the “prince of the power of the air” per Eph. 2:2, 6:12 – the seventh plague marks the end of Satan’s power to deceive the nations as before (cf. 20:2-3, Is. 14:12-17).

Revelation Chapter Eleven – Appendix to the Chapter

Jesus and the Two Witnesses

There is a relationship between the period of the teaching ministry of Jesus and the period of the prophesying ministry of the two witnesses in the eleventh chapter of Revelation. See the following chart:

The Ministry of Jesus and the Ministry of the Two Witnesses	
<p>Jesus ministry lasts for 3½ literal years (Dan. 7:24-27, Luke 13:6-9, others).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>Jesus is seen with Moses and Elijah in the vision on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-9).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>Jesus is crucified.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>Two others are crucified on each side of Jesus.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>Jesus is in the grave for 3 days.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>Jesus is resurrected from the dead.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>Jesus ascends to heaven in a cloud (Acts 1:9).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>There is an earthquake at the resurrection of Jesus (Matt. 28:2).</p>	<p>The prophesying of the two witnesses lasts for 3½ “prophetic” years (11:2-3).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>The two witnesses are described as performing the same miracles as Moses and Elijah (11:5-6).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>Symbolically the two witnesses are crucified, also (11:8).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>The two witnesses are killed in the same “city” as Jesus (11:8).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>The two dead witnesses lie in the street for 3½ days (11:9).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>The two witnesses are resurrected from the dead (11:11).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>The two witnesses ascend to heaven in a cloud (11:12).</p> <p style="text-align: center;">—————</p> <p>At the “hour” of the resurrection of the two witnesses there is an earthquake (11:13)</p>

These parallels most likely exist because there is a relationship between (1) the Jewish Age and the harvest period at the end of that age when Jesus comes the first time and (2) the Gospel Age and the harvest period at the end of that (or this current) age.²⁷⁹

One advantage of this dual imagery is that it confirms the unity of the verses describing the two witnesses (11:1-13) by this other means... helping to solidify the interpretations of the chapter.

Another advantage is that it demonstrates that the passage is symbolic even while extrapolated from actual events, which then result in fulfillments on a much larger scale.

Finally it illustrates the closeness of Jesus to his people. The ministry of Jesus is paralleled by the trials and experiences of the Gospel Age, showing us that Jesus understands our experiences and is with us throughout the entire age until the very end.

²⁷⁹ An alternate view of Revelation known as the Preterist View proposes that all of the Book of Revelation is fulfilled by the year 70 AD with the destruction of the Jewish Temple. This viewpoint is discussed in more detail in *Appendix F – The Book of Revelation – Four Views*. However, it should be pointed out that even within this chapter there are descriptions incompatible with a strictly literal interpretation of the chapter (such as a literal temple or literal 1260 days, etc.) and requiring a mix of symbolic and literal to make it work. Problems include defining the beast from the abyss, the symbolism applied to the two witnesses and what it means, why only a tenth part of the city falls, etc., etc.

Summary of the Seven Churches, Seals, and Trumpets of Revelation

Often these three series of seven churches, seals, and trumpets are seen as consecutive periods of time, i.e., the churches occur first, and then the seven seals, and then the seven trumpets. Yet there is no real reason to assume this to be the case other than theological preference. In fact the evidence presented in the previous pages suggests otherwise... that these three series have common beginning and ending points plus linkages at various points between the sets.

Instead, these seven periods describe seven identical – or nearly identical – periods of time. Since most expositors who view the seven churches prophetically have a general consensus of historical periods of these churches, consider this a reasonable starting point for identifying the periods of the seven seals and trumpets, also. These seven periods in rough approximation are:

- ❖ First Church, Seal, Trumpet – the early church during the period of the apostles.
- ❖ Second Church, Seal, Trumpet – the church following the death of the apostles and the fall of Jerusalem until the Edict of Milan and the end of persecution (73 A.D. to 313 A.D. are reasonable dates).
- ❖ Third Church, Seal, Trumpet – the church during the rise of the clergy system and institutionalized Christianity (to approx. 800 A.D.).
- ❖ The Fourth Church, Seal, Trumpet – the Middle Ages and medieval period and height of the power of the Roman Church.
- ❖ The Fifth Church, Seal, Trumpet – the early Reformation period perhaps beginning about 1517-1518 A.D. with Martin Luther.
- ❖ The Sixth Church, Seal, Trumpet – the latter Reformation period beginning perhaps in the late 1600's with new movements and evangelistic endeavors.
- ❖ The Seventh Church, Seal, Trumpet – the present period of the rise of secularism and materialism as the "hour of testing" comes upon the world (perhaps beginning in the late 1800's).

The following chart offers one suggested outline of these periods to illustrate the various events and relationships that relate scripturally and historically.

Seven Churches, Seals, and Trumpets (Chronological Chart 2)

A chart that gives a pictorial image of the periods of the seven churches, seals, and trumpets with some suggested dates and related subjects is shown on the following page. This may help some readers organize the preceding information.

Church	Meaning of Name	Dates	Events	Seal	Trumpet	Matthew 13 Parable	Wisdom Ja. 3:17
Ephesus Rev. 2:2-3	First (or) Desirable	33-73 A.D.	Apostasy Begins (2 Cor. 11:13)	Rev. 6:2		Sower	first Pure
Smyrna Rev. 2:10	Bitter	73 to 313 A.D. 303-313	 Diocletian's Persecution	 Rev. 6:4		Tares	then Peaceable
Pergamos	Elevated Place	to 798-800A.D.	Patrick (circa 433)			Mustard Seed	Gentle
Thyatira Rev. 2:21 Rev. 2:19 Rev. 2:23	[uncertain] perhaps "castle" or "sacrificial offering"	begins 798 A.D. to 1518 A.D. circa 1158-1179 1334-1354	Roman Church (Crusades and Inquisition) Peter Waldo Black Death	 Rev. 6:8		Woman and Leaven	Reasonable (as in willing to yield)
Sardis	perhaps "those remaining" or "those escaping"	1518 A.D. to 1668 A.D.	Luther		Rev. 9:5 & 10	Hidden Treasure	Full of Mercy and Good Fruits
Philadelphia	"brotherly love"	1668 A.D. 1789 to 1799	William Penn French Revolution	 Rev. 6:12	Revelation chapter 10 to 11:13	Pearl of Great Price	Unwavering or Impartial
Laodicea Rev. 3:20	either "judgment of the people" or "justice for the people"	late 1800's (1874) end possibly 2043?	2 nd Adventists Harvest Period 1 Cor. 15:52		 Rev. 11:15	Dragnet	Without Hypocrisy

Revelation 12/13 and 17/18 Parallel Visions of “Mystic Babylon”

Beginning with chapters 12 and 13, Revelation deals extensively with “beasts” with multiple horns and heads and other features. These beasts and their descriptions all tend to be interrelated. The chart below helps to synchronize all of these various symbols throughout Daniel and 2 Thessalonians and Revelation.

	<u>Babylon</u>	<u>Medo-Persia</u>	<u>Greece</u>	<u>Rome</u>	<u>Antichrist</u>
Daniel 2	Head / Gold	Chest-Arms Silver	Belly-Thighs Brass	Legs Iron	Feet-Toes Iron & Clay
Daniel 7	Lion-Beast	Bear-Beast	Leopard-Beast	Terrible-Beast	Little Horn that became great
Daniel 8		Ram with Two Horns	Goat with “Great Horn” and 4 Horns		
2 Thess. 2				“what restrains him”	“Man of Lawlessness”
Rev. 12 and 13				Dragon	Beast
Rev 17 and 18					Woman “Babylon” on the Beast

Notes

- 1) Parallels between the “Little Horn” in Daniel 7 (verses 11, 20-22, and 25) and the Beast in Revelation 13 (verses 5-7).
- 2) The “clay” of the toes in Daniel 2 compares to the stone in that same chapter (that becomes a great mountain and fills the whole world). The stone represents the Kingdom of God, and the clay (which can be thought of as “imitation stone”) then represents a counterfeit Kingdom of God.

The clay and the iron together represent the two elements of this counterfeit Kingdom of God – church and state. Likewise, in Revelation 17 we see the same two elements of church (the woman) and state (the beast), and in Daniel 7 with the state (the beast) and the church (the horn). Where this division of power is not shown it is assumed to be the case.

- 3) Regarding the identity of “mystic” Babylon (Revelation chapters 17 and 18), Reformers and other Christians of the past that applied the prophecies of Babylon to the Roman Church (or more specifically, the institution of the Papacy). It was the historic position of the Reformation Church for hundreds of years.

Note that this suggested interpretation applies to the historic institution of the Roman Church only, and not to individuals at any time in any place. Many exemplary Christians have claimed the Roman Church as their own throughout history.

A short abbreviated list of those that have testified in harmony with the Reformation view includes:

Martin Luther and Melancthon (Lutherans)
John Wycliffe (early English protestant church)
Thomas Cranmer (Anglican)
Peter Waldo (Waldenses, indirectly Huguenots)
John Calvin (Presbyterian and Reformed)
John Knox (Scottish Presbyterian)
Cotton Mather (Congregational Church)
John Wesley (Methodists)
Alexander Campbell (Church of Christ)
Roger William (first Baptist pastor in America)

Brief Introduction to Revelation Chapters Twelve and Thirteen

These two chapters – **Revelation 12** and **Revelation 13** – both describe the opening of the Christian or Gospel Age. The closing of the age in the Harvest period and the great tribulation is then picked up in chapters 14-19 followed by the Kingdom of God in chapters 20-22. Yet despite covering the same period of time – the early through medieval Gospel Age – these two chapters each describe the same period from two different standpoints:

- **Revelation chapter 12** centers on the virtuous woman who represents the faithful church and leads to “her” experiences in a time when Christianity becomes increasingly worldly and corrupt as well as increasingly powerful. The dragon is present as the anti-hero or villain of this chapter. The faithful church challenges the “falling away” or “apostasy” from the faith (2 Thess. 2:3) by following the simplicity and dedication of the apostles and earliest church, but their commitment to truth and sanctification forces them out of the “city” of Christendom and into the “wilderness” of persecution.
- **Revelation chapter 13** centers on the worldly church and its development and relationship to the Roman Empire as the empire changes from pagan to nominally Christian. This chapter first describes change in control in the western part of the empire from the dragon or pagan Roman Empire to the beast with ten horns or the Latin/Papal church and its growing power. Then the chapter describes the eastern part of the empire (the two-horned beast) and the creation and growth of the Greek/Orthodox church (the image of the beast).

This chapter concludes (13:16-18 through 14:1-5) by contrasting the nominal Christianity of the worldly Christian society that evolves (those with the mark of the beast and who worship its image in 13:16-18) against the faithful (those that have the Lamb’s name and their Father’s name written on their foreheads in 14:1-5).

In brief review and summary:

- The time setting in both cases is the same and begins with the early church in the first several centuries and the pagan Roman Empire and progresses through time into the medieval period.
- The unique perspective in each of these two chapters represents two very different experiences – **[1]** the early to middle history of the true and faithful church (chapter 12) and **[2]** the early to middle history of the worldly and unfaithful church (chapter 13).

Four new symbols are introduced in these two chapters (12-13) that subsequently appear directly or indirectly in following chapters of Revelation (16-20):

- Chapter 12 introduces the dragon that represents Satan's use of civil or governmental power. In this chapter it primarily represents the Roman Empire in the pagan period and then in the period subject to the church.
- Chapter 13 gives us the three symbols of the beast, the two-horned beast, and the image of the beast. The beast and the image of the beast represent religious powers. The two-horned beast represents the combination of church and state in a similar manner to a faithless woman riding the beast elsewhere in Revelation (17:3).

Revelation Chapter Twelve ~ the Woman and the Dragon

The astonishing description of the woman and the dragon that open this chapter is one of many evidences that the Book of Revelation is a book of symbols. A woman clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, and with twelve stars on her head is not something we ever expect to literally see with our physical eyes. Neither is a dragon with seven heads, ten horns, and most unbelievably a tail that case a third of the stars of heaven²⁸⁰ to earth.

So we need to determine the meaning behind these symbols. Although they are also defined in *Appendix B ~ Bible Symbolology in Prophecy*, it seems exceptionally important that they be considered in detail here. And so, before proceeding directly into verse-by-verse interpretation of the chapter, it will be helpful to consider the symbolism of this chapter first.

Two other subjects will follow after the discussion of symbols for a total of three somewhat related subjects.

These three preliminary subjects are:

- (1)** the symbols used in this chapter,
- (2)** the relationship of this chapter of Revelation to several chapters in the Book of Daniel, and
- (3)** consideration of two problematic interpretations of the chapter.

These three preliminary subjects are presented in the same order in which they are listed above and precede the endeavor at a verse-by-verse discussion of the chapter.

²⁸⁰ As of July 2015, NASA estimated the number of stars in our Milky Way galaxy alone at 100 billion. Elsewhere it is estimated that 1,300,000 earths could fit inside our (relatively small) sun.

(1) Identifying the Symbols of Revelation Twelve

The Woman

Some of the most striking symbols in this chapter are contained in the very first verse of the chapter.

That this is a verse of symbols is suggested within the beginning of this verse. The reference to a “great sign” echoes the language of the opening verse of the book of Revelation. It appears to be a reminder of the symbolic nature of the images in this passage (as elsewhere) that is provided at the start of the chapter.

This particular sign is a “great” sign. It is the beauty of the church. From any standpoint – in God’s heart for the church from its beginning to the impact of Christianity on the world in the millennia that would follow – this is a “great” and momentous point in time.

This sign of the “woman” appears in “heaven”, but before considering the meaning of the woman in heaven, it is easier to first define the significance of the celestial symbols in this verse and then return to the “woman” and to “heaven”.

There are many other instances of light and of light giving astronomical objects being used as symbols in the scriptures. Some examples:

- *Light* represents truth (Ephesians 1:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:4-6).
- A *lamp* represents the word of God (Psalms 119:105, 2 Peter 1:19).
- The *dawning day* represents the coming messianic age (2 Peter 1:19, Psalm 46:5).
- *Stars* represent teachers (Daniel 12:3, Revelation 1:20, cf. Jude 13).
- The *sun* represents Jesus, the church, and the New Testament gospel (Psalm 19:4 [5-9] with Romans 10:17-18, Matthew 13:43, etc.).
- The moon is used symbolically in both the Old and New Testaments (Ezek. 46:1, Rev. 6:12-14, 12:1). This one requires a little more explanation.

Like other celestial and light giving objects, the moon represents a source of knowledge. However, out of all those listed the moon is the only one that does not provide its own internal light. Instead the moon is a reflection of the sunlight. This unique aspect of the moon’s light helps us to identify the

moon as a symbol of the Law covenant.²⁸¹ As the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Law are simply an image of the gospel (Hebrews 8:4-5, 12:1), likewise the moon (the Law) is also a reflection of the sun (the gospel).

Turning to the “woman” herself, a woman when used symbolically in scripture represents a church (or perhaps in a larger definition any religious group, even as God in the Old Testament describes Himself being married to the Hebrews people). The church can be either the faithful and true church as in the bride of Christ (2 Cor. 11:2, Eph. 5:22-32, Rev. 19:7-8) or an unfaithful and adulterous church as elsewhere in Revelation (17:1-6, 18:2-4).

Some of these symbols of the heavens are brought together in a powerful image of a woman arrayed in light. This imagery strongly suggests that she is the true and faithful church proceeding from the time of the apostles. She is:

- Clothed with the “sun” symbolizing the gospel message of Jesus,
- Standing on the “moon” picturing the support of the gospel from the Hebrew scriptures and Jewish law, and
- Crowned with “twelve stars” that represent the teaching and the authority of the apostles.

And now, remembering that the rest of the celestial imagery (sun, moon, twelve stars) is not literal, either, it should be understood that in this verse heaven is also imagery and neither describing the literal sky nor the place where God dwells.

Confirming the difficulties of interpreting heaven in a literal sense is the impossibility of the church on earth or “the woman” appearing in a literal heavens. Yet the “sign” of the woman appears there.

Instead of making assumptions of a literal heaven in this verse, consider how fitting it is if “heaven” here represents the religious world into which the early church burst with a completely different life and theology. Only in the rise of Islam is there a more abrupt spread of religion in the west (or perhaps anywhere), and there it required force of arms from the very start to advance so quickly.

²⁸¹ Note additionally that the Jewish calendar is partially a lunar calendar. Also, Passover occurs at the full of the moon, so that when Jesus died on the cross for Jew as well as Gentile, the moon (the Law Covenant) was at the full that night, and it began immediately to wane after his death.

For those who are still uneasy with interpreting heaven in this way, an appendix if devoted solely to this subject because of its perceived importance and difficulty. Please see *Appendix C ~ Special Note on "Heaven" in Revelation* for more details.

The Great Red Dragon

Another set of very striking symbols is included in 12:3-4 beginning with a "great red dragon" with seven heads and ten horns. The dragon is presented as "another sign [that] appeared in heaven" and introduces the "sign... in heaven" in similar language to the introduction to the woman. Comparing the obvious imagery of the woman, this fantastical description is a "sign" or symbol to be interpreted.

The dragon represents Satan in his use of government to exercise abusive crushing power. The number of heads and horns reveals that this is the case:

- The **seven heads** represent seven successive governments or empires (17:10-11). Note that in Daniel chapter seven there are also seven heads on the four beasts. Later on we'll note additional links with that same chapter in Daniel.

When Revelation chapter 13 is considered it will be demonstrated how much of that chapter is also drawn from Daniel chapter seven (e.g., the descriptions of the first three beasts in Daniel seven with the description of the beast of 13:2), and how each of these chapters are related to Revelation chapter 12.

- The **ten horns** symbolize ten units of government within or allied to a larger government, such as one of the beasts (cf. 17:12-13). The ten horns represent nations of Europe.

This interpretation of the dragon as Satan's use of government finds support both elsewhere in Revelation and in historical fulfillment.

The seven heads and ten horns of the red dragon are also on the scarlet beast that the faithless woman named Babylon rides. "And he carried me away into the wilderness, and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast,²⁸² full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns" (17:3).

²⁸² The "great red dragon" and the "scarlet beast" are not the same thing, but they do appear to be related. They both have seven heads and ten horns. And while *red* and *scarlet* are not the same words (as English words or in the Greek from which they are translated), they still bear a resemblance. In the case of Rev. 17:3 the woman is riding the beast, which suggests the Roman Church in control of civil power... similar, but not identical, to the way the dragon is distinguished from the institutional church elsewhere in Revelation.

Later in Revelation 17 the heads and horns are interpreted for us:

“Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, (17:9)

“And they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.” (17:10)

“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings...” (17:12)

Literally the seven mountains are the Seven Hills of Rome. These Seven Hills are:

- Aventine Hill (Latin, Aventinus; Italian, Aventino)
- Caelian Hill (Cælius, Celio)
- Capitoline Hill (Capitolinus, Campidoglio)
- Esquiline Hill (Esquilinus, Esquilino)
- Palatine Hill (Palatinus, Palatino)
- Quirinal Hill (Quirinalis, Quirinale)
- Viminal Hill (Viminalis, Viminale)

These seven individual hills became the city of Rome at the time they were surrounded by the Servian wall.

Yet Biblically the mountains have a symbolic meaning, as well, as do the rest of the symbols in Revelation. Mountains are symbols of kingdoms (Daniel 2:35/43-44, Isaiah 2:2-4, cf. also Rev. 16:20), and this is exactly what we are told in Rev. 17:9-10 cited above: *“The seven heads are seven mountains... and they are seven king[dom]s...”*

In Revelation 17:12 we also find the definition for the horns as *“ten king[dom]s who... receive authority as kings...”* The comparison of heads and horns throughout scripture suggests that the heads represent larger kingdoms, i.e., empires as opposed to the horns that represent individual nations.

As there are several symbols in Revelation 17 that have real world examples as well as symbolic fulfillments,²⁸³ it seems reasonable to ask if there are similar literal examples of the symbols of Revelation chapter twelve.

²⁸³ Revelation chapter seventeen describes the adulterous woman as having a golden cup of abominations in her hand, seated on seven mountains and also seated on many waters or people(s). Today there is a preserved ancient Roman coin with a picture of a woman seated on seven hills. Even more bizarrely, there is a preserved Papal coin from the early 1800's with a picture of a woman seated on a globe holding out a [golden] cup on one side and a picture of the pope on the other side.

One such example in particular stands out. Strangely enough, the symbol of a dragon came into use as an Imperial ensign in the Roman army some time *after* Revelation was written.²⁸⁴

The seven heads and ten horns represent the same seven heads of the beasts found in the 7th chapter of Daniel (Dan. 7:4-7, noting that the leopard-like beast has four heads) and ten horns (Dan. 7:7, 20, 24). The heads represent seven empires that eventually govern the land of Israel successively throughout the course of history:

- (1) Babylonian Empire
- (2) Persian Empire
- (3) Greece (Greek-Macedonian Empire / Alexander the Great)
- (4) Greece (Seleucid Empire / Middle East)
- (5) Greece (Ptolemaic Empire / Egypt)
- (6) Roman Empire
- (7) Greece (Byzantine Empire / Thrace)²⁸⁵

The ten horns represent the division of central and western Europe into separate nations. A common suggestion begins these nations with ten separate tribes of peoples²⁸⁶ that divided up the western half of the Roman Empire. Ten nations remained an approximate but consistent number of the nations in western and central Europe all the way until modern times.²⁸⁷

To this point most of the symbols of this chapter have been surveyed. Two of the symbols at the close of the chapter to consider – the serpent and the river of water – will be held until the end of the chapter is discussed.

This leaves two remaining symbols.

²⁸⁴ Hislop, A. (1916). *The Two Babylons*. pp. 319-320, Loizeaux Brothers: Neptune, NJ. and Elliot, E.B. (1847). *Horae Apocalypticæ: Or a Commentary on the Apocalypse*, 3rd ed., vol. 3. p 14. Seeley, Burnside, and Seeley: London.

²⁸⁵ When Alexander the Great died, his empire divided into four parts controlled by four of his generals who removed all opposition. The geographic areas controlled by these four smaller empires are (1) Macedonia & Greece, (2) Thrace and parts of Asia Minor, (3) part of the Middle East centered around the cities of Babylon and Damascus, and (4) Egypt and nearby areas. All of these mini-empires except the one centered on Thrace (Lysimachus was the general of Alexander that controlled this region and his empire did not last long past his death) controlled the land of Israel. Not until the split between the Eastern and Western Roman Empires did Thrace – now represented in the eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire control Israel as an identifiable entity of Thrace. Cf. Rev. 17:8-11 which describes this whole process.

²⁸⁶ Although the names on some lists vary slightly, an approximated list of the ten tribes represented in the ten horns is as follows: Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Franks, Allemani, Suevi, Vandals, Burgundians, Anglo-Saxons/Jutes, Heruli, and Lombards.

²⁸⁷ Oddly, even the modern day European Economic Community – the predecessor to the European Union – during a period from 1973-1986 consisted of first nine and then ten members.

1260 Days

The 1260 “days” (or 3½ times) are not literal days, but are 1260 years following the rule of “a day for a year” applied in the time prophecy found in Ezekiel 4:1-6. (Note also that nearly every commentator since the second century and including the present day has defined the 70 weeks or 490 days of Daniel 9:24-27 as 490 years.) This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

The Male Child

The “male child” that comes from the woman is the final symbol to consider at this point. If the woman is a symbol of the church (or Israel in some other interpretations), it seems impossible that she gives birth to Jesus or to any literal child... even if the description of a child destined to rule nations parallels that of Jesus. Yet that description, so similar to that of Jesus, could be the key to discovering who this child is. The Apostle John offers a warning on this very subject of who would be born out of the early church – “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us” (1 John 2:19, cf. Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).

Summarizing the Symbols of Revelation 12

So far, most of the symbols in this chapter have been considered, and the following list makes it evident the kind of effect that understanding the symbols has on the overall interpretation of this chapter:

- the woman is not a real woman
- the sun is not the real sun
- the moon is not the real moon
- the twelve stars are not twelve literal stars
- heaven is not the literal heaven
- the dragon is not a literal dragon
- the seven heads of the dragon are not literal heads
- the ten horns of the dragon are not literal horns
- the male child is not a literal child
- the 1260 days are not literal days

A second list is in order now to summarize what these symbols do represent. The...

- Woman pictures the purity of the early church
- Sun pictures the gospel
- Moon pictures the Law and the Old Testament
- Twelve Stars picture the twelve apostles
- Heaven pictures spiritual power and authority (true or corrupt) or earthly religious power and authority (true or corrupt)
- Dragon pictures the instruments of power which Satan uses to dominate the world and crush opposition... in this case the pagan Roman Empire
- Seven Heads picture empires (also described in the 7th chapter of Daniel) as seven heads. This is elaborated on the Revelation 17:8-11
- Ten Horns picturing ten nations or ten kingdoms in common cause
- Male Child picturing a *counterfeit* of Christ and His Kingdom
- 1260 Days picturing a period of 1260 years (or 3½ “times”) during which the church would be persecuted

Identifying the symbols of this chapter is the first and longest of the three preliminary subjects for this chapter. Two more remain and the next one is brief...

(2) The Relationship of Revelation 12 with Daniel 7, 8 and 12

A number of elements in Revelation chapter 12 are drawn from several chapters in Daniel. This is especially true in a comparison of closing verses of Revelation twelve (verses 13-17) with Daniel chapter seven (verses 21 and 25) and chapter twelve (verses 5-7).

As noted, Revelation chapter twelve bears a strong relationship to chapter thirteen, as they cover the same period of time in similar ways but from different standpoints. So it is not surprising that *both* chapters include a strong correlation between Daniel and Revelation.

For the present chapter, consider the following parallels between Revelation twelve and the chapters in Daniel...

Revelation 12	Daniel 7, 8, and 12
Seven Heads (12:3)	Seven Heads (7:4-7)
²⁸⁸ Ten Horns (12:3)	Ten Horns (7:7)
Third of the Stars of Heaven Thrown to Earth (12:4)	Caused some of the Stars of Heaven to Fall to Earth and Trampled Them (8:10)
But [Aune, et al.] the child was caught up to God and to His Throne (12:5)	Magnified Itself to be Equal with the Prince of the Host (8:11, 25)
Persecution for God's People for 3½ Times / 1260 Days (12:6, 14)	Persecution of God's People for 3½ Times (7:25, 12:7)
Period of Persecution Represented by a Flood of Waters (12:15)	Period of Persecution Represented by a Flood of Waters (12:5-7, cf. 8:16)
Persecution of the Woman Described as "War" (12:17)	Persecution of the Saints Described as "War" (7:21)

This brings us to the third and final preliminary subject prior to a verse-by-verse discussion of this chapter.

(3) Two Problematic Interpretations of Revelation Twelve

First Interpretive Challenge – The Symbols of the “Woman” and the “Male Child”

A first glance it seems like the male child in this chapter should be Jesus. The child is described as “a male [child], who is to rule all nations with a rod of iron; and her child is caught up to God and to His throne” (12:5).

This interpretation usually comes with the added proposition that the woman is not the church at all, but Mary or the Jewish people. Supportive of the interpretation of the woman as Israel is Gen. 37:9-10 where the same symbols of

²⁸⁸ Note – It should not be assumed that the ten horns in Revelation 12 are scattered among the seven heads. The ten horns are all located on one of the seven heads, similar to how the ten horns are all located on one of the seven heads (specifically the head of the 4th beast) in Daniel chapter seven.

sun, moon, and stars are used in Joseph's dream of his family. It is with Joseph's family (his father Jacob/Israel and Jacob's 12 sons) that the nation of Israel begins.

Both of these interpretations are problematic. First, interpreting the woman as Mary is problematic. Why is Mary "in heaven" before she gives birth to Jesus? Why is she singled out to be persecuted by the dragon? Why is a literal woman persecuted by a symbolic dragon? And so on.

The second interpretation is just as problematic. Considering the interpretation of the woman as the Jewish people at the time of Christ, why is she clothed with the sun (the gospel) if she represents the Jewish people? Why is she later given "two wings of the great eagle" (12:14) representing the Old and New Testaments during her persecution? It is more likely that the Genesis dream is a picture of future deliverance. Joseph is commonly understood to be a picture of Jesus— so all Israel will one day bow down to Jesus after he delivers them... as Joseph did in Egypt.

If the interpretation of the woman is problematic, the interpretation of the male child as Jesus is much more of a problem. Assuming that the woman in this chapter represents the early church, we have the following problems when interpreting the male child as Jesus:

- That Jesus would be born from the church (assuming that is what the woman represents) is a physical problem.
- That Jesus would be born from the church is also a chronological problem (Jesus comes before the church and is responsible for its creation).
- That Jesus is described as a child is also a problem. He dies as a man and not a child, and since his death he is a "life giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45).
- As we noted the dragon is not specifically Satan as an individual, but rather Satan in his exercise of crushing power. Here the dragon with the seven heads and ten horns represents Roman civil authority... making time setting when the child assumes rulership in the past and not in the future kingdom.
- When the male child reigns over the nations, the dragon is cast down to the earth "having great wrath" and proceeds to persecute the faithful church represented by the woman (12:9, 12-13, 17). Yet elsewhere in Revelation when Christ truly begins to reign, the dragon is bound and helpless (20:2-3).
- This brings up a related problem regarding the woman, the fact that she (the church) is being persecuted instead of reigning with Christ (2 Tim. 2:12, 20:4) at this time and point in the chapter (12:6, 13-17).

This question regarding the nature of the male child – along with the next interpretive problem regarding the dragon and the “war in heaven” – also has ramifications regarding the question of who is speaking in verses 10-12.

As to who is pictured by the male child (and his followers), that is examined when we begin a verse-by-verse and section-by-section interpretation,

Second Interpretive Challenge – The Dragon and “War in Heaven”

Another common but problematic interpretation that occurs in this passage is connected to the previous interpretation of the male child. This different but related scene of the child precedes the most common interpretation of 12:7-9 in which we find Michael and the Dragon at war.

The first consideration is a review of the nature of the dragon. In the previous discussion on Revelation chapters 4-5, it was noted at length that Satan has four names and that these four names describe his corruption of God’s attributes. These four names are the dragon (Satan’s corruption of power), the serpent (Satan’s corruption of wisdom), the Devil (Satan’s corruption of justice), and Satan (Satan’s corruption of love). So although the dragon is one of the names given to Satan (20:2), it is descriptive of his abuse of power in particular.²⁸⁹

Satan’s abuse of power on a worldwide scale manifests itself most commonly in government.²⁹⁰ The dragon is appropriately used as a symbol of civil power (governmental power), and unless we conceive of Satan literally having seven heads and ten horns, etc. (12:3), this is the reasonable interpretation of the dragon. The symbol of a dragon in general represents Satan’s abuse of (governmental) power, and here in Rev. 12:3 it represents the power of the pagan Roman Empire.

This will become more apparent when the chapter is explored in detail verse-by-verse.

²⁸⁹ For a detailed discussion on the four names of Satan and how they picture the abuse of God’s character of wisdom, justice, love, and power, see the discussion in *Revelation Chapters Four and Five ~ The Throne Scene*.

²⁹⁰ This is not to say that government itself is bad. It’s always preferable to lawlessness. Nevertheless governments – particularly in most of past history – exercised government authority abusively and indiscriminately.

The war in heaven in verses 7-9 is generally taken as a description of the casting of the actual Satan to the earth. However, this interpretation also becomes awkward for several reasons:

- The interpretation of this chapter as a whole suddenly becomes very literal instead of symbolic.
- The dragon no longer represents Satan's use of civil government, but now suddenly and briefly becomes Satan in person.
- The time setting is wrong. Events described before and after these verses relate to the Christian or Gospel Age, whereas the casting Satan and the fallen angels from heaven occurs long before this time. So unless these verses are a parenthetical history inserted at this point with no rhyme or reason, the literal interpretation is out of place in this chapter.

(A side proviso may be in order here. It should be noted, though, that an event of the type described in verses 7-9 of this chapter may very well have taken place literally in the manner described here and the event then becomes a historical type or illustration of later events. We have no record of exactly what happened when Satan and the angels that followed him were barred from heaven, but based on Daniel 10:10-13 there is a[n unresolvable] basis for thinking that it possibly took place in the manner described in Revelation 12.)

Up to this point the two interpretative problems have been outlined above without any sort of alternate explanation. And yes, that is the very next thing. Finally.

One point to keep in mind throughout the following commentary is that the focus of chapter twelve is the woman and the "rest of her children" (12:17). The other two chief actors in the drama – her offspring the "male child" and the "dragon" – provide the context for her experiences. This lovely and luminous woman and her faithful children are the focal point of the chapter around which everything revolves.

Verses 1-2

For **verse 1**, a return and review of the meaning of the symbols may be desirable.

The reference to a “great sign” echoes the language of the opening verse of the book of Revelation. So we are reminded of the symbolic nature of the images in this passage as elsewhere, but this particular sign is a “great” sign, and from any standpoint – from God’s heart for the church at its beginning to the impact of Christianity on the world in the millennia that follow – this is a “great” moment in history.

In **verse 2** the woman is pregnant and is in pain from childbirth. Something is coming out of the early church. Something that is different from the pure early Christianity of Jesus and the apostles. Words are seldom wasted in Revelation, and although childbirth is always a painful experience for a woman, the fact that it is specifically spelled out here with such emphasis “... and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth...” suggests that the church’s experience represented by the woman’s birth pangs indicate a spiritually difficult time.²⁹¹

Verses 3-4a

The great red dragon – like the woman – also appears as “another sign... in heaven” suggesting that the dragon is also a symbol and not a literal dragon. The implausible tenet of literalness becomes stretched very thin as verses three and four proceed, so much so that little more time will be spent emphasizing the symbolic nature of these verses and others from this chapter.

This dragon is a symbol of the pagan Roman Empire before it became Christianized. Oddly enough the symbol of a dragon became an ensign of the Roman Empire from the second to third century – within the very time frame when the dragon is first introduced in this chapter, and well after the book itself is

²⁹¹ In an odd but interesting connection to physical childbirth, the expected birthdate dated from the onset of the last menstrual cycle is often cited as 280 days, although only 4% percent of woman actually give birth on the expected day.

However, Jim Schucker notes that if the 280 days is a good average, then at “a day for a year” the 280 years would cover a range from 33 AD when Christ was crucified to 313 AD when the Edict of Milan ended official Roman persecution of Christians and set the stage for the rise of institutional Christianity. The final ten years of this period leading to the Edict of Milan from 303 AD to 313 AD (cf. Rev. 2:10) are the worst period of persecution under the Roman Empire. These 10 years of exceptionally violent persecution – that close the 280 years in which the woman is “with child” – would then represent the severe birth pangs of the woman when she “cries out” in labor.

Whether this period of time for physical childbirth is an accurate “average” perhaps lacks the precision that would be preferred, but if it is even a close average or approximation of the period until childbirth, then the relationship between this interval in the experiences of the church to the woman’s birth pangs in Revelation is interesting. And as a side note to this footnote, the number 280 is 7 X 40... perhaps represents a pattern of events found elsewhere in Revelation but without numbers: a series of events (7) resulting in a final judgment (40).

written. (Prior to that time the principle ensign of the Roman Empire was the Roman eagle or other animals but not the dragon. Yet by the end of the third century the dragon was nearly as well known.)

As already noted, the seven heads represent seven empires and the ten horns ten individual nations as distinguished from larger multi-national empires. The crowns are on the heads of the dragon in this chapter, emphasizing that this dragon is associated with one of those empires. In the following chapter of Revelation we will see a beast with seven heads and ten horns and the crowns on the horns, indicating the shift in government to the support of the beast by the nations of western Europe (cf. 17:12-13).²⁹²

“And his tale swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.”

This depiction is nearly impossible to understand in any other time setting than the one chosen for this chapter so far, and yet there is more than one possible interpretation. All of the possible interpretations are set in this time period of the pagan Roman Empire, and at least two of them seem to provide a good explanation for defining the “third” part of the stars that are thrown down “to the earth.”

It is preferable to start with aspects of history and scripture that are certain. The Edict of Milan ended the terrible ten years of persecution (2:10) under Diocletian in 313 AD (the labor pangs described in 12:2). Just 12 years later, Constantine – the first emperor to call himself a Christian – called together a council of bishops at Nicaea in 325 AD. It seems reasonable that the “stars” or teachers/leaders of the Christian church in the verse under discussion represent the bishops of the empire.

At this point the interpretation of the stars dovetails fittingly with the description of “the stars of heaven” being thrown “to the earth,” for this is exactly what happened. Having just survived the extremely severe and extended persecution of the Roman Empire, the church is now suddenly in the good graces of the emperor and the leadership is called to debate issues confronting the church.

Early church historian Eusebius who was present at the Nicean Council describes the bishops as awed by Constantine’s clothing and appearance at the council,²⁹³

²⁹² Additional detail on the crowns is included in the commentary on chapter 13.

²⁹³ Cited from a secondary source: see Freeman, C. (2003). *The Closing of the Western Mind*. p. 167. Alfred A. Knopf: New York.

(although Eusebius may have been personally motivated by personal concerns to overstate the bishops response in order to ingratiate himself with Constantine).

Yet it is doubtful that Constantine really understood or cared about the issues. His evident concern appears to be a necessity to unify the church under his authority to bring order to the empire.

Constantine's success in co-opting the church for his benefit put the church more or less under his control and under the control of the emperors that would follow him. This is how the "stars of heaven" were dragged down to the earth and out of a position of spiritual control. The church becomes increasingly worldly under the rewards of earthly advantages. The dragon initially wins the contest for power.

However, what is meant by a *third* of the stars of heaven? As suggested above, there are at least two possibilities that may seem workable:

- (1) The third of the stars represent the fraction of bishops of the eastern part of the Roman Empire present at the council. It is true that "about" a third²⁹⁴ of the bishops of the east were present at the Nicene Council in 325 AD.²⁹⁵ The difficulty with this interpretation is that we're arbitrarily selecting out the eastern portion of the empire.
- (2) The third of the stars represent one of three groups rather than an actual percentage number. This seems more in keeping with the way a "third" is used elsewhere in Revelation.²⁹⁶ There were basically three groups present at the Nicene Council represented on one side by Athanasius, on the other side by Arius, and the moderate and undecided view in the middle represented by Eusebius. And no matter what your view of Arius, it was his party that stood against the increased power of the church leadership resulting from the council.

Yet whatever "third" is identified with this passage, it is the correct time and correct historical period for some of the "stars of heaven" to be thrown to the earth,²⁹⁷ as the leadership of the church becomes increasingly suborned by Constantine and those emperors who succeeded him.

²⁹⁴ Despite some conflicting reports, the majority of the evidence suggests this is a fairly accurate count of the number of eastern bishops present.

²⁹⁵ Although bishops were present from the western part of the empire from as far away as Britain.

²⁹⁶ See especially Rev. 8:7-12.

²⁹⁷ Cf. Dan. 8:9-10.

Verses 4b-5

The difficulties of identifying the “male child” born out of the early church as a picture of Jesus are noted previously. And yet there are descriptive terms applied to this male child that seem only fitting for Jesus. This is because the male child is a pretender and a deceiver, pretending to rule by the authority of Christ.

This “male child” is the Papal Roman Church described elsewhere as the “man of lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:7, cf. Dan. 7:25), not a physical man, but an imitation of “the Christ” head (Jesus) and body (the church – cf. 1 Cor. 12:12, 27, Eph. 2:15-16).

Some might still question whether this description of the one who would rule all nations really refers to someone other than Jesus. Yet already noted are two major problems with connecting the reign described in this chapter to the reign of Christ:

- (1) The luminous woman that is seen at the start of the chapter is persecuted during this time (12:6, 13-17).
- (2) Rather than being bound and helpless (Rev. 20:2-4), Satan in the form of the dragon is loose on the world with great wrath (12:12-13, 17).

Others might thoughtfully suggest that the reign of Christ described here is the sense in which he is exalted after his resurrection and reigns in the hearts of believers. This interpretation also has problems. Foremost is that everywhere else in Revelation the reign of Christ is always described as something that happens at the *return* of Jesus and not his first presence. Second is the contrast between “the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ” (12:10) in juxtaposition to the persecution of the woman and her seed fleeing to the wilderness.

Also problematic for interpreting the male child as Jesus (or any actual man) are the descriptions of this “male child’s” origins in letters by two apostles. They trace its start and development from the early church’s beginning, though the antichrist is not yet “born” (fully developed) at that time.

- 1 John 2:19 – “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.”
- 2 Thess. 2:7 – “For the mystery of lawlessness [the “man of lawlessness” and “son of destruction” – 2 Thess. 2:3] *is already at work* [italics mine]...”

This is a good point at which to note that several expressions from the 2nd Thessalonians describing the antichrist are found in the 12th and 13th chapters of Revelation. The four below are matched to their parallels in Revelation twelve.

- In 2 Thess. 2:7 (as noted above along with 1 John 2:19) the antichrist already is in process of development. This fits well with the development of the apostasy coming out of the early church in the 12th chapter of Revelation (cf. the Parable of the Wheat and Tares in Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).
- In 2 Thess. 2:3 the antichrist²⁹⁸ is described as the “man of lawlessness” and “son of destruction”. And so the antichrist is described in terms of the same “male child” imagery found in the 12th chapter of Revelation.
- In 2 Thess. 2:6 there is something unspecified in the chapter (i.e., the Pagan Roman Empire) that restrains or holds back the “man of lawlessness” until the time it is revealed [born]. In Revelation 12 we have alternate description with the Roman dragon ready to consume the child for its own purposes.
- In 2 Thess. 2:4 the “man of lawlessness” exalts itself to take the place of God “so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.” How similar that sounds to the boasting found in 12:10-12 and 13:5.

After having considered all the elements of these verses, now the verses themselves can be considered, as follows:

“And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when he gave birth he might swallow²⁹⁹ her child.” (12:4b)

When Constantine becomes emperor, the dragon of the Roman is prepared to absorb the Christian Church for its own ends.

“And she gave birth to a son, a male [child] who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron...” (12:5a)

²⁹⁸ Modern day usage of the prefix “anti” to mean “against” does not reflect the most common usage in Greek. In the original language “antichrist” almost certainly meant “in place of Christ,” and that is how it is usually described in scripture... someone usurping the place of Christ.

²⁹⁹ For anyone following along in the NASB and most other translations, the given language of the translation is “devour”. However, Aune takes exception and translates the Greek word *κατεσθειν* as “swallow” with good reason. See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 650, 686). Dallas: Word Books. See also notes at verses 13-17 titled *Language Framing Revelation Twelve*.

This imagery of a counterfeit Kingdom of God ruling over all nations has already been noted, but the following passages from the 17th chapter of Revelation are very persuasive when considered collectively.

“...the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality... and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast... having seven heads and ten horns... the seven heads are... seven king[dom]s [on which the woman sits]... the ten horns... are ten king[dom]s... they give their power and authority to the beast... and he said to me, the waters where you saw the harlot sites, are peoples, and multitudes and nations and tongues... the woman which you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of earth.”

If it is objected that the “male child” in Revelation twelve cannot be the same as a “woman” in Revelation seventeen, consider the 13th chapter of Revelation where the beast of Revelation seventeen is described once again (without the woman).³⁰⁰ In Revelation 13 the beast is referred to by male pronouns. Later in the chapter, the beast is distinctly described as a man... “Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man...”

“...and her child was snatched away³⁰¹ to God and to His throne.” (12:5b)

Again there is the temptation to apply this to Jesus, but “child” is a correct translation here, and it was necessary for Jesus to reach adulthood and endure the crucifixion for every member of the human race before his ascent to heaven.

Contrastingly, if the male child is the counterfeit kingdom that is to rule for centuries in the name of Christ, then the reference to “God and to His throne” is a change in status from persecution by the dragon to pretensions of greatness.

The party responsible for snatching away the child is never defined in the text. It does not say, “God snatched away the child to His throne,” which would have been much clearer if that was the intent. Plus the very expression “snatched away” suggests something slightly unscrupulous. Only the dragon (the pagan empire) is left as a possible candidate, but in context it seems to be a questionable candidate.

³⁰⁰ The distinction between the woman and the beast in chapter 17 illustrates the distinction between church and state, a distinction that is illustrated differently in chapter 13 without the woman.

³⁰¹ Again, readers following along in the NASB or other translations may notice a difference in language... from “caught up” in the NASB to “snatched away” – as suggested by a number of translators. Aune also suggests this as one possible translation (ibid, p. 689).

Whatever the case, the result is the historical accuracy of the description. Constantine did “snatch away” the church and exalted it, but ultimately it did not work out the way he planned. The Byzantine Empire failed in the west as the Papal Roman Church went on to dominate western Europe.

Verses 6-12

Now that much of the groundwork has already been laid, this section of the chapter will progress quicker.

While the verses on either side speak of the male child ruling all nations and “snatched away to God’s throne (verse 5) and a victorious war and the time of the kingdom (verses 7-12), verse 6 speaks of this time when the those who still cling to the purity of the early church must flee from persecution³⁰² into the wilderness for 1260 years.

1260 Years

This period of 1260 years begins in 539 AD with the overthrow of the Ostrogoths (who controlled Italy) by the Byzantine Empire... preparing the way for the rise of the Roman Church.³⁰³ This followed shortly *after* Emperor Justinian’s decree in 533 that the bishop of Rome was the chief or foremost bishop among all Christian bishops. By the time 50 more years had passed, Pope Gregory I (Pope 590-604) “raised armies, kept Rome inviolate from Lombard attacks, negotiated with both Lombards and imperial officials, and on his own authority made peace with the Lombards.”³⁰⁴

The period of 1260 years ended in 1799 with the death of Pope Pius VI in a French prison (after Napoleon the invades Italy and humiliates the church).³⁰⁵

³⁰² Cf. Rev. 12:13-17.

³⁰³ At this point the Bishop of Rome effectively becomes the defacto government of the city

³⁰⁴ Latourette, K.A. (1953). *A History of Christianity*, Vol. 1 to A.D. 1500. p. 338. Harper & Row: New York et al.

³⁰⁵ The beginning and ending points can also be expanded into parallel seven year periods, as follows:

533 – Constantine describes the Bishop of Rome as head of all Christian bishops in a letter – formalized by code in 545 AD
1793 – French Revolution takes control of government – execution of Louis XVI – France goes to war with Europe

539 – Rome left in the hands of the new Bishop of Rome – Ostrogothic capital Ravenna falls and Ostrogoths surrender
1799 – Pope dies in a French prison

540 – Belisarius returns to Constantinople

1800 – In March 1800 after 6 months without a pope, Pius VII elected

Even the Roman Catholic Church has stated that this date represents the nadir of their power in modern times.

Victorious Voices

Verses 7-12 describe the rise of the Papal Church to prominence over the civil power, described as a “war in heaven” for the power of spiritual control of Europe. The response to victory by the Roman Church is given in the “voices from heaven” (12:10-11) saying,

“Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”

As has been pointed out, a war of angels in heaven does not fit with the context of the chapter. It is out of sequence since it is a past event from before the church, and it would be out of sequence again as future kingdom event since the church is persecuted and the dragon is still loose in the world and wreaking havoc.

Michael and His Angels

The archangel Michael and his angels are involved in this war. Again, it seems like it would be easy to revert to a literal interpretation at this point. And again, it would be so easy if it wasn't out of context, but a deeper look is required.

It's obvious that the literal archangel Michael is being used as a representation here, but at first glance it is not obvious why that is the case. We know very little about the archangel Michael which makes the interpretation more difficult. And then, who are the angels?

The meaning of the name Michael seems to be the key, and it means “like God” or [translated literally] “who as God.” This is almost verbatim Paul's description of the man of lawlessness.

“Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.” (2 Thess. 2:6 KJV)

Another word translated as “angel” means any kind of messenger and is clearly used throughout Revelation and the New Testament for non-angelic beings.³⁰⁶ The messengers here are the supporters of the two sides of this conflict.

War in Heaven

This is a war in the realm of religion and power for control of church and state. It is the church that wins.

This war begins with the era of the Eastern Roman Emperors in Constantinople calling (often handpicked) councils of the church to hear theological matters and come to the conclusion the emperor already favored.³⁰⁷

Yet the church grows increasingly powerful, especially in the west where the eastern emperor had little governmental control. In the account of the conflict between Emperor Theodosius and Bishop Ambrose of Milan, the emperor appears to concede eventually that he has little command of the situation.³⁰⁸

In this odd mixture of conflict between church and state the dragon loses command in the western Latin Church. As a result the dragon is gradually cast down to the earth in the west, but for a time it is still engaged to act on the church’s behalf even there.

The Dragon, the Devil

In verse 12 the dragon is transformed into “the devil” before becoming “the dragon again in verse 13.

In the preceding verses the pagan empire is described as “the accuser of our brethren,” and that is just what the name “devil” means... accuser or slanderer!

³⁰⁶ The Greek word angelos (αγγελος) translated angel simply means "messenger". It can be an angel in the sense we normally think of the term, i.e., a spiritual being, but it can mean any messenger. For example, angelos is applied to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:10. See also Luke 7:24, 2 Cor. 8:23, 2 Cor. 12:7, less obviously Rev. 1:20 where stars are used for human messengers and leaders (cf. Rev. 12:1,4).

³⁰⁷ Freeman, C. (2003). *The Closing of the Western Mind*. pp. 167-172, 178-182, 193-199. Alfred A. Knopf: New York.

³⁰⁸ Bauer, S.W. (2010). *The History of the Medieval World: From the Conversion of Constantine to the First Crusade*. p 70. WW Norton: New York and London.

Language Framing Chapter Twelve

The word “swallow” (rendered “devour” in many translations) in 12:4 is translated from the Greek word κατασθιειν. This word is a synonym of the Greek word καταπινειν in 12:16 also meaning “to devour, swallow” and describes the earth swallowing up the river of water spewed out by the dragon.³⁰⁹

The similarity and contrast is significant. In the first instance (1) the dragon attempts to swallow or integrate the woman to its own ends, and in the second instance (2) the dragon tries to destroy the woman and the earth swallows the river of water to help the woman.

This is not the only instance of parallel language relating to the dragon and the woman.

- In both 12:6 and in 12:13 the dragon is pursuing the woman.
- In both 12:6 and 12:14 the woman is fleeing into the wilderness.
- In the first instance the “male child” is “snatched away to God and to His throne” suggesting that the conflict between the dragon and the woman in 12:6 takes place on earth. Subsequently in 12:12-13 the earth is explicitly stated to be the site of the conflict.
- In both 12:6 and 12:14 the time period is the same (1260 years).

The value of these parallels is their confirmation that the persecution in 12:6 and 12:12-17 is the exact same persecution.

And there is one additional but significant reason why any of this matters. Since this framing language surrounds 12:7-11, it that confirms that the description of the kingdom and its success comes amidst a period of persecution of the woman... the faithful people of God. Therefore 12:7-11 cannot be a description of the true kingdom. It must be a description of the antichrist or counterfeit Kingdom of God.

³⁰⁹ See Aune, David E. (1998). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (p. 686). Dallas: Word Books

Verses 13-17

To understand these verses, a lengthy look at the various symbols and how they are applied in both Daniel and Revelation is required. Afterwards the symbols can be assembled and eventually the last verses of this chapter will be summarized in a simpler and easier to follow description.

Symbols and Applications in Daniel and Revelation

The last verses of this chapter of Revelation harken back to 12:6 and expand on the experiences of the woman as she flees into the “wilderness.” The wilderness in Revelation is set in contrast to “cities”. The cities in Revelation represent the dominant civil or religious/spiritual organizations. The cities can either be good as in the case of the New Jerusalem (20:9, 21:2, 10-27, cf. Gal. 4:26) or wicked and corrupt (11:8, 17:2, 5, 18, 18:21).

In this case the woman is outside the corrupt “great city” (11:8) in order to avoid persecution (12:6, 13, 17). These are the faithful of the church and those who followed them later that cling to the purity and simplicity of God’s word from Jesus and the apostles in the face of the rise of “Christendom” ... the church-state systems that begin to claim to be Christ’s kingdom on earth and that persecute those in disagreement with them.³¹⁰ The holy people being persecuted in these verses are the same faithful people that are represented by the woman in Revelation 12:1 and are described as her remaining children “who keep the commandments of God, and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (12:17).

The woman is in the wilderness for a period of 1260 years ending in 1799 when the power of the Roman Church to physically persecute³¹¹ others comes to an end.

In Daniel there is a similar picture, not only of the persecution of the people of God, but also using some of the same symbols to picture this period and its events. In order to fix this relationship between Revelation 12 and Daniel 12 in the mind, first consider a brief chart (below) comparing Daniel with the closing verses of Revelation chapter twelve.

³¹⁰ During the medieval period a Christian could be tortured or killed for owning a Bible in one of the common languages of Europe instead of in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew (which few could read outside of the church priests and bishops). Also, during most of church history through the late Reformation period you could be tortured or killed for believing in forgiveness of sin without the Catholic Mass.

³¹¹ Each day of the prophecy equals one year – a principle illustrated in Ezekiel 4:1-6 and accepted by most Christians in other time prophecies such as the Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (Dan. 9:24-27). It is also proven by fulfillment in the two passages just cited in this footnote. [Note that “3½ times (or years)” and 1260 days are the same length of time at 30 days per month or 42 months.]

Revelation 12

Daniel 7 and 12

Persecution for God's People for 3½ Times / 1260 Days (12:6, 14)	Persecution of God's People for 3½ Times (7:25, 12:7)
Period of Persecution Represented by Floodwaters of a River (12:15)	Period of Persecution Represented by Floodwaters of a River (12:5-7, cf. 8:16)
Persecution of the Woman Described as "War" (12:17)	Persecution of the Saints Described as "War" (7:21)

The key verses from Daniel are 12:5-7. For ease of consideration they are reproduced below:

(5) "Then I, Daniel, looked and behold, two others were standing, one on this bank of the river and the other on that bank of the river.

(6) "And one said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, 'How long will it be to the end of these wonders?'

(7) "I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, as he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time,³¹² and as soon as they finish shattering the power (lit. hand) of the holy people, all these events will be completed."

The verses above are a little difficult to follow through all the events mentioned, so a suggested structuring of them follows:

- (1) There is a river of water with two individuals (angels or perhaps just people in a vision) standing by it with one on each side or bank of the river.
- (2) There is a man dressed in linen standing over the waters of this river.
- (3) One of the individuals (presumably the one next to Daniel, although this is unstated) asks how long "to the end of these wonders?" which possibly refers to the end of the prophetic events that begin in Daniel 11:1 and continue through Daniel 12:4 (meaning up to the verses now under consideration) or perhaps more likely and specifically referring more only to the events described in Daniel 12:1-4 that represent the final events of prophecy at the end of the age and into the Kingdom of God.

³¹² See previous footnote. There are 3½ times altogether, i.e., a time (one), times (two), and a half a time totaling 3½ altogether.

- (4) The man dressed in linen gives the time period before these events as 3½ “times” equaling 1260 years in prophetic fulfillment at “a day for a year.”
- (5) It seems reasonable that the floodwaters of the river that divide the individuals on each from each other represents these same 1260 years.
- (6) The 1260 years and the waters of the river would then illustrate the span of time until the persecution of God’s people comes to an end when they “finish shattering the power (or hand) of the holy people.”
- (7) When that happens or “as soon as they finish... all these [other] events will [then] be completed” ...meaning that at some point following the 1260 years, the flood of waters, and the severe persecution of the faithful church reach their common endpoint, then the remaining events described previously in Daniel 12:1-4 will be completed, i.e., the remaining events will take place completing the prophecy of these chapters.³¹³

To interpret the last verse of this passage in Daniel (12:7) more simply, once the institutional church’s thorough and extreme persecution of the faithful church ends, then the progression of events accompanying the return of Christ that are described in Daniel 12:1-4 can follow that to their ends.

So, in a shorter combined version of these verses (12:5-7), there will be 1260 years of persecution of God’s people – represented by the distance across the water of the river – before the persecution ends and the final events of the prophecy described in this chapter (12:1-4) are fulfilled or “completed” – the restoration of Israel, the great tribulation, and the resurrection and kingdom.

The subject has seemingly veered away from Revelation for quite a bit, but now this suggested interpretation of events in Daniel can be compared to the similar description of events in Rev. 12:13-17.

Revelation 12 – like Daniel 12 – also describes a period of persecution of 3½ “times” or 1260 years accompanied by a flood of waters.

However, the passage in **Daniel** takes us to the end of the 1260 years and beyond when “they finish shattering the power [lit. *hand*] of the holy people” and the floodwaters of the river are crossed and the persecution of the faithful people of God by the institutional church is brought to a halt.

³¹³ Keil suggests a similar possibility at the conclusion of a lengthy discussion on these verses. See Keil, C.F. (1866-1891). *Commentary on the Old Testament by C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch*, vol. 9, Ezekiel [and] Daniel. pp. 821-822. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers.

The passage in **Revelation** stops within the 1260 year period of persecution and doesn't describe the end of this period or what comes after it.

These floodwaters in Daniel also find a similar echo in these closing verses of Revelation without progressing beyond their end. In Daniel the floodwaters of the river span the entire period of 1260 years and events extend beyond their end. It seems reasonable that the floodwaters of the river in Revelation 12:15 are intended to represent the same overall period, but do not go beyond this period.

About Two More Symbols

So at this point we have three more symbolic elements to consider before we can summarize these verses. First the meaning of these symbols and then how they fit together.

- *Serpent* – In order to persecute the woman, the dragon (12:13) changes to a serpent (12:14 and 15) and then back to the dragon (12:16 and 17). The serpent – one of Satan's four names representing and corruption of wisdom – comes into play to deceive and destroy.

The serpent is set in contrast within the same verse (12:14) to the eagle's wings, which allow the woman to escape. The eagle (God's far-seeing wisdom) is one of the four "living ones" described in Rev. 4:6-7 as being both on the throne (see margin for literal rendering) and all around the throne.

There is a readily apparent contrast between (1) God's truth and understanding given to us in "the two wings of the great eagle" or the Old and New Testaments, and (2) Satan's deceptions counter to the truth.

The serpent represents Satan's deception and not truth of any kind.

- *Flood of Water like a River* – The symbol of water at first glance seems like perhaps the only symbol in the scriptures with variable meaning. Water is connected with truth (Is. 28:14-18, Eph. 5:26), with life (Jo. 4:14, Rev. 22:1, 17), or with representative groups of people (Rev. 16:12, 17:15, Ps. 65:7 cf. Rev. 21:1).

Differentiating which is meant depends on how the water is being used. (1) When it is water enclosed in body of water (sea, river, many waters, etc.), it means a particular group of peoples. (2) When it is water without definition or water used as rain or hail, then it is connected with truth. (3) The third

meaning (life and truth that brings life) bridges the two other possible meanings. The scriptures speak of a river of life or a fountain of life.

All three of these interpretations seem consistent throughout scripture.

Here in Revelation and also in Daniel the period of persecution is described as a torrential river, connecting the flood of waters with an inundation of deceived people that is intended to be devastating to the woman.

Interpretive Summary of Verses 13-17

Verses 13-14

These verses of Revelation (starting in 12:13) pick up where verse six of this chapter left off with the persecution of the woman. This persecution actually begins prior to the start of the 1260 years, because as a consequence of the persecution, the woman eventually flees into the wilderness and into the 1260 year period of the rise and domination of the Roman Church.³¹⁴

It is the dragon that is active in the persecution – especially after he is “thrown down to the earth” – because initially the (primarily eastern) Roman emperors persecuted “heretics” on behalf of the church, and later in the western Latin church (Roman Church), the states operated completely upon the authority of the pope and church.

The woman – those who clung to some degree to the original apostolic understanding and simplicity of the gospel fled into the wilderness – assisted by the truth of the Old and New Testament represented in the two wings of an eagle. There she is nourished by the scriptures at a distance from the corrupting influence and teachings of the institutional church.

To some extent this wilderness experience takes on an almost literal feel when the true spirituality of this time is considered. During the darkest period of the church, one of the main centers of spirituality was the monasteries. These were often located far from the main urban centers and were somewhat self-regulated with a degree of freedom of discussion not found in the churches and seminaries and government of the medieval church. Also, the earliest organized challenges to the church – such as the Waldensians and Lollards – frequently lived and/or

³¹⁴ Interestingly, the experience of Elijah described in 1 Kings chapter 17, where he flees from persecution from Ahab and Jezebel (cf. Rev. 2:20) for 3½ years (Luke 4:25, James 5:17-18), and where he is miraculously fed by God, is remarkably similar.

preached in predominantly in rural areas and were forced to hide from the authorities. Later even Luther was forced into hiding for a period of time.

Verses 15-16

The earlier consideration of Daniel 12:5-7 is helpful here. In the Daniel description of these events, the end of the 1260 years and the end of the flood of waters is a common point at which the persecution (by the Roman Church) also ends. Since the woman is still being persecuted *during* these verses of Revelation (12:15-16) and in the following verse (12:17), it is problematic to make the events in Revelation follow *after* the 1260 years.

As to what is actually happening in these verses, at this point Satan switches tactics in part. In his form as a serpent he sends forth a river of water (cf. Rev. 16:12)... an overwhelming flood³¹⁵ of people with a corrupted understanding of Christianity (the tares of the parable of the wheat and tares Matt. 13:24-30 and 36-43) to overwhelm those who kept faith with the early church.

This flood of waters proceeded from the fourth century bishops and Constantine through the early Byzantine Roman Emperors that altogether built an institutional church initially subservient to the state. This union of church and state would determine who would be "acceptable" and continued to progress through the increasing power of these institutions and entrenched creeds (that for all practical purposes essentially became more authoritative than the Bible) down to the eventual use of crusades against heretics and then finally the Inquisition.

Yet as Christianity in its corrupted form became part of the social order, it also provided a place where the Bible and Christian piety would be accepted, if suppressed to some extent. It provided a society from which the faithful could draw new converts into the wilderness church. And so "the earth helped the woman" and drank up the river of water making at least something of an outward form of Christianity a part of society or of "the earth".

³¹⁵ It is interesting how often water is associated with trouble. The world of Noah's time ended in the flood waters, and that disaster is picked up in the New Testament (Luke 17:26-27) as a picture of the "great tribulation". The escape of Moses and the Hebrews from Egypt also occurs through the Red Sea, which ends in the destruction of the Egyptians. Though slightly different, the fall of ancient Babylon is conducted through the dried river bed (cf. (Rev 16:12)). So it seems reasonable that the flood of river waters in Daniel and Revelation also could be associated with trouble – in this case the persecution of the faithful people of God.

Verse 17

The dragon is enraged with the woman. This conflict essentially results from the contrast between the life of the early apostolic church and teachings of the New Testament – pictured by the woman – versus the rich aristocracy of the church bishops and cardinals.³¹⁶ And so the dragon – itself now the servant of the ecclesiastical church – goes off to make war with her and “the rest of her children who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.”

These are the children of the woman that are in addition to the “male child” described in the early part of this chapter (12:2-5).³¹⁷ Unlike that child, these “children” follow the scriptures, live a life of simplicity and self-sacrifice and persecution by others, and reject the institutional church and its outward pretense of Christianity.

Note on Daniel 8:10-11

There seems to be a parallel between Daniel 8:10-11 with the 12th chapter of Revelation. In Daniel, the magnification of the little horn to heaven (8:10-11) and casting the stars to the ground (8:10) find a parallel in Revelation with the casting of the stars to the ground by the dragon (12:4) and the magnification of the antichrist figure (12:5). Nor do these seem to be the only parallels between the Daniel eight and Revelation twelve and thirteen.

Assuming a possible connection between the third of the stars in Rev. 12:3 (either with a third of the bishops of the east at the Nicene Council or a third “part” of the church in general at the time of Constantine), there appears to be a thread between the little horn in Daniel chapter eight and Constantine and the eastern part of the empire featured in Revelation chapters twelve and thirteen.

³¹⁶ This was a constant theme of the earliest movements (e.g., the Waldensians and the Lollards) in opposition to the established church. The contrast between the wealth of the bishops and cardinals in contrast to the example of the simple and self-sacrificial lives of the apostles and the teachings of Jesus the deception of wealth created an obvious and negative comparison.

³¹⁷ Note the contrast of the first child – the “male child” who is reigning with authority – to the faithful children of the woman who keep the commandments of God and testimony of Jesus and follow the woman into the wilderness of persecution.

Revelation Chapter Thirteen ~ the Beast, the Two-Horned Beast, and the Image of the Beast

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Introductory Note 1 ~ the Structure of the Chapter

As a preliminary note, it must be remembered the chapter divisions and verses in the Bible are not original and were added later. Sometimes the chapter divisions seem appropriate. At other times they don't seem appropriate, and this one of those times. It's not far off, but marginally different from what it should be.

Revelation chapter 13 should run from 13:1 through 14:5 with 14:6 beginning Revelation chapter 14. This can be seen in the contrast between the nominally Christian (13:16-18) and the faithful (14:1-5). Also, the first part of Revelation 13:1 might belong most properly to the preceding chapter 12, but it will be left with chapter 13 for this discussion.

All of these structural arrangements show the difficulty of breaking a continuous thread of thought in the books of the Bible into smaller parts. In this instance

Revelation chapter 12 relates to chapter 13 and then chapter 14:1-5 forms a bridge of sorts between the Gospel or Christian Age described in chapters 12/13 and a new section describing the Harvest and Tribulation period that begins with 14:6.

The chapter breaks into two parts (13:1-10 and 13:11-14:5) but with three separate subjects, as follows:

- (1) Rev. 13:1-10 – the description of the beast (with seven heads and ten horns) and its relationship to the dragon.
- (2a) Rev. 13:11-15 – the description of the two-horned beast and the image of the beast.
- (2b) Rev. 13:16-14:5 – a picture of nominal Christians that have the false mark [the name or number of the beast] and faithful Christians that have the writing [mark] of the Father and the Lamb.

Collectively, these sections are descriptive rather than chronological (although each one may portray an internal chronological progression). That is, the events of 13:11-15 do not follow immediately after the events described in 13:1-10. Instead each of these sections is like a snapshot covering the same period from different perspectives and each ending somewhat generally in the medieval era.

Introductory Note 2 ~ Overview of the Interpretation of the Chapter

The divisions of the chapter provide an overview of the early-to-mid history of the institutional church. This chapter is a precise narration written in advance, and describes the growth of the church-state relationship that came to dominate eastern and western Europe from the time of the Roman Emperor Constantine into the medieval period. In this way it exactly matches the time period and the events described in the preceding chapter of Revelation, except this time it views it from the standpoint of the adulterous mixture of church and state (cf. Rev. 17:2).

(1) Rev. 13:1-10 – The first section of the chapter is a description of the Western or Latin Church as it grows into the Papal Roman Church (the beast) and the Holy Roman Empire.

(2) Rev. 13:11-15 – The second section of this chapter describes the early the influence of the Roman Empire (two-horned beast of the Eastern and Western Roman Empire as it grows into the Greek Byzantine Empire and then the eventual development of it's own [Eastern Orthodox] Church (the image of the beast).

The first two sections of the chapter track both the eastern Greek and western Latin churches as separate subjects, although they begin together. Initially they are united and share some aspects of their history.

Over time the relationship between the two original regions and their churches, as they developed, becomes somewhat tangled until they finally separate into two distinct entities. That aspect of their relationship is also shown in this chapter. Several examples to explain what is meant by this – examples that will later be explained in additional detail and more fully supported as the chapter and background history are considered in detail – are given below:

- ❖ Rev. 13:11 – “Then I saw another beast coming up from the earth out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke as a dragon.”

The eastern Byzantine emperors had not only civil power (*spoke as a dragon*), but at least within the political and geographic reach of the Eastern Roman / Byzantine Empire they also had religious power (*like a lamb*).

The two horns emphasize the sphere of authority of the early emperors beginning with Constantine. Originally having control of both the eastern and western parts of the Roman Empire represented in the two horns, the western half of the empire eventually split from the east and then was mostly lost when the Western Roman Empire reached its final end in 476 AD.

Yet for centuries afterward the Byzantine Emperors would continue to dominate a church increasingly divided between east and west, once again fulfilling the description of the beast with two horns *like a lamb* symbolizing its religious power.

- ❖ Rev. 13:12a – “It exercised the full authority of the first beast, on its behalf.”

By the time of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian, the Western Roman Empire had been separated and then destroyed for about 150 years. In the year 533 AD, Justinian issued a novella [essentially a proclamation] that stipulated the Bishop of Rome was to be the chief of all the bishops of the church (with the Bishop or Patriarch of Constantinople as the second of all the bishops).

Among other things, Justinian also freed Italy from the domination of the Ostrogoths and effectively left the bishops of Rome with the care of that city.

These are just some of the ways the Byzantine Empire worked on behalf of the beast and acknowledged working by its authority.

Rev. 13:12b describes this relationship in a similar manner – “And he makes all on the earth to worship the first beast.”

In contrast to the immediately preceding point, it is the Byzantine Emperor that called the councils of the church and who determined theological decisions for centuries. From 537 to 752 AD the selection of the Bishop of Rome also required the approval of the Byzantine Emperor and from 678 to 752 AD the popes were all Greek, and they acknowledged the supremacy of the eastern emperor in all political matters but not in theological matters.

- ❖ Rev. 13:14-15 – “He deceives those that dwell on the earth... telling [them] to make an image of the beast... and it was given him to give breath to the image of the beast...”

While in theory the early eastern emperors had power over the church everywhere to persecute any who disagreed with what had been determined as Orthodox Church doctrine, in practice this power generally extended only as far as the political boundaries of the Byzantine Empire. Yet within this sphere the Byzantine Emperor became recognized as the head of the church, also.

The “image of the beast” is the eastern [Greek] Orthodox Church, both before and after its split with the western [Latin] Roman Catholic Church in the Schism of 1054 AD. It is the only other institutional church to exist during this period and prior to the Reformation, and it is the Byzantine Emperor (as head of the eastern church) with the power to give it life. As a church-state institution with similar power over the people, the Eastern Orthodox Church represents an image of the beast of western church in so many ways.

This chapter is a clear history written in advance of the events that would dominate the political and especially the religious world of eastern and western Europe for more than a thousand years.

The Symbols and Their Interpretation in This Chapter

Some of what follows will be review from chapter twelve, but the majority is new.

A reminder at this point that symbols in Revelation do not *ever* describe the character and faithfulness of any individual in or out of any church or denomination at any time. Instead it deals with institutions (nations, empires,

denominations, etc.) that are not in character with apostolic Christianity. These are institutions that many have revered, but they have a character and history that is not worthy of the confidence many good people have placed in them. A great deal has been done in the name of Christ that is diametrically opposed to the teachings and spirit of the gospel, as Jesus and the apostles predicted (Matt. 7:15-23, 13:25, 24:4-5, 2 Thess. 2:3, 1 John 2:19, Rev. 18:4, 21-24).

So with that in mind as a qualification to the severe view of the denominations represented in this chapter, let's review the symbols of the Revelation thirteen.

When looking at a precise interpretation for each of the actors in the scenes from this chapter, we should also consider the general meaning of the symbols. The scriptural basis for the interpretation of these can be found in Appendix B ~ Bible Symbolism in Prophecy and in the detailed explanation of the chapter that follows, so the initial interpretations below are mostly limited to a brief explanation.

(1) The **dragon** is a symbol of civil power (governmental power) as it does in the previous chapter. Although the dragon is one of the names given to Satan (20:2), it is descriptive of his abuse of power in particular.³¹⁸ Unless we conceive of Satan literally having seven heads and ten horns, etc. (12:3), this is a reasonable and appropriate definition of the dragon. The symbol of a dragon represents Satan's abuse of (governmental) power, and here it represents the power of the pagan Roman Empire. This will become apparent when the chapter is explored in detail.

(2) The **beast** is a symbol of a major empire (either secular or religious or some combination of the two) as in Daniel chapter seven. In this case it represents the (Latin) Roman Church or Holy Roman Empire (papacy). Again, this will become apparent when the chapter is explored in detail.

(3) The **seven heads** represent seven successive governments or empires (17:10-11). Note that in Daniel chapter seven there are seven heads on the four beasts, and that much of Revelation chapter thirteen is also drawn from Daniel chapter seven (e.g., compare the descriptions of the first three beasts in Daniel seven with the description of the beast in 13:2).

(4) The **ten horns** symbolize ten units of government within or allied to a larger government such as one of the beasts (cf. 17:12-13). These ten horns represent nations of Europe.

³¹⁸ For a detailed discussion on the four names of Satan and how they picture the abuse of God's character of wisdom, justice, love, and power, see the discussion in *Revelation Chapters Four and Five ~ The Throne Scene*.

(5) The **two horns** symbolize two units of government and in this case the Eastern and Western Roman Empire.

(6) The **two-horned beast** represents the Roman Empire from after the time of Constantine, which eventually becomes known as the (Greek) Byzantine Empire.

(7) Two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon provide characteristics of the two-horned beast. The **lamb** is a picture of Jesus, but in this case it is “like” a lamb but not the real thing. In other words this beast is something claiming to be Christian. The **dragon** is a picture or symbol of crushing governmental power. In this case, although the beast claims to be Christian it speaks and abuses its power in the same manner as Satan himself. These characteristics perfectly illustrate the power of the Byzantine Emperors from the time of Constantine onward.

(8) The **image of the beast** or something that is nearly identical to the Roman Papal Church... but not the same. An image of it or something that looks the same. In this case it represents the (Greek) Orthodox Church.

Again, the interpretation of these symbols will become more apparent once we consider them in the context of this chapter, in other chapters of scripture, and in history. However, before we begin let’s review these suggested interpretations in a simpler format before plunging into the details of the chapter. We have the following primary symbols and their initial interpretation shown in the following:

Symbol	Interpretation
Dragon	Pagan Roman Empire
Beast with Ten Horns & Seven Heads	Roman (Latin) Papal Church
Ten Horns	Nations of (Western) Europe
Two-horned Beast	Roman (Greek Byzantine) Empire
Two Horns	Eastern and Western Roman Empire
Dragon (speaks) and Lamb (two horns)	Byzantine Emperors from Constantine
Image of the Beast	Greek Orthodox Church

Parallels with Daniel Chapter Seven

Before looking at this first section of the chapter, it will help in identifying the beast to see the many parallels of this section to Daniel chapter seven... and listing them out first will aid in this identification.

The symbols are listed out below in the order they occur in Revelation rather than the order they occur in Daniel.

Revelation 13	Daniel 7
One Beast from the Sea (13:1)	Four Beasts from the Sea (7:3)
³¹⁹ Ten Horns (13:1)	Ten Horns (7:7)
Seven Heads (13:1)	Seven Heads (7:4-7)
Looked like a Leopard (13:2)	Leopard-like Beast (7:6, cf. 8:5-8, 21)
Feet like a Bear (13:2)	Bear-like Beast (7:5, cf. 8:3-4, 20)
Mouth like a Lion (13:2)	Lion-like Beast (7:4, cf. 2:38)
Mouth Speaking Arrogant Words (13:5)	Mouth / Great Boasts (7:8, 11, 20, 25)
Authority for 42 Months (13:5)	Authority for 3½ Times (7:25)
Makes War with the Saints (13:7)	Makes War with the Saints (7:21, 25)
...and Overcomes Them (13:7)	...and Overcomes Them (7:21, 25)

Notice first that the last four behaviors of the beast in Revelation 13 that are described above are identical to that of the last horn that grows up in Daniel 7. The beast of Revelation 13 is the end result of everything that came before it.

³¹⁹ Note – It should not be assumed that the ten horns in Revelation 13 are scattered among the seven heads. The ten horns are all located on one of the seven heads, similar to how the ten horns are all located on one of the seven heads (the head of the 4th beast) in Daniel chapter seven.

This means that we can also track the beast of Revelation thirteen through time by means of Daniel. The four beasts in Daniel are the four great successive empires of Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, and the little horn is the successor to the Roman Empire or the Holy Roman Empire (Papacy). The beast of Revelation is described as the net result of everything – all those empires – that came before it. However, it is more specifically *represented* in Daniel chapter seven by the final product of those preceding empires – the “other horn” of Daniel that comes up last.

In summary the “beast” of Revelation thirteen and the “little horn” or “other horn” of Daniel seven are one and the same.

This also means that the fourth beast or source from which the “other horn” in Daniel derives its power – the Roman Empire – is the same as the dragon in Revelation. A simple diagram of the parallels:

[Daniel 7th Chapter] 4th Beast’s Power and Authority -----> Other Horn
[Revelation 13th Chapter] Dragon’s Power and Authority -----> Beast

Abbreviated Historical Background for the Chapter’s First Section

In sorting through the history of this time, it is difficult to specify exact points at which we can say there is a western Latin church or an eastern (Greek) Orthodox church, or when the Roman Empire should be solely confined to the eastern Byzantine Empire. The divisions in this chapter of Revelation describe events and developments that overlap each other.

The western Latin church and the eastern empire and Greek church did not officially split permanently until the year 1054. Yet long before this point they were on separate paths. Likewise the Roman Empire still consisted of eastern and western divisions from shortly before the time of Constantine (305-337 AD) until the western division of the empire collapsed in 476 AD and the eastern portion or the Byzantine Empire became the predominant and then sole inheritor of the Roman Empire.

The first two portions of this chapter of Revelation describing the beast (13:1-10) and the two-horned beast and image of the beast (13:11-15) present this history from the standpoint of each of these two divisions of church and empire. Yet, because they describe each history from the standpoint of (1st) the Latin west and

(2nd) the Greek east, their histories overlap. This will become apparent as each section of this chapter is examined.

Before proceeding to interpret the first section of the chapter regarding the beast (13:1-10), it will be helpful to note several points on the history and growth of the western church.

The church begins for almost 300 years as a largely disenfranchised class within the empire. Unlike the pagan religion(s) and philosophies that made it a point to tolerate other religions and viewpoints, the Christian religion rejected all other religions completely without compromise. Outside of Judaism (tolerated based on its antiquity), this opposition to the pagan religions and to philosophy was unique and revolutionary in the Roman world.³²⁰

This leads us to one of the more evident turning points in the history of the church with the controversial conversion of Constantine I. Setting aside the question of whether his conversion was real,³²¹ he clearly saw political advantage in appeasing the Christians who represented the only volatile religious minority in the empire.³²²

Part One – the Beast with Ten Horns and Seven Heads

Now that we have some background on this confusing mix of beasts and horns, it is possible to consider what all of it means.

Verses 1-2 – “And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems [i.e. crowns], and on the heads were blasphemous names. And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.”

The dragon is positioned on the shore of the sea when the beast comes up out of it. In the preceding chapter the dragon is preparing to devour a potential opponent and perhaps it is the same concept here. In both cases the opponent is the same

³²⁰ Freeman, C. (2003). *The Closing of the Western Mind*. pp. 133-136, 150-152. Alfred A. Knopf: New York.

³²¹ His continuing mixture of pagan and Christian symbols on coins and monuments, his murder of his son and wife for political ends, portraying himself as the 13th [and perhaps greatest] apostle of Jesus Christ in his mausoleum... these are just a few of the problems.

³²² Drake, H.A. (2000). *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*. Chapter 5. Johns Hopkins: Baltimore and London.

(the “man child”, “man of lawlessness”, and “son of destruction” – 12:4-5, 13:18, 2 Thess. 2:3) and in both cases the dragon concedes his power (12:13, 13:2).

There are seven heads and ten horns in the preceding chapter of Revelation, also, but the description is reversed in a couple ways.

(1a) In 12:3 the seven heads are listed first and the ten horns are mentioned afterwards.

(1b) In 13:1 the ten horns are listed first and the seven heads are mentioned afterwards.

(2a) In Revelation 12:3 the diadems [crowns] are on the seven heads.

(2b) In Revelation 13:1 the diadems [crowns] are on the ten horns.

The emphasis must shift from the heads to the horns because the time has come for the horns to ascend to power (cf. 17:12). The Roman Empire eventually splinters into various nations that support the Roman Church (17:1-2).

One other difference between chapters on this subject is the description in 13:1, which adds a further detail to heads, noting that they now have blasphemous names written on them. This suggests a religious power... and likely illustrates the corruption of the Christian life and doctrine that the apostles Paul and John already see beginning in their day (2 Thess. 2:3, 1 John 2:18-19, 2 John 2:7).

As noted in the previous chart, this beast has symbolic characteristics from all three of the beasts that precede it in Daniel. They are listed in the same order except in reverse as if tracking the predecessors of the beast backwards in time. These beasts in Daniel:

- Daniel 7:6 describes the empire represented by the leopard (Greece).
- Daniel 7:5 describes the empire represented by the bear (Medo-Persia).
- Daniel 7:4 describes the empire represented by the lion (Babylon).

However, once again bear in mind that the fourth beast in Daniel 7:7 is not the equivalent of this beast in Revelation... at least initially it is the equivalent of the dragon of Revelation or the Roman Empire. And the beast of Revelation is yet another successor empire. It is the Holy Roman Empire that follows after pagan Rome falls.

Verse 3

“I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed.³²³ And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast...”

If the seven heads of the dragon and the beast in Revelation are the same as the seven heads in Daniel, then the wounded head must be the “head” that is current at this point in the chapter (i.e., at that point in history). This head is the Roman Empire (first pagan and then Christian when co-opted by Constantine and subsequently by a common church – at that time – in both the east and the west).

Note verses 12 and 14 of this chapter... it is “the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed” and not just the Roman “head” that is wounded. The head and the beast are dependent on each other, and to kill the head is to kill the entire beast.

The fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 AD represented the end of the old empire in the west, and a potentially fatal wound to the beast itself while unfriendly “barbarian” tribes occupy Rome and the Western Empire. At this point in this part of the chapter, the focus has begun to narrow down more to the Papal Roman [Latin] Church. While the eastern part of the empire survived, the west appears to be at an end. However, this potentially fatal wound is healed, and by the year 800 AD there is a [Latin] Holy Roman Empire with the pope in Rome as the acknowledged religious leader and with civil authority of his own. The wound that appeared fatal is healed.

Verses 4-7

“...they worshipped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, ‘Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?’

“There was given him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is those who dwell in heaven. It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.”

³²³ Aune gives this translation: “One of its heads appeared to be fatally wounded, but its mortal wound was healed.” See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition). (p. 715). Dallas: Word Books.

The brief diagram below is included here again as a reminder of the similarities and differences between the beasts in the 7th chapter of Daniel and the 13th chapter of Revelation. A simple diagram of the parallels:

[Daniel 7th Chapter] 4th Beast's Power and Authority to -----> Other Horn
 [Revelation 13th Chapter] Dragon's Power and Authority to -----> Beast

The “other horn” derives its power from the fourth beast – the Roman Empire – in Daniel 7:20 [*passim*] and in the same way the beast derives its power from the dragon in Revelation 13:4.

The beast of Revelation and the “other horn” of Daniel have additional similarities. The table below is a partial repeat of an earlier table comparing these two chapters:

Revelation 13 - Beast	Daniel 7 - Other Horn
Mouth Speaking Arrogant Words (13:5)	Mouth / Great Boasts (7:8, 11, 20, 25)
Authority for 42 Months (13:5)	Authority for 3½ Times (7:25)
Makes War with the Saints (13:7)	Makes War with the Saints (7:21, 25)
...and Overcomes Them (13:7)	...and Overcomes Them (7:21, 25)

The descriptions are the same, so the evident conclusion is that the “other horn” of Daniel and the “beast” of Revelation identify the same thing... the Papal Roman Church.

These four verses in Revelation describe the final rise to power of formalized western Latin Christianity into the system of the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire.

1260 Years (42 Months)

This period has been discussed in previous chapters, but it bears repeating here. 42 months, 3½ times (or years), and 1260 days are all the same time period at 30 days per month.

Comparing all the passages in Revelation and Daniel that incorporate this period of time (e.g. Rev. 11:2-3, 12:6, 14, 13:5), they are all characterized by the same events – the persecution of the faithful and the power of the institutional church.

This period of 1260 years³²⁴ begins in 539 AD with the overthrow of the Ostrogoths (who controlled Italy) by the Byzantine Empire and preparing the way for the rise of the Roman Church.³²⁵ This followed shortly *after* Emperor Justinian’s letter in 533 that the bishop of Rome was the chief or foremost bishop among all Christian bishops. By the time 50 years had passed, Pope Gregory I (Pope 590-604) “raised armies, kept Rome inviolate from Lombard attacks, negotiated with both Lombards and imperial officials, and on his own authority made peace with the Lombards.”³²⁶

The period of 1260 years ended in 1799 with the death of Pope Pius VI in a French prison (after Napoleon the invades Italy and humiliates the church).³²⁷ Even the Roman Catholic Church has stated that this date represents the nadir of their power. They subsequently lose all civil power and lose the ability to persecute others through the Office of the Inquisition.

Verses 8-10

“All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.”

³²⁴ Ezekiel 4:1-6 provides the key to interpreting time prophecies of this form. Each day of the prophecy represents one year of history.

³²⁵ At this point the Bishop of Rome effectively becomes the defacto government of the city

³²⁶ Latourette, K.A. (1953). *A History of Christianity*, Vol. 1 to A.D. 1500. p. 338. Harper & Row: New York et al.

³²⁷ The beginning and ending points can also be expanded into parallel seven year periods, as follows:

533 – Constantine makes the Bishop of Rome head of all Christian bishops

1793 – French Revolution takes control of government – execution of Louis XVI – France goes to war with Europe

539 – Rome left in the hands of the new Bishop of Rome – Ostrogothic capital Ravenna falls and Ostrogoths surrender

1799 – Pope dies in a French prison

540 – Belisarius returns to Constantinople

1800 – In March 1800 after 6 months without a pope, Pius VII elected

A Comparison to the Seven Churches of Revelation

The parallels between the last verses of this section and the messages to the seven churches of Revelation in chapters two and three are striking.³²⁸ Compare the following passages below (and also notice that the phrases in Revelation 13 occur in the exact same order as the 2nd through 4th churches):

“If anyone has an ear, let him hear” (13:9).

This expression is found in all of the messages to the seven churches and stated as, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22). This phraseology only occurs in the messages to the seven churches and in this chapter and verse (13:9).

“If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes...”

This is a parallel description to the experiences of Smyrna the second church of Revelation. “Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested...” (Rev. 2:10).

“...if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed.”

The sword is also a central theme of the message to Pergamum the third church of Revelation. “The one who has the sharp two-edged sword says this... therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:12, 16).

“Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.”

Faith and perseverance are two of the hallmarks of Thyatira the fourth church of Revelation. “I know your faith... and perseverance... (Rev. 2:19).

The inclusion of these messages here in these verses of chapter thirteen seem intended to provide us a timeline for the events of this section of the chapter (13:1-10). This portion of the chapter occurs during the 2nd through 4th churches, meaning that the timeframe begins in roughly the second through fourth centuries and continues into the medieval period and the high tide of the Roman Church and Holy Roman Empire.

³²⁸ Giving credit where credit is due, this is partially a suggestion from Jeff Mezera, although he may or may not agree with my final conclusion.

Abbreviated Historical Background for the Chapter's Second Section

In 545 AD, Emperor Justinian I of the Roman Empire – now based solely in Constantinople – published a novella³²⁹ proclaiming that the “the holy pope of ancient Rome is the first of all the priests, [and] the archbishop of Constantinople, the new Rome, occupies the place next after the holy apostolic seat of ancient Rome, and has precedence over the others.”³³⁰

Yet, even though Justinian recognized the bishop of Rome as the supreme patriarch of the church, he still dominated the papacy,³³¹ and this situation continued from the time of Justinian³³² for over two centuries (537-752), a period known as the Byzantine Papacy.³³³ In particular, during the latter portion of this period the popes (i.e., the bishops of Rome) were chosen from candidates from the Byzantine east.³³⁴

However, even the latter Greek popes considered themselves to be Roman (in the broader sense of the word) by doctrinal faith and rejected the doctrinal changes and ecclesiastical innovations of the eastern church.³³⁵ Yet Zacharias, the last of the Greek popes, still saw himself as a subject of the Roman Emperor in Constantinople like all the other popes previous to him.³³⁶

This confusing mixture of authority still saw the emperor as the head of God's kingdom on earth (a counterfeit earthly claim of church and state), while acknowledging the authority of the pope in the Latin west in matters of doctrine and theology.

³²⁹ Justinian. (trans. 2014). *Novel 131 Concerning Ecclesiastical Canons and Privileges*. (trans. Kearley, T. revised from Blume, J.) Retrieved May 27, 2017, from

http://www.uwyo.edu/lawlib/blume-justinian/ajc-edition-2/novels/121-140/novel%20131_replacement.pdf

³³⁰ Note that Justinian had already written a letter in 533 AD recognizing the Bishop of Rome as head of all other bishops. *Codex Justiniani*, lib. 1, tit. 1; transl. Littlefield, R.F. *The Petrine Claims*. p. 293. Cited from a secondary source: Smith, Uriah. (1944). *Daniel and the Revelation*. pp. 275-276. Review and Herald: Hagerstown, MD.

³³¹ Barker, J.W. (2004). In C. Kleinhenz (Ed.), “Vigilius, Pope” *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia*. (Vol. 2, pp. 1142-1143). Routledge: New York and London.

³³² And in fact began long before in the time of Constantine. From the time that Constantine called the Council of Nicea until the 8th century, every major church counsel was called at the request of the Roman Emperor and not the bishops and (supposed) leadership of the church.

³³³ Byzantine Papacy. (2017). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved May 30, 2017 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_Papacy

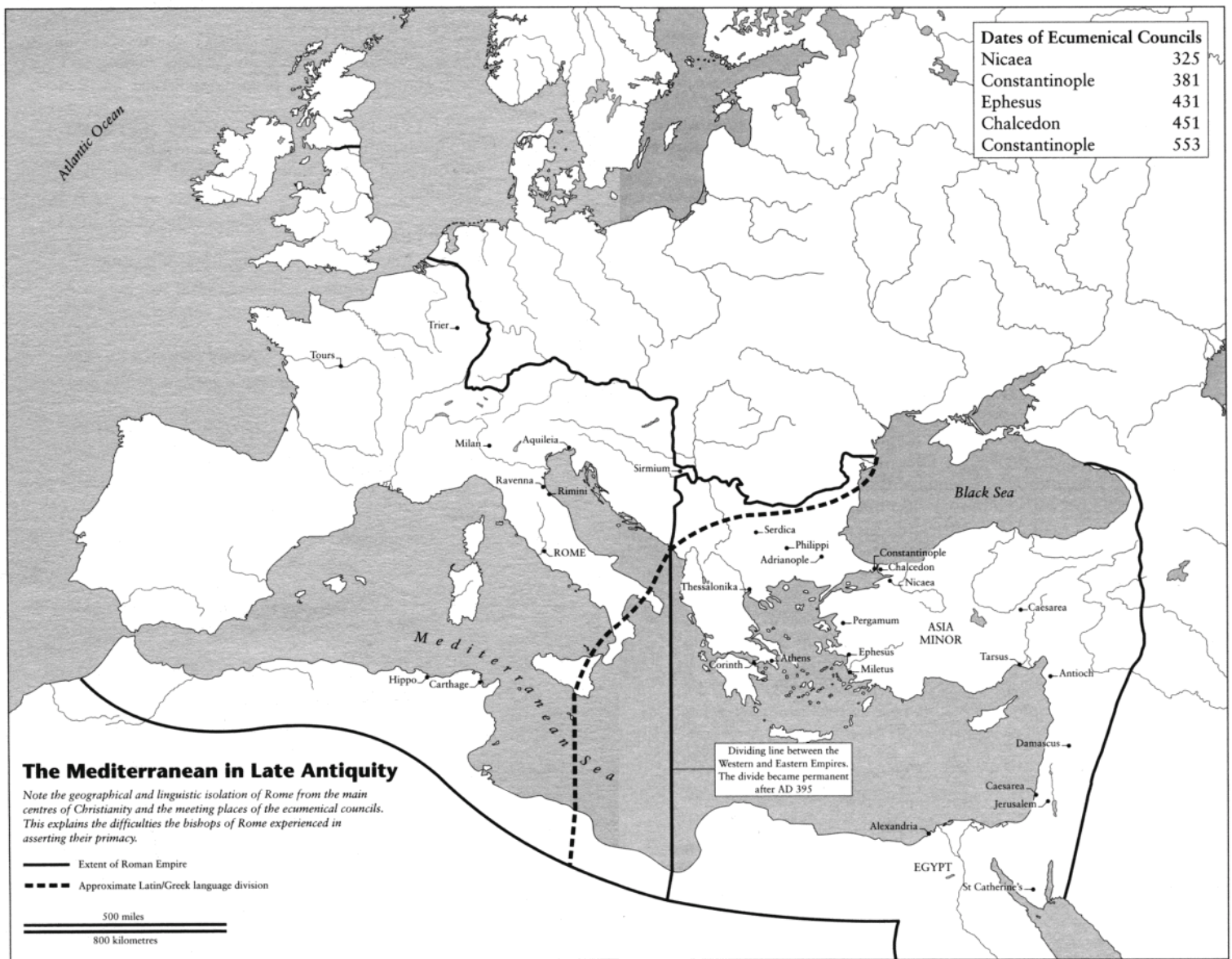
³³⁴ Ekonomou, A.J. (2007). *Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes*. Lexington Books: Plymouth, UK.

³³⁵ *ibid*, p 298.

³³⁶ *ibid*. p 300.

In 1054 the “East-West Schism” or “Great Schism” finally ended any remaining pretense of unity between east and west. The differences between the two had been increasing for hundreds of years, and simply became official at this point in time.

The numeral *two* defines the state of both the empire and the growing formal and authoritarian church. There were *two* halves to the empire (east and west), *two* languages (Greek and Latin), and eventually *two* denominations (Orthodox and Roman Catholic). The map below outlines the division between the eastern and western empire and the predominantly Greek and Latin speaking areas.



Part Two – the Two-Horned Beast

Verses 11-15

“Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.

“He exercises all the authority of the first beast on its behalf [or “on his authority”].³³⁷ And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to earth in the presence of men.

“And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform on behalf [by the authority]³³⁸ of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life. And it was given him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak, and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”

Unlike the beast with ten horns and seven heads, which originally arises out of the sea in opposition to the dragon (pagan Rome), the two-horned beast arises symbolically “out of the earth” or in actuality out of the Roman Empire’s government. It is a fitting description of the Eastern Roman / Byzantine Empire.

This beast has two horns “like a lamb”³³⁹ indicating that this is a government that divisions of power that are religious. This beast also speaks like a dragon since it is a civil government with religious authority.

Since the emperor was technically head of all of the church and practically head of everything under his political domain [e.g. Justinian Novel 131, c.2], he could

³³⁷ The usual wording “in his presence” or “by his authority” at the close of 13:12a is capable of various translations and nuances. David Aune pays some attention to this, and his translation may capture the concept best. “It exercised the full authority of the first beast, on its behalf.” See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 720 and 757). Dallas: Word Books. This seems to convey the intent of the passage. The relationship between the two-horned beast and the beast with ten horns is partly cooperative. The two-horned beast’s religious power is still derived from the beast or institutional church as a whole before it completely divides into two parts, and the two-horned beast acts with civil power on behalf of the entire early Roman Church (east and west).

³³⁸ See preceding footnote.

³³⁹ Although the word translated lamb here (Greek αρνιω) is usually translated lamb (and most translators do so here), at least one commentator has suggested that “ram” would be a more appropriate translation here. This would connect us to the Medo-Persian ram in Daniel 8:2-4, but to no seemingly evident purpose of comparison. On the other hand, the true Lamb of God is described with “seven horns” in Rev. 5:6. So it seems that a lamb with two horns is appropriate in Revelation.

both speak like a dragon (civil power) with two horns like a lamb (religious authority) in both the eastern and western empire.³⁴⁰

The emperor somewhat superficially recognized the authority of the church while maintaining authority to enforce or dispute theological and practical decisions. All of the major church councils – from Constantine until the eighth century – were called by the Byzantine Emperors.

The emperors “exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf.” It did “great signs” which “it was given him to perform on behalf of [or alternately “on the authority of”] the beast.” The emperors were given power and authority in religious matters as well as civil matters because of this unholy alliance, and the two-horned beast of the empire “...makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast...” The two-horned beast of the eastern and western empire (and then the Byzantine Empire in partial control of the west) was greatly advantaged by having religious authority in its alliance with the Roman Church.

These “great signs” by the two-horned beast probably do not represent actual miracles (although many miracles and saints were proclaimed), but rather represent the sweeping changes brought about in the church. It created an institutional church with a hierarchy and a dogma that it enforced.

One of these signs by the two-horned beast is specifically called out “...so that he even makes fire come down from earth in the presence of men.” Only one other place in Revelation is the specific language called out (Rev. 20:9) when “fire came down from heaven and devoured them [the final opponents of God at the close of the kingdom].” Here the two-horned beast is exercising judgments on his enemies (persecution of all those opposing the growth of the institutional church and its quenching of the spirit of God), and he does it “in the presence of men” (as though they believe the judgments are coming from God).

However, as time moves forward the relationship between the Greek east and the Latin west becomes strained, and the two-horned beast creates an “image of the beast” through the (Greek) Orthodox Church.³⁴¹ He (the Byzantine Emperor) had the power to give it life (independence and authority) and to persecute its enemies.

³⁴⁰ A good example of this complexity can be seen in Wikipedia under the heading of *Byzantine Papacy*.

³⁴¹ Whether the following comment has any great significance or not, it is at least interesting to note that the word translated “image” in these verses is the Greek word for icon or ikon (Greek εἰκὼν or eikon). It is particularly interesting because an ongoing controversy over the use of icons is what ended the Byzantine control of the Papacy and was also a major cause leading to the final break between the Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox Church (i.e., the “East-West Schism” or sometimes the “Great Schism”).

Part Three – the Nominal and the Faithful People of God

The second part of the chapter is followed by a description of the forced allegiance and worship of the beast, and the persecution of those who oppose him (13:16-18) enforced by the two-horned beast. This is followed by the character of the faithful and their allegiance and worship for the Lamb of God (14:1-5).

This is the third and final section of this chapter. The beast is brought back into the description to further define its original relationship to the two-horned beast as the representative of the entire church prior to the division of east and west. This emphasizes that before the image existed the emperors were creating the beast or Papacy with their emphasis on the Roman pontiff as the supreme ruler of the church.

The distinction between the beast and the image of the beast appears at a later date. Notice the language of the first plague; the “people who had the mark of the beast (cf. Rev. 13:16-17) and [those] who³⁴² worshipped its image” (cf. Rev. 13:15). In the description of the first plague, the plague is upon two different groups.

Verses 16-18

While many Christians perceive this as a physical mark, i.e., that people will literally have the number 666 stamped on their hands or foreheads (although in certain metal rock cultures there are probably those who do so), it is unlikely that this will ever become a criterion for the literal purchase of goods.³⁴³ Also, it is important to remember that these verses are closing a chapter set in the past and not the future.

As if these reasons weren't sufficient, the language of the final verse of this chapter reads a slightly different way: “Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast... and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.” Since we are already given an exact number, the only explanation is that there must be some sort of calculation involved to arrive at this number.

³⁴² Note that translations are split on whether the phrase should read “them [the ones] who had the mark of the beast and them [the ones] who worshipped its image” or “them [the ones] who had the mark of the beast and worshipped its image.” The former seems correct as the article *tous* (Gr. τους) occurs in both places distinguishing as separate groups between (1) those with the mark of the beast and (2) those that worshipped the image. The later translation appears to be a simplified adaptation for modern English readers, that does not completely reflect this distinction.

³⁴³ Among other reasons it would be just a little too obvious!

The passage also suggests (but does not state directly), that this number may be connected to a name or title. "...that no one will be able to buy or sell, except the one who has the mark, the name of the beast or the number of his name." One possible calculation for this number can be found in a particularly disturbing title for the Roman pope – *Vicarivs Filii Dei* in Latin or *Vicar of the Son of God* in English.

A vicar is like a vice president or regent. Think of it as a substitute or replacement. A vicar takes the place of the one that is absent or unavailable. In this case the title refers to one who takes the place of Jesus. How similar this sounds to a passage found in 2nd Thessalonians 2:4:

"...he takes his seat in the temple [the church] of God, displaying himself as being God."

Calculating the number 666 from this name of the beast or self-proclaimed title of the head of the Roman Church is accomplished through the arrangement of the Latin language by which some letters also have numerical value.³⁴⁴ The total numerical value in the original Latin title adds up to 666, as follows:

V = 5
 I = 1
 C = 100
 A
 R
 I = 1
 V = 5
 S

 F
 I = 1
 L = 50
 I = 1
 I = 1

 D = 500
 E
 I = 1

Total 666

³⁴⁴ Remember also that in Latin V and U are the same letter.

Those who follow the beast have this mark on the hand (activities and influence on behalf of the beast) and/or their foreheads (mental assent or agreement with the ambitions of the beast). Those that don't are not allowed to figuratively "buy or sell" with those that make merchandise of the Word of God (2 Cor. 2:17, Rev. 18:11-24). They are rejected by the church and cutoff, i.e., outside Christian society and Christendom's laws and in the "wilderness" condition (Rev. 12:6).

The description of the number of the beast is also "...that of a man..." which again ties in with 2 Thessalonians and the "man of lawlessness".³⁴⁵ Although the beast is a system of religious government, a man claiming an outrageous title also heads it, and this man is *only* a man and not God on earth.

Verses 14:1-5

In verse 1 the Lamb is standing on Mount Zion and with Him 144,000 with His name and His Father's name written on their foreheads. Compare this to the preceding three verses, where the followers of the beast also have a mark on their foreheads given as the number 666. The verses are obviously connected and they contrast the unfaithful in 13:16-18 with the faithful in 14:1-5.

In verses 2 and 3 the 144,000 are singing in "heaven" and worshipping "before the throne" and before the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (cf. Rev. 4:2-4). This helps to define Mount Zion in the first verse as another symbol of heaven and those who truly represent God's spiritual voice. Mount Zion is used elsewhere to represent the heavenly kingdom in contrast to the earthly realm (e.g. Heb. 12:22, Rom. 11:25-26), and it is to heaven that these 144,000 belong and where their worship is heard... not on the literal Mount Zion.

This "new song" and those who sing it are described in several ways:

- Their collective voice is "like the sound of many waters," which harkens back to the description of Jesus in chapter one (1:15). There Jesus speaks to many people and cultures in their language, and here (14:2) is the response of those who hear from throughout the world.
- However, this song has an edge to it. It is also "like the sound of loud thunder," i.e., it is the sound of controversy and of opposition to those who have the mark of the beast and worship its image.

³⁴⁵ See also Daniel 7:8 where the "other horn" of the antichrist is also described as having "...eyes like the eyes of a man..."

- Yet it also harmonious, “the sound of harpists playing on their harps” as they sing. The symbol of the harp is never fully explained anywhere, but it is reasonable to assume the harps represent harmony with God and worship. Harps were often the instruments used to accompany the singing of the Psalms, and each of the twenty-four elders has their own harp (5:8)... an appropriate representation of each of the twenty-four books of the Old Testament.³⁴⁶

In verses 3 and 4 the 144,000 are “purchased from the earth” or “bought with a price” which is the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28, 1 Cor. 7:23, I Pet. 1:18-19), and this expression is part of another song that is sung in Rev. 5:9. They also “follow the Lamb wherever He goes” through living the same self-sacrificing life as Jesus (Luke 9:23). These are forgiven and faithful Christians, and again this provides a stark contrast to those with the mark of the beast and essentially follow the “him” of the antichrist in the preceding verses.

In verses 4 and 5 they are also “chaste” and “have not been defiled with women...” This is not a literal description of course (cf. Heb. 13:4, 1 Tim. 3:2), but once again has spiritual significance. They are faithful to Christ (2 Cor. 11:2, Eph. 5:22-33, Rev. 19:7-8) unlike the other adulterous women described in Revelation (2:20, 17:5). And “no lie was found in their [collective] mouth...” signifying that they speak the truth and are unwilling to compromise it. “They are blameless” not because they are perfect, but because they are forgiven and justified and faithful (Heb. 9:14) and who will bring a charge against God’s people (Rom. 8:33)?

Taken altogether these last verses properly belonging with chapter thirteen are a beautiful picture of the church of God and of His love and affirmation for them.

³⁴⁶ The number of books of the Hebrew Bible changed over time because many books were combined (e.g., I and II Kings were/are one book and all twelve of the “Minor Prophets” were/are one book to this day. The number of books finalized at twenty-four in the same period in which the New Testament books were finalized.

Parallels Between Revelation Chapter 13 and 2nd Thessalonians Chapter 2

There are a number of parallels between the 13th chapter of Revelation and the 2nd chapter of Second Thessalonians, so it is worthwhile to take some space to consider the impact of this passage in Paul’s writing on the interpretation of the Revelation chapter.

First of all note the parallels between the chapters:

2nd Thessalonians 2	Revelation 13
2:7 – “For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way.”	13:1-2 – “Then I saw a beast... And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.” (Cf. Rev. 12:4, 7-9)
2:3 – “...the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction...”	13:18 – “...the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man...” (Cf. Rev. 12:2, 4-5)
2:2-3 – “...the day of the Lord... will not come unless the apostasy comes first...”	13:5 – “There was given him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies...”
2: 4 – “...who opposes or exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”	13:15 – “...so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.”
2:9 – “...the one whose presence is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness...”	13:14 – “And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs it was given him to perform...”

While the descriptions in 2nd Thessalonians all seem to refer to the “lawless one”, the descriptions from the passage in Revelation distinguish between the “beast” and the “two-horned beast” that are in league together. (The distinctions between these two are not specified in the citations from Revelation in the list above.) Since the description in the 13th chapter of Revelation would represent a (initially at least) united perspective of the institutional church that is much later broken into two respective parts, it makes sense that Paul’s account of the antichrist in 2nd Thessalonians – a much broader description of the antichrist – would include descriptions that are otherwise divided in Revelation between the first beast and the two-horned beast as they work together. Neither would it be surprising that the image of the beast would adopt a similar approach.

A sidebar for those considering the 2nd chapter of Thessalonians in detail.

Noted Biblical scholar FF Bruce, a highly regarded authority in NT translation and manuscript evidence, considers the “one” in 2:9 “whose presence is in accord with the activity of Satan” is not “the Lord” of 2:8 but rather the antichrist. In his words,

“The use of παρουσία [parousia or presence] here probably suggests a parody of Christ’s Parousia (v.8).”³⁴⁷

This makes much more sense in context for two reasons. First, it means that the return of Christ is not “according to” or “in accord with” the working of Satan’s deceptions. Second, it makes more sense of the overall passage, which is providing descriptions of the antichrist and not Jesus (see list below for clarification on this point).

The following list breaks down the description of the antichrist in a way that simplifies the structure of Paul’s language in 2 Thess. 2:3-10. The antichrist:

- Is an apostasy that must come before Christ returns (2:3)
- Is the son of lawlessness and son of destruction that must be revealed before Christ returns (2:3)
- Opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship (2:4)
- Takes his seat in the temple [the church] of God, displaying himself as being God (2:4)
- Is not yet revealed in Paul’s day, but is being restrained by something the Thessalonians already know, and will be revealed at the prophetic time (2:6)
- Is the mystery of lawlessness and is already beginning in Paul’s day, but is still restrained until that restraining obstacle is removed (2:7)
- To be revealed when the one that restrains “him” is removed as an obstacle (2:8)
- Is the one that the Lord will slay after His return [meaning the Lord cannot have returned yet without the antichrist present to be slain] with the breath of His mouth and bring the antichrist to an end (2:8)
- Is the one whose [own] presence will be accompanied by Satan’s deceptions (2:9-10)

All of these descriptions point to (1) an apostasy or turn from the faith beginning in Paul’s day, (2) restrained by the Roman Empire until the antichrist can take its

³⁴⁷ Bruce, F.F. (1982). *Word Biblical Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians* (Vol. 45, 1st edition). (p. 173). Waco, TX: Word Books.

place, (3) after which it will be “revealed”, and (4) all of this takes place between the fall of the Roman Empire and the return of Christ... because when He returns He will “bring to an end” this system that takes the place of God and Christ.

All of this passage points to a time between the fall of the Roman Empire [that which restrains the “man of lawlessness”] and the return of Christ. The significance of this with regard to Revelation is that the parallels between these two chapters in 2nd Thessalonians and Revelation point to a period following the early church but before Christ returns with similar language to make this point.

Parallels Between Revelation Chapter 13 and Revelation Chapter 16

The chart below³⁴⁸ illustrates parallels between these two chapters of Revelation. It is not surprising that they are linked together since some of the seven last plagues of chapter sixteen are largely poured out as judgments on the opponents of God described in chapters twelve and thirteen:

Revelation 13	Revelation 16
13:14-18 – those with the mark of the beast and those who worshipped the image of the beast	16:2 – the people who had the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image
13:5-6 – there was given him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies... and he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God...	16:9, 11, 21 – they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues... and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail...
13:1-2, 11, 14-15 – dragon, beast, and two-horned beast/image of beast	16:13 – the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet
13:13 – he performs great signs	16:14 – spirits of demons, performing signs
13: 14 – telling those who dwell on the earth	16:14 – which go out to the kings of the whole world

³⁴⁸ Courtesy of Jeff Mezera. He lists more parallels than are listed in the chart above and they are arranged somewhat differently.

Revelation Chapter Fourteen ~ Harvest and Tribulation

(As noted near the end of the comments on chapter thirteen, 14:1-5 more properly belong with the conclusion of chapter thirteen (13:16-18), and consequently discussion of this chapter begins with the verse at 14:6, although verses 1-5 may also operate in both directions as a transition between chapters, and may illustrate the impending completion of the harvest church (cf. Ob. 21).

Introduction

The twin themes of this chapter are the harvest of the faithful church and the judgment of the corrupted church. This contrast can be seen in the comparison of the words of Jesus, "I am the true vine" (John 15:1) to the description of Babylon in this chapter as "the vine of the earth" (14:18-20) that does not bear fruitage to God, but whose fruitage is cast into "the great winepress of the wrath of God."

Structure of the Chapter

The chapter has an interesting structure with two sets of angels [messengers]³⁴⁹ and their messages that surround Jesus on each side of him:

- Three angels in verses 6-12.
- Jesus the Son of Man in verses 13-14.
- Three angels in verses 15-20.

Also, the overall descriptions and messages of the first set of angels correspond to the descriptions and messages of the second set of angels.

- ❖ The messages of the first set of three angels are announcements and warnings.
- ❖ The messages of the second set of three angels are the results and consequences that follow in the same order.

Still other similarities in the language emphasize the relationship between the first and second sets of angels. These double sets of angels contain a variety of interwoven parallels.

³⁴⁹ Although - as noted previously - the word for "angel" means *messenger*, the identity of these messengers is not considered here.

For example, the *source* of these angels is grouped within each set, yet the sets are linked to each other by the words *another angel*. The first three angels do not have a point of origin, whereas the last three originate in the temple precincts. The first three are in motion (flying and apparently following in flight) whereas the last three depart from the temple.

- (1) Another angel³⁵⁰ flies
- (2) Another angel, a second angel follows
- (3) Another angel, a third angel follows
- (4) Another angel comes out of the temple
- (5) Another angel comes out of the temple
- (6) Another angel comes from the altar

Another set of parallels between the two sets links the voices of the angels in order by set, where the first and third angel in each set speak with a loud voice:

- 1st angel - loud voice (14:6-7)
 - 2nd angel (14:8)
- 3rd angel - loud voice (14:9-11)
- 4th angel - loud voice (14:15-16)
 - 5th angel (14:17, 19-20)
- 6th angel - loud voice (14:18)

There are also some parallels in the subject matter of the two sets of angels, as shown by pairing them in the same order as within their sets:

- 1st angel - hour of judgment / preaching (14:6-7)
- 4th angel - hour to reap / harvesting (14:15-16)
- 2nd angel - wine of the passion of her immorality (14:8)
- 5th angel - winepress of the wrath of God (14:17, 19-20)
- 3rd angel - warns of fire (14:9-11)
- 6th angel - has power over fire (14:18)

This final set of parallels emphasizes the point originally made in introducing these parallels. The first set prophesizes the results found in the second set.

³⁵⁰ The strongest manuscript evidence favors "another angel" here, but there is contradictory evidence favoring simply "an angel". Since there are no previous angels in context, and since the next two angels are numbered as "second" and "third", it suggests the possibility of a very early manuscript error. However, the more favorable manuscript evidence that includes "another angel" should not be automatically dismissed. Yet, this still leaves the question somewhat open for alternative interpretations of the evidence.

Parallel to Revelation 17 and 18 and to the Parable of the Wheat and Tares

Another help for interpreting this chapter are parallels in language with at least two other passages of scripture. These passages all have twin themes - the harvest of the faithful church and the judgment of the false church (cf. Joel 3:12-14). The relationship is easier to see by considering the chart below (the Revelation 14:6-20 heading lists the phrases below in the order in which they appear in the chapter):

Revelation 14:6-20	Revelation 17 and 18	Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43
Another angel with the eternal gospel to preach...		...a man who sowed good seed in his field
...because the hour of his judgment has come...	For in one hour your judgment has come	...the harvest is the end of the age...
Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great...	Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great...	
...who has made all nations drink of the wine of... her immorality	those who... were made drunk with the wine of her immorality	
...tormented...	...give her torment and mourning... weeping and mourning...	...in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth
...with fire and brimstone...	...ten horns... will burn her up with fire	...bind them [tares] in bundles to burn them up...
those two worship the beast and his image and... receive the mark...		tares
the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus	...those who are with him are called and chosen and faithful	wheat
...Son of Man... having a sharp sickle in his hand	...come out of her, my people...	...the harvest... the Son of Man... gather out of his kingdom...

Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come... harvest is ripe	...come out of her, my people...	...in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers
[six angels]		...the reapers are angels...
...angel who has power over fire... gather ...the vine of the earth... her grapes are ripe	...she will be burned up with fire...	...gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up...
...great winepress of the wrath of God		...furnace of fire...

Special Note on Verses 14:10-11

Before proceeding with a verse-by-verse discussion of the chapter, special consideration should be given to what these two verses are *not* saying. With the possible exceptions of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus or the lake of fire,³⁵¹ perhaps no other passage of scripture is used so often to support the doctrine of eternal torment by fire and brimstone. This is partly due to the use of the word "torment" in a majority of translations.

Yet a careful and serious study of the verses suggests something quite different from a first superficial reading. Consider - to begin with - how the Revised Version translates these verses:

*"...he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is prepared undiluted in the cup of his anger; and he shall be put to the test with fire and brimstone in the sight of the holy angels, and in the sight of the Lamb:
 "and the smoke of their trial goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night, they that worship the beast and his image and whoso receives the mark of its name."*

The word "torment" does not occur at all in these verses, but instead is replaced by the words "put to the test" and "trial" in the Revised Version. Translating the

³⁵¹ The parable is a parable and not a literal description. The other example is "lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

word *basanismou* (Gr. βασανισμού) rendered "torment" is misleading. The word originally meant to test³⁵² and in New Testament usage also means suffering (Matt. 4:24) or difficulties (Mark 6:48). Although the discussion of this word is controversial, yet some Lexicons and Greek NT word studies challenge the concept of intentional torture as the primary meaning in this verse.³⁵³

More accurately, the individuals described in these verses are suffering the natural consequences of their choices rather than deliberate torture, even though an isolated and surface reading still leaves the impression of everlasting suffering.

This leads to the next question, which is what is meant by "forever and ever." Notice that it does not say their testing or suffering is everlasting, but rather that the smoke of it ascends up forever and ever. In biblical usage this does **not** imply that the action itself - in this case the testing/suffering described in these verses - continues eternally. Instead it suggests a finality that will be remembered and never repeated. Aune³⁵⁴ describes the significance of this phrase in this way:

"The image here is based on the sight of a conquered city burning in the distance (Josh. 8:20, Judg. 20-40, Rev. 18:9-10, 18).³⁵⁵ More specifically, there may be an allusion here to Is. 34:10, where it is said of Edom "its smoke goes up for ever" (see Fekkes, *Isaiah*, 206-208). If so, the Hebrew text is probably in view, for the LXX lacks the Greek phrase "forever" corresponding to the Hebrew [] *le olam*. In 20:10, it is said of the devil, the beast, and the false prophet that "they will be tormented day and night forever."³⁵⁶ There is a close verbal parallel in 19:3, where the destruction of Babylon is in view [] "her smoke ascends forever"."

The quote above illustrates the difficulty with a literal interpretations of these verses.

³⁵² The original idea of testing comes from the use of the *lapis lydius* or "touchstone". This particular stone became used as a means of testing gold and perhaps other metals for purity. The concept of testing and trial initially derived from the use of this stone, and the Greek word βασανισμού that is identified with this process.

³⁵³ E.g., [1] *Liddell and Scott – A Greek-English Lexicon*, Ninth Edition. (pp. 308 & 309). New York: Harper and Brothers, [2] Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (p. 534). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers (which references Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 1. (p. 31-32). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers for further detail).

³⁵⁴ See Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (p. 836). Dallas: Word Books.

³⁵⁵ Note: The judgment and destruction of a city is one of the two themes of this chapter. The destruction of "Babylon" the "great city" of 17:18 is described here in this chapter in 14:8 and 14:19-20. This city is also intimately connected with the "beast" in 17:3-5 and destroyed by fire in 17:16 and burning and in torment in 18:9-10, 18, etc. - JH.

³⁵⁶ Which begs the question as to how symbolic entities like the beast could literally suffer "day and night forever." -JH

Consider what a literal interpretation of this passage requires:

- The worshippers give homage to a literal beast [evidently with seven literal heads and ten literal horns] and the beast's literal image. The worshippers would have the beast's mark or his number 666 literally on the forehead.
- They would drink a literal cup of wine that somehow contains the wrath of God in some literal fashion.
- They would be tried and in suffering - not in some distant locale - but in the presence of the Lamb and the holy angels (apparently in heaven where it is presumed Jesus and the angels would want to witness this for all eternity).
- There would be smoke billowing up (presumably in heaven?) for all eternity. (Compare this to interpreting Is. 66:24 literally with its concept of worms that live forever.)

When studying Revelation, it is always advisable to remember that it **is** the Book of Revelation. It is a symbolic book. As to what these verses truly mean, that will be considered below as the verses of the chapter are discussed in more detail.

Revelation 14:6-7 - the Message of the First Angel

There are essentially three parts to this description of the message and activity of the first angel.

The first part of the description says that this angel has the "eternal gospel to preach". Since this chapter represents the end of the age and the harvest picture at the close of this age, the gospel has already been preached for nearly 2000 years. However - as during the time of Jesus - the harvest suggests additional knowledge is available that was not present before this time. The Second Advent movement beginning in the 1800's eventually culminates in the harvest period and an understanding of prophecy and God's plan unavailable in the age previous to this time.

The second part of the message is the warning that the "hour of His judgment" has arrived. This hour of judgment is simultaneous with the harvest period and the end of the age throughout this chapter and elsewhere in scripture. They are all the same period of time.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ Looking backward in Revelation to the sixth of the seven churches, the sixth church is promised that they would be "kept from" the hour of testing coming upon the whole world (Rev. 3:10). No such promise is made to the seventh church.

As a sidebar, note a similar description of harvest and judgment in the 9th chapter of Ezekiel. In that chapter there are six men with destroying weapons and one man with a writer's inkhorn. So the numbers are the same as the six angels with their messages and actions of judgment along with the Jesus in Revelation chapter fourteen. Like the people of the harvest of the church in Revelation (cf. 14:1), the faithful in Ezekiel receive a mark to set them aside from the hypocrisy and idolatry of the city. And in Ezekiel nine the faithless city of Jerusalem stands in for the faithless city of symbolic Babylon in Revelation fourteen.

Returning to Revelation chapter fourteen, the third part of the message of the first angel is to "worship him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters." At this end of the age, skepticism is rife (Luke 18:8, 2 Pet. 3:3-4) and the creation of the universe is a subject of great debate. This reference to creation at the opening of the harvest period and the end of the age is similar to the message to the seventh (final) Revelation church of Laodicea (3:14), where Jesus gives descriptions of himself which evolve from truth or "the Amen" to the character of Jesus as "the Faithful and True Witness" to the evidence of his power and authority as "the Beginning [Cause] of the Creation of God."

This suggestion of a time of skepticism in our Lord's words in Luke 18:8 is amplified in Endicott's Commentary, as follows:

"When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith?"

The question implies, it is obvious, an answer in the negative. When St. Luke wrote his Gospel, men were witnessing a primary, though partial, fulfillment of the prophecy. Iniquity was abounding, and the love of many was waxing cold. And yet in one sense He was near, even at the doors (James 5:8-9) when men thought that the wheels of His chariot drove slowly. So has it been, and so will it be, in the great "days of the Lord" in the Church's history, which are preludes of the final Advent; so shall it be in that Advent itself.³⁵⁸

Revelation 14:8 - the Message of the Second Angel

Whatever the expression "Babylon is fallen, fallen" means, it does not mean the actual destruction of Babylon at this point. This is clear from the use of the same expression in Revelation 18:2-8 where the "great city" is still alive and present. Instead the phrase is prophetic. It describes both her fallen "spiritual" condition

³⁵⁸ Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers - Luke 18:8. (no date). In *Biblehub.com*. Retrieved Nov. 10, 2017 from <http://biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/18-8.htm>

and the inevitable and final consequences of her choices. Babylon is doomed, although "she" does not know it or believe it (18:7).

Revelation 14:9-11 - the Message of the Third Angel

These verses speak of great individual distress, but the key to understanding these verses is that this trial and anguish is not in a future life, but rather that it takes place in the present life.

The smoke of this torment goes up "forever and ever."³⁵⁹ Note that it is the "smoke" and not the "torment" that continues forever.

Smoke is used symbolically elsewhere in Revelation (9:2-3). It is also used in several other applications in Revelation. For example the glory of God is described as smoke (15:8) and smoke is connected with the sacrifice of Christ (8:4, see there for discussion on this point).

More to the point is the earlier discussion on the smoke from a burning city. Elsewhere, the description of "the smoke of her burning" (18:9) is followed by "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever" (19:3). It is obvious that posing a *literal yet eternal* plume of smoke rising from the destruction of the city that it is *symbolic* rather than *literal* does not make sense. In fact, all of the descriptions of verse 11 - torment, fire, and smoke rising up forever - are also applied to *symbolic* Babylon in chapter eighteen and adjoining chapters.

The true significance of the language in verse 11 is the complete and everlasting destruction of the symbolic city. The mystical "great city" that is "also called Sodom and Egypt" (11:8) will never again deceive the world (18:23) or persecute the faithful people of God (18:24).

All those who put their faith in the institutions of this world will find themselves constantly frustrated. This is clearly seen in the increasing polarization of the present world and its disenchantment with long-reverenced systems of government, religion, economics, and society, which cannot deliver upon their promises. "...they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."

³⁵⁹ In Greek this more appropriately reads "unto *the* ages of *the* ages" anyhow. See the footnote in the *RVIC2000* (RV plus Parkinson in footnotes).

Revelation 14:12 - A Long Awaited Balancing of the Scales

"Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus."

This verse is an echo of other passages from long before the hour of judgment that describe the suffering of the faithful people of God throughout the past. Particularly applicable are passages from the fourth period of the church (2:19) and throughout all of the period of intense persecution by the Roman Church (12:17, 13:10, 17:6).

God wants us to know that one of the reasons for the change is to balance the scales of justice - not against individuals, they will have an opportunity later to recognize their inhumanity and to repent of it if willing - but a balancing of scales against the corrupt system that is set in its ways and will not change (18:5-7).

Revelation 14:13 - Resurrection Following the Return of Christ

The key to understanding this verse depends to some extent on a Greek word occurring near the close of this verse, i.e., "...for their deeds [works] follow with [accompany] them." The most common translation is "follow[ing]" them, but this obscures the primary meaning for this part of the verse. It sounds as if the works come later, but this is not the meaning of the word translated following.

The word that is translated "follow" in the NASB and many other translations is the Greek word *akoloutheo* (Gr. *ακολουθεω*) found in Strong's Concordance #190. There is has the definitions of *accompany, attend, follow*. It can mean either to accompany/join with another or to follow another as a party member or disciple. It does not mean something that comes later. Here in this verse, this word suggests that although the death and resurrection of the individual means the end of labor, yet the Christian's works continue on.³⁶⁰

What this means in the context of the verse is that those who "die in the Lord" do not cease performing good works. In the words of this verse, "...they... rest from their labors, but [after death] they continue their works [without interruption]."³⁶¹

³⁶⁰ The AMPC (margin) and NABRE translate the final words of this verse as "accompany them".

³⁶¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 15: 51-52 - "...we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet..."

With this understanding of the closing words of the verse, it is now easier to understand the verse as a whole. There are three key elements involved:

- ❖ The subject of the verse is "the dead who die in the Lord..." or faithful Christians.
- ❖ The verse is time sensitive. It refers to those who die in the Lord "...from now on..." at the end of the age, and not to all who died in the Lord throughout the age before the harvest.
- ❖ Those who die in the Lord from this point in time onward "rest from their labors" but "their works continue on." In other words they continue their works after death, but their works are no longer laborious.

As noted earlier, the time setting of this passage is the end of the age, the second advent of Christ, the harvest of the church, and the hour of judgment. This points us to the same time described in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17. In these verses "the dead in Christ will rise first..." and these verses also speak of "...we who are alive and remaining over into the presence of the Lord..."³⁶²

The verses in Thessalonians are similar to the sequence in the Revelation verse:

- The dead in Christ "rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16).
- Then "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!" (Rev. 14:13) or those "who are alive and remaining over into the presence of the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:15).
- Those who "die in the Lord" (Rev. 14:13) from the time of the returned Lord on - that is all throughout the harvest period at the "end of the age" (Matt. 13:39, Rev. 14:14-15) - can rest from the laborious nature of their works (Rev. 14:13).

Thus this verse speaks of a time at the end of the age when the "sleeping saints" have been resurrected at the Lord's return and those that remain until the full end of the harvest and the time of judgment are resurrected as they "...die in the Lord from now on."³⁶³

³⁶² The translation of this verse (1 Thess. 4:15) differs from that in the NASB, but each change represents the clearer translation of this verse from multiple recognized authorities and translations (which are not listed in detail in this footnote).

³⁶³ The translation of 14:13 has been a cause of much discussion among commentators. The translation adopted in these comments is the easiest to substantiate as can be seen by the translation in Marshall's *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* and the *RVIC2000* or discussion of the verse in Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (p. 535). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers and Shallieu, F. (1993). *The Keys of Revelation*. p. 51. Revelation Research Foundation: Hamburg, NJ. Aune has a different but somewhat interpretive translation that appears partially dependent on opinion over manuscript evidence (see Aune, David E. (1997). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation 6-16* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (pp. 783 & 788, note 13.d-d). Dallas: Word Books). His argument seems dubious in contrast to those by Vincent, Shallieu, and others.

Revelation 14:14-16 - The Lord of the Harvest Comes to Reap

Verse fourteen contains several word pictures that illustrate the purpose of the returned Lord. For example, Christ is elsewhere pictured as coming with clouds that represent trouble. Some believe the clouds will be a literal sight, but here we see that Jesus also has a crown and more uniquely a sickle. In the following verse (14:15) he reaps the earth with this sickle. Few, if any, consider Jesus to be using a literal sickle in the harvest of the church, so it becomes likely that the other visual pictures in this verse are also symbols.

The symbols in this verse represent:

- White Cloud - The beginning of judgment with the cloud representing trouble and the whiteness representing the righteousness of the cause.
- One like the Son of Man - The expression the "Son of Man" is a reference to Jesus (Rev. 1:13, cf. also John 5:27 and Dan. 7:13).
- Golden Crown - Divine (gold) authority to rule (crown)³⁶⁴ as seen elsewhere in Revelation and scripture (cf. Psalm 2:all, Rev. 3:21, 6:2, 19:12, 16, 20:4, 22:1, etc.) or (more likely) golden "wreath of victory" as described in 1 Cor. 9:25 and Rev. 6:1-2, etc.
- Sharp Sickle - Possibly truth or possibly representing the final test before the victory of the church seen in the wreath of victory Jesus wears (see above). The descriptions in this verse are meant to encourage the harvest church.

Verses fifteen and sixteen describe the action that follows. The fourth angel of this passage says that now is the time to reap two very different harvests.

There is a similarity between the reaping of the earth and the reaping of the vine of the earth. Notice the similarities but differences in the chart below:

<i>Harvest of Grain</i>	<i>Harvest of Vintage</i>
Harvest of the Earth	Harvest of the Vine of the Earth
Harvest... is Dried ³⁶⁵ [ready for harvest]	Her Grapes are Ripe
Earth is Reaped	Gathered [the Clusters from] the Vine of the Earth

³⁶⁴ Although in Greek, "stephanon," meaning "garland" of victory or as in a conqueror as in Rev. 6:2; not His diadem as a king.

³⁶⁵ Literal translation - NASB, margin

Revelation 14:17-20 - The Winepress of the Wrath of God

The last verses of this chapter describe the final end of the system of Babylon.³⁶⁶ This climax of the great tribulation described from many viewpoints elsewhere within prophecies of this time, but here it is described as "the great winepress of the wrath of God."

Some elements of the last verses of this chapter have already been covered to an extent in previous discussion, but here are five additional points of interest:

- All of the last three angels come out from the sanctuary or from the altar of the temple (cf. 3:12, 1:1-2) or tabernacle (cf. 15:5). While the path of the Christian is a movement deeper into the sanctuary (temple or tabernacle), this movement is now reversed as Jesus and the heavenly hosts move into the world to take action.
- The response of the angel with power over fire is similar to a passage in an earlier chapter (8:3-5) where an angel takes fire from the altar and casts it into the earth at the end of the *Jewish* age. In this chapter - which describes the closing events of the *Gospel or Christian* age - once again there is an angel from the altar with "power over fire" connected with the judgment at the end of the current Gospel Age.
- The winepress is "trodden outside the city" or in the wilderness (17:3) outside of the "great city" of Babylon (17:1-5, 18). It is in the wilderness condition where the false city can be seen.³⁶⁷ This is where the judgment of the city takes place. It doesn't take place inside the city being judged and destroyed (18:21-23), but outside the city where the faithful church was forced to hide (12:6, 14) from the persecuting power of the Roman Church (16:6, 18:24). This is the retributive justice of God for the violent persecution of His people, and so the winepress is established in the very wilderness where the faithful people of God once fled for their lives.
- It is not wine that comes out from the wine press. Blood comes out of the winepress as another symbol of retributive justice. "Righteous are you... O Holy One, because You judged these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. They deserve it." (16:6)

³⁶⁶ See the earlier chart from the comments on this chapter noting the parallels between this chapter and chapters 17 and 18 describing the fall of Babylon.

³⁶⁷ Cf. a similar but different example in Rev. 21:10 where the New Jerusalem - the true city of God - is finally seen in the kingdom from "a great and high mountain" and not the "wilderness" condition nor the corrupt "great city."

The blood rises to the level of the horse bridles. As noted elsewhere, horses are symbols of the doctrines and teachings that motivate others. Horse bridles direct horses in the direction they should go, and the retributive justice of God will overwhelm those who would corrupt the doctrines of God by misdirection or deception. This will change in the Messianic Age when the doctrines (horses) will be rededicated to true holiness to God instead of violent persecution of others (Zech. 14:20).

- Finally, there is the question of the 1600 stadia or furlongs.³⁶⁸ The significance of this number is in the symbolic meaning. This number connected to the judgment of the "vine of the earth" or false vine is 40 times 40 - the square of forty or the number of testing and judgment³⁶⁹ - and here it represents the climax of God's judgment on Babylon.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁸ NASB, lit. stadia. Many recent translations render this distance in modern units of measure. However helpful and well intentioned this might feel in providing an idea to the modern reader of the distance involved, it misses the point of the dimension, which is to provide a specific number (i.e. 1600 units). The actual unit of measure in the original language is stadia, and this is sometimes translated in older versions by the somewhat similar measurement of furlongs.

³⁶⁹ See *Appendix B – Bible Symbolism in Prophecy* [last subject in this appendix] for examples of where the number forty clearly represents trial and judgment.

³⁷⁰ Some have noted that it is approx. 1600 years from the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D. to the beginning of WWI in October 1914. A more likely an intriguing correlation is the 1600 years from the Council of Arles beginning Aug. 1, 314. Convened by command of Constantine, this council seems to be the first official act of the church-state relationship that would continue in some capacity until 1600 years later to the day on Aug. 1, 1914 when WWI begins the final dissolution of the old church-state relationships of Europe. See articles by Mezera, J. and Doctor, R. (2018). *BOT*, Vol. 29 (1). (pp. 6-8). Lisle, IL.

Revelation Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen

~ the Seven Last Plagues

As we suggest an interpretation for the seven last plagues of Revelation, we will be forced into areas that may be difficult to accept for some. Revelation is an intensely honest look at the ills that plague both the church and the world, and as such it may criticize attitudes and institutions to which we feel connected... and we may be tempted to take the discussion very personally. This can be both good and bad.

The book of Revelation is really no different than any of Jesus' sayings or Paul's letters. While not said or written directly to us... yet, if the shoe fits, wear it.

That said, it is important to bear in mind that the book of Revelation never ever deals with individuals. Even in its examination and judgment of the lifestyle and institutions of the church, the individual is never directly addressed. We need to accept these aspects of the book of Revelation as a challenge in the same way that we would any other admonition of the scriptures, and not cling to the desire for personal vindication.

The idealist viewpoint of Revelation seems to have a good perspective on this subject. We quote in the regard as follows:

"...the work of Paul S. Minear,³⁷¹ whose interpretation of the symbols of Revelation is stimulating. For him, the purpose of Revelation is to warn Christians of the enemy within – "the false Christian." The whole of the book is viewed from that perspective. The seven letters provide the context of the book – it is a divine challenge to the church to be faithful to Christ. The judgments thereafter are designed not to effect the ruination of those outside of Christendom, but of the unfaithful within it. But those who persevere in righteousness receive the promise of the new heaven and the new earth. Read in this way, Revelation is to be taken not as an apocalyptic invective against the non-Christian but rather as a prophetic warning to the Christian."

³⁷¹ C. Marin Pate, Introduction to *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998) pg. 25, paraphrasing Paul S. Minear, *I Saw a New Earth: An Introduction to the Visions of the Apocalypse* (Cleveland" Corpus, 1968).

With that qualification in mind before we begin our interpretation of the seven last plagues, we still need to take a moment and review some of the chief characters in the drama we are about to explore. Another idealist author has provided a well thought out explanation in this regard:

“The identity of Babylon has been a subject of some debate. Two opinions seem viable... [and here he proceeds to review option (a) suggesting that Babylon represents the world in general with its temptations and philosophies, etc.], and (b) “The second option is that Babylon represents the world in the church, the unspiritual or earthly element that has infiltrated the body of Christ, or even a false church like Jerusalem. Six reasons support this theory: (1) In 2:9 John knows of a community that claims to be a congregation of the living God but is really a synagogue of Satan; (2) Revelation 17 echoes Exodus 16 and 23, where Israel is branded a harlot who fails to keep the covenant; (3) the great city is mentioned in Revelation 11:8, where a political-cultural interpretation is out of the question and suggests that Babylon should not be interpreted as a political-cultural entity in chapters 17 and 18; (4) the officials of Jerusalem, during his earthly ministry, opposed Jesus and encouraged Rome to crucify him (Acts 2:23, 3:13, 4:10, 5:30, 7:52); (5) when the harlot is destroyed (Rev. 18:20), God squares accounts for what she has done to the prophets and apostles (1 Kings 19:10); (6) Revelation 18:22-23 echoes Jeremiah 25:10, a passage that deals with Jerusalem.³⁷² [Hamstra proceeds to interpret Babylon throughout the remainder of this section of the book as a worldly religious element... whether a false church or a more general element within the body of Christ as a whole.]”

Our suggestion would be that the beast / Babylon (the eventual failure of the Roman Church as an institution) and image of the beast / false prophet (the eventual failure of the Protestant Church) represent the problems of institutionalized Christianity.

This does not mean that God’s people are being criticized individually. Nor does it mean that God’s people are not represented in the institutions of Christendom, nor that much good has not been accomplished thereby. Institutions do not represent the body of Christ. Much to the contrary, God is very specific that this is a place where God’s people have been throughout much of the church’s experience (Rev. 18:4). The scriptures deal with the way that institution building has gotten in

³⁷² Sam Hamstra Jr., “An Idealist View of Revelation” in *Four Views on the Book of Revelation* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998) pg. 117-118.

the way of spirituality in the body of Christ (Rev. 13:11-14) rather than the condition of any individual at any time or place.

With that in mind, let us proceed to look at the passages in question...

Chapter 15 – The Setting of the Plagues

- (1) Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, *which are* the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.
- (2) And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.
- (3) And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,
“Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty;
Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!
- (4) Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name?
For You alone are holy; For all the nations will come and worship before you,
For your righteous acts have been revealed.”
- (5) After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened,
- (6) and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean *and* bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes.
- (7) Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.
- (8) And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

Chapter 15 is designed to give us a background as well as a motive for the seven last plagues. We will not take the space to examine this chapter verse by verse, but we will note several aspects to it.

(A) The chapter breaks down neatly into two parts right down the middle: vss. 1-4 and vss. 5-8. Verses 1-4 seem to be more concerned with the cause of (motive for) the plagues, although this might be a little conjectural. Verses 5-8 give us the setup and circumstances immediate to the plagues.

(B) Verses 1-4: the seven angels with the seven plagues appear, leading us to think that the early part of this chapter is connected to what follows. And what follows in these verses are the servants of God (verses 2 and 3) singing of how the nations will come to worship when God's righteous acts have been revealed. This gives us a motive for the plagues... to bring mankind into relationship with God. The plagues must happen to bring mankind to this point.

(C) The sanctuary of the temple, or the Most Holy,³⁷³ is opened in heaven.³⁷⁴ The Most Holy is filled with smoke (verse 8) so that no one could enter the Most Holy, and this condition existed till after the seven plagues were finished.

The filling of the tabernacle (tent) in the wilderness or the temple with smoke from the glory of God happened in the Old Testament when the Ark of the Covenant was brought into the Most Holy (Exodus 40:20-21 and 34-35, 1 Kings 8:6-11, 1 Chronicles 5:7-14). It also happened in prophecy, as in Isaiah 6:1-13, Ezekiel 10:4, Ezekiel 43:1-6 and Ezekiel 44:1-4, and Haggai 2:7.

A discussion on the meaning of these passages would be exhaustive, but for now we want to focus on one thing – “and no one was able to enter the temple (sanctuary, or the Most Holy of the tabernacle) until the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.” There is a direct relationship here to the Old Testament accounts we just noted. In the literal tabernacle and temple, when the smoke from the glory of God filled the Most Holy, the priest could not enter to do the work of

³⁷³ See the earlier section called “The Temple and the Tabernacle in the Book of Revelation” for a detailed description of the Most Holy.

³⁷⁴ The Most Holy was *in* the Tabernacle or “Tent” before all of it was replaced by the Most Holy *in* the Temple(s), which makes the use of “temple” in Revelation 15:5-8 confusing in relationship to the temple(s) in Jerusalem and the temple in Ezekiel. How could you have a temple in a temple? The problem is the translation since the word “temple” should be translated as “[the innermost] sanctuary” or the Most Holy. In Revelation 15 the tabernacle refers to the Tabernacle structure that contained and sheltered the law or testimony, and the word translated “temple” that should be translated “[innermost] sanctuary” refers to the Most Holy compartment and not to the temple at all.

the temple service. This suggests in our account that Christ and the church can not be their priestly work (Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:4-6) for mankind (Rev. 21:2-4, 22:1-5) until the seven last plagues have completed their work of revealing God's justice to the world ("because in them the wrath of God is finished" verse 1).

(D) Finally, we have the observation in verse 7 that "*one of the* four living creatures" give the seven last plagues to the seven angels who are to use them. As we noted in an earlier section, the four living creatures suggest God's four character attributes – justice, power, love, and wisdom³⁷⁵. Assuming that one of the four in particular is meant here, which one of these would logically be the choice for handing out the plagues? If the reference in verse 4 to "God's righteous acts" is any indicator, the living creature represented here is justice.

Our conclusion is given support in the book of Ezekiel,³⁷⁶ where the four living creatures are represented again in Ezekiel 10:14. Only this time there is one change. The bullock is missing, and its place is a cherub. Inasmuch as all the faces are connected to cherubim, the face of the cherubim becomes the point of discussion. The emphasis on the cherubim suggests the pre-eminence in this picture of the one face that is missing – the bullock (justice). In this passage, once again the sanctuary is filled with smoke from the glory of God. In the meantime a man appears and is given coals of fire from a living creature (justice – Ezekiel 10:7) to cast over the city of Jerusalem for its destruction (Ezekiel chapter 9).

Taking this collectively, we have the following comparisons:

- In each case, one of the living creatures hands out destructive power.
- In each case the sanctuary is filled with smoke from the power and glory of God.
- In each case the evidence points towards justice as the living creature responsible for this course of action (Ezekiel 10:7 and 14, Revelation 15:4).
- And in each case the people of God are separated from the effects of the wrath (Ezekiel 9:4-6, Revelation 15:2-3, cf. Revelation 18:4)

We've taken the time to examine whether justice is the particular one of the living creatures that supplies the seven last plagues, because it demonstrates how the use of symbolism in the book of Revelation can add force and depth to the narrative.

³⁷⁵ See the earlier section entitled "The Four Faces of God and Satan Compared, Appendix B".

³⁷⁶ See the earlier section entitled "The Book of Revelation and the Book of Ezekiel".

The symbolism is like representational art. It gives us a vision that reaches us on an intuitive level where mere discussion alone will never have the same impact.

Chapter 16 – The Seven Last Plagues

(1) Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”

(2) So the first *angel* went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.

(3) The second *angel* poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like *that* of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.

(4) Then the third *angel* poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood.

(5) And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things;

(6) for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it.”

(7) And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments.”

(8) The fourth *angel* poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.

(9) Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.

(10) Then the fifth *angel* poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain,

(11) and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.

(12) The sixth *angel* poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.

(13) And I saw *coming* out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;

(14) for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

(15) (“Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”)

(16) And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.

(17) Then the seventh *angel* poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done."

(18) And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake *was it, and* so mighty.

(19) The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

(20) And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

(21) And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.

Time Setting of the Plagues

As we begin to consider the plagues, we will not take the time or space here to explore in detail the basis for starting the plagues with WWI, other than to suggest a review of the previous sections on the Seven Churches, Seals, and Trumpets and on Revelation 10 and the French Revolution – which would suggest that we are at least generally in the right time frame for the "time of the end" following the French Revolution, and that we are at the conclusion of the three "woe trumpets" mentioned below.

Seven Last Plagues and Ten Plagues on Egypt

One brief observation before we look at the seven last plagues. Only one other place in the bible is there a series of plagues, which begs the question... is there a connection between the two sets of plagues? In the book Exodus there are the ten plagues on Egypt. Initially it seems there is an obvious difference in the number of the plagues, but note that in Revelation the plagues in chapter 16 are referred to as the seven *last* plagues. This provides a numerical connection with the plagues of Exodus. The first three plagues were on both the Egyptians and the Israelites, but the last seven plagues were on the Egyptians only.

Unfortunately, there are no clear references to a set of three preceding *plagues* in Revelation. However, there is a set of three events that may qualify. The last three trumpets are often referred to as the "woe trumpets" in the prophecies of the

trumpets. (Revelation 8:13, 9:1,12,13, 11:14,15) Viewing these three “woes” as “plagues” would provide the numerical correspondence needed between the three first plagues and the seven last plagues in each instance. The similarities between these two sets of plagues seem to great to ignore, and may also give added depth of meaning to the passage in Revelation that describes “the great city” of Revelation 16:19 as “the great city which mystically is called Sodom and *Egypt*” (Rev. 11:18).

As to any additional connections between the two sets of plagues, those are not included here. Now let’s look at the plagues themselves...

Interpreting the Seven Last Plagues

1) “And I heard a loud voice from the temple (sanctuary or Most Holy), saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth.”

2) And the first angel went and poured out his bowl into the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshipped his image.”

The results of the first plague fall on those who have the mark of the beast and worship the image of the beast. As discussed in chapters 12-13 these are the two medieval religious institutions of the Roman and Orthodox Churches. The first plague is World War I and the final dissolution of the power of aristocracy in Europe. (The logic of this period as our starting point should become apparent as we move forward in time from this first plague.)

Barbara Tuchman describes the effect of the war this way “...the Great War of 1914-1918 lies like a band of scorched earth dividing that time from ours. In wiping out so many lives which would have been operative on the years that followed, in destroying beliefs, changing ideas, and leaving incurable wounds of disillusion, it created a physical as well as a psychological gulf between the two epochs...”³⁷⁷

It had its greatest impact on those churches that still relied on a world of unchanging beliefs. The final destruction of the old Europe and the cynicism that followed finalized the changes in the world leading to this time.

³⁷⁷ Tuchman, B. (1962). *The Proud Tower: A portrait of the world before the war 1890-1914*. (p.xiii). New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

3) “And the second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.”

The Russian Revolution. This revolution began late in WWI and continued past the end of the war. The results of this plague fall on the sea class, that portion of society that is restless and willing to challenge the status quo.

“...and every living thing in the sea died.” Throughout the late 1800’s and early 1900’s socialism and communism and anarchism had been growing in popularity among the idealistic of the “sea” class, but the Russian Revolution changed all that. Stalinism ended the ideals of the revolution and instituted a communist dictatorship, and the communist agenda became violent.

“...and it became blood like that of a dead man...” Blood separates itself into two fluids: a clear plasma and a thick dark red liquid. It seems a fitting description of the battle between “white” and “red” Russia, and the larger pattern of the battle for control between democracy and communism.

4) “And the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood.

5) And I heard the angel of the waters saying, “Righteous art Thou, who art and who was, O Holy One, because Thou didst judge these things;

6) for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou has given them blood to drink. They deserve it.”

7) And I heard the altar saying, “Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Thy judgments.””

Moving forward in time takes us into the 1920’s and 1930’s and the split between fundamentalism and liberalism. The plague is on the rivers and springs waters... the sources of truth. This criticism of the church is leveled at those who divided the church into two extreme warring camps. Those responsible for the extreme positions fragmented the body of Christ, and for these actions are likened to those who persecuted the saints and prophets in the past.

The 1800’s were a period when Darwinism was theorized and first gained public interest. It was also the height of higher criticism... the attempt to discredit the bible through archaeological and scientific arguments. Advancements in science

gave an increasing number of people the confidence that man would eventually explain all the mysteries of the universe without the need for God.

These controversies split the institutional church into two camps. The “liberal” camp would eventually become more and more “humanist” and downgrade the authority of the Bible and the atonement.

Among the “liberal” wing of churches, the sacrificial death of Christ itself becomes only a spiritual example and not a means for the satisfaction of justice for sin. In many cases Jesus is just “a good man” and a teacher ahead of his time, but not the Son of God.

And so the atonement itself becomes a stumbling block, and the doctrine of substitutionary atonement an embarrassment, as described in the words of the plague... “Thou hast given them blood to drink”.

8) “And the fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun; and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.

9) And men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues; and they did not repent, so as to give glory to God.”

We arrive at the 1940’s and the time of World War II and the Jewish Holocaust. Because of its brightness, the sun is a symbol of the gospel in particular and the power of the truth in general. Here the brightness of the truth is so powerful that men are scorched by it.

There is no symbolic class here described, but rather “men” is left in its stead... which all the more calls attention to the subject of the plague. All men were now confronted with all the cruelty of which mankind is capable.

The horror of the 1st World War led to its description as “the war to end all wars”. When the 2nd World War exploded mankind’s perception of themselves and their progress, it was a scorching revelation.

Yet, even in the revelation that man in his barbarism did not seem to be progressing into a golden future age as many had hoped did not turn man to God for answers. The evil revealed through the horror of the war and the actions of the

Nazis turned many away from God – whom they considered responsible for allowing mankind’s evil choices – “and they blasphemed the name of God...”

10) “And the fifth angel poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast; and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain,

11) and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.”

Moving into the 1950’s through 1970’s we arrive at an extremely significant event in the history of the Roman wing of the church... Vatican II. It was Vatican II that changed the face of the traditions of the Roman church.

While these changes were actually positive steps in many ways, the effect was to disenchant and disenfranchise many within the church. Traditions that had been accepted for hundreds of years were discarded, and many of the saints of the church had their sainthood revoked. The result was confusion for many in the Roman church “...and his kingdom became darkened, and they gnawed their tongues because of pain.” Many rejected the church from that time on.

12) “And the sixth angel poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, that the way might be prepared for the kings from the sun rising.

Our day. The pinnacle of secularism. The Euphrates is the river that supported Babylon. As traditions lost their edge to the rising tide of secularism and prosperity in the western world, the old line churches saw their support erode to some the degree that they refused to adapt to changing conditions and respond to those being lost in a haze of materialism. Even in less developed nations, the “newer” churches were/are growing faster than the old line denominations. The life of the traditional church is being sucked dry.

At this point we get a reminder of the purpose for all of this, so that we don’t despair amidst the downward spiral of cherished institutions, for the new kingdom cannot begin until all the judgments are complete. The preparation of “the way... for the kings from the sun rising” seemingly best refers to the coming kingdom of God (Malachi 4:2, Matthew 13:43, Rev. 5:10) for which the way is being prepared.

13) And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;

14) for they are the spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty,”

15) (“Behold, I come like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and they see his shame.”)

16) And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.”

Exactly what all of these verses mean is uncertain since there is no clear fulfillment as yet. The most that can be said is that, while wanting to avoid the position of the “one world government” and other aspects of much more literal interpretations of this passage, still, some kind of confederation seems to be involved. And fear must be at least one motivating factor for its formation.

Exactly what form this confederation will take remains unknown, but in the words of the prophets... “Do not say ‘a confederacy’ to all to whom this people shall say ‘a confederacy’, and do not fear their fear.” (Isaiah 8:12) “...they have healed the brokenness of my people superficially, saying ‘peace, peace,’ but there is no peace.” (Jeremiah 6:14)

17) “And the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air; and a loud voice came out of the temple (sanctuary or Most Holy) saying “It is done.”

18) And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.

19) And the great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.

20) And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.

This bowl is poured out into the air, which represents the abode of “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2) or Satan (cf. also Eph. 6:11-12) during the Gospel Age. The the final plague of the seven last plagues is poured out “upon the air” and so finally ends Satan’s control of the institutions of this world. Exactly what outward form(s) this plague might take is still unknown at this point. Suffice it to say that it will end the institutions of this world and make way for the “kings from the sun rising” (16:12) to bring healing to the world in the Messianic Age.

21) “And huge hailstones, each about the weight of a talent, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.”

In the tabernacle construction, there were silver sockets that supported the boards that framed the tabernacle itself, i.e., the Holy and Most Holy, and the veils between the compartments (Exodus 26:17-25). Each socket weighed one talent (Exodus 38:27). The silver came from a tax on the people of Israel (Exodus 38:25 and 26). Somehow, this tax was considered “atonement” for Israel (Exodus 30:12-16). In this way it differed from the offerings of gold (vs. 24) and copper (vs. 29 – rendered “brass” in many translations) in Exodus chapter 38.

The mention of “atonement” suggests that the silver talents each represent the sacrifice of Christ in some way. Silver seems to represent the truth (Psalm 12:6) of our Lord’s sacrifice of his sinless human life, perhaps also represented in the 30 shekels or “pieces of silver” Judas received for his betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26:15).

Whether this is the case or not, there is at least one passage in 1 Kings 20 (especially vss. 39-42) that suggest that a talent of silver is representative of the value of a man’s life.

So when we read in Revelation 16:21 that at the conclusion of the 7th plague “huge hailstones, each about the weight of a talent, came down from heaven upon men...” it naturally suggests a connection with the Old Testament symbolism of the silver talents. If “water” represents *truth*, then “hailstones” represent *hard truths*, and if “the weight of a talent” represents the *value of a man’s life*... then perhaps this plague of hailstones represents hard truths about the value of man and his institutions. These hard truths will be made manifest in the collapse of social order at the conclusion of the “seven last plagues” or “great tribulation.”

“And huge hailstones, each about the weight of a talent came down from heaven on men, and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.”

Concluding Thought on the Purpose of the Plagues

“And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” – Revelation 21:5

Two Women of Revelation

Revelation chapters 17 and 21 present contrasting pictures of the “great whore” Babylon and “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” the New Jerusalem. The points of comparison are so similar that it is apparent the reader was intended to note the contrast between the chaste bride of Christ and the adulterous pretender. They are listed below (from the New American Standard translation):

Revelation 17: 1-8

And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot...”

And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw...

And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet...

adorned with gold
and precious stones
and pearls
in her hand a golden cup...

...full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality

And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life...

...mystery, Babylon the Great

Revelation 21: 9-27

And one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls... came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I shall show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me...

...having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.

city was pure gold
foundation stones... precious stones
twelve gates were twelve pearls
street of the city was pure gold

and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying shall ever come into it...

...but only those who are written in the Lamb’s book of life.

...the holy city, Jerusalem

Revelation Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen ~ Two Views of Babylon

The seventeenth and eighteenth chapters of Revelation present two parallel but differing aspects of the "great city" of Babylon. These parallel views describe:

- ❖ Chapter 17 - the political and social aspects of this spiritually corrupt "great city" including its rise to power and its fall to destruction.
- ❖ Chapter 18 - the spiritual (18:1-8, 21-24) and economic (18:9-23) bankruptcy of this "great city" and its eventual destruction.

That these chapters are not a continuous history of Babylon from the beginning of chapter seventeen to the end of chapter eighteen is evident from the fact that Babylon is destroyed at the end of each of these chapters (17:16-17, 18:21-23)... although chapter eighteen - while still referencing the legacy of the past - begins much later with events relatively close to the final end of Babylon.

So what is Babylon?

In the narrowest sense it is specifically the Roman Church (but *not* individual Roman Catholics) that *symbolically* "committed immorality" (adultery) with the kings of the earth in historical church-state relationship (17:1-6).

The description of these opening verses of chapter seventeen fits the Roman church precisely:

- Its church-state power (immoral relationship with the kings of Europe).
- Its domination of Europe (the ten horns) and its inheritance of the Roman Empire (the seven heads).
- Its self-description as the "mother church" (mother of harlots i.e., other state churches).
- Its persecution of Bible-believing Christians in the Inquisition (drunk with the blood of saints).

In the broader prophetic sense it sometimes stands for elements of the western world in part or in whole - political, religious, social, and economic. Context makes the application apparent.

The eighteenth chapter provides an illustration of these prophetic senses. A large portion of the chapter is devoted to economic failure. Oddly, this occurs on both a spiritual level and a literal level (as do a few other aspects of Revelation):

- Spiritually - Those who follow the beast have a mark on the hand (activities and influence on behalf of the beast) and/or their foreheads (mental assent or agreement with the ambitions of the beast). Those that don't are not allowed to figuratively "buy or sell" (13:16-18) with those that deceive (18:23) and make merchandise of the Word of God, (2 Cor. 2:17, John 2:13-16). They are rejected by the church and cutoff, i.e., outside Christian society and Christendom's laws and in the "wilderness" condition (cf. 12:6).
- Literally - There is a strong parallel in the eighteenth chapter of Revelation to the Old Testament description (Ezekiel chapters 26-28, Isaiah chapter 23) of the Phoenician merchant trading city of Tyre. In the discussion on the eighteen chapter that follows - concerning the relationship of Tyre to the symbolic Babylon of Revelation - evidence is offered suggesting Tyre's relationship to Babylon may also represent the economic power of the western world.

Revelation Chapter Seventeen ~ Babylon's Rise and Fall from Power

Although it has been mentioned previously, it is vital to remember that the symbols of Revelation never describe any individual under any context in whatever circumstances they find themselves. This is particularly important for this chapter and the following chapter due to the vivid symbolism that is used here. These symbols and their interpretation say nothing about godly individuals in or outside of any of the institutions of Christianity or government referenced below. They deal only with the institutions themselves... which have long received an undeserved degree of worship and reverence. This caution should be kept in mind when reading the interpretations that follow.

17:1-6

The angel wishes to make to a point to John regarding the "judgment" of the great harlot. The crux of this chapter is the judgment itself. The lengthy description of the harlot that precedes the judgment portion of the chapter is solely for the purpose of identifying the beast and harlot. However, it can be said in advance that the woman represents the Papacy and the institution of the Roman Catholic Church.³⁷⁸ The symbolism clearly demonstrates this.

The symbols that identify the harlot throughout these first verses will be described and commented upon in the order in which they appear.

- ❖ The harlot sits upon "many waters." This particular symbolism is described in 17:15 - "The waters which you saw where the woman sits, are people and nations and multitudes and tongues."³⁷⁹ This corrupt woman dominates many nations and peoples throughout her reign.
- ❖ The "kings of the earth committed acts of immorality [adultery]" with her. This can only mean an illicit church/state relationship, and with the less successful exception of the Orthodox Church, only one church in history has wielded this much power - the Roman Church.

³⁷⁸ The comments on Revelation chapters 12 and 13 are helpful to consider along with this chapter in identifying the symbols used here.

³⁷⁹ Cf. notes on Rev. 1:15.

- ❖ "...and those who dwell on the earth³⁸⁰ were made drunk with the wine of her immorality." Those that support this corrupt arrangement are intoxicated with the long running success of this alliance. They attempt to establish the Kingdom of God on earth contrary to the command of God to wait for the appropriate time (cf. Luke 19:12-15, 2 Tim. 2:11-12, etc.). They have not watched and waited (Luke 12:35-38) but are "drunk" with corrupt doctrine and "sleep in the night" before the day (cf. 1 Thess. 5:4-8).
- ❖ "And he carried me away in the Spirit into the wilderness..." Only in the wilderness outside of "Babylon, the great city" can the true nature of this great harlot be properly understood.
- ❖ The "scarlet beast" on which the woman sits is the same beast with seven heads and ten horns and with "blasphemous names" that is also pictured elsewhere in Revelation (13:1). Revelation 13:1 is an amalgamated picture of the beast and the woman representing church and state. Here in chapter seventeen the church (the woman) and the state (the beast) are shown in league together, but as separate entities.
- ❖ The fact that the woman is astride the scarlet³⁸¹ beast indicates that she is in a position of greater authority than the beast. This is true for most of the 1260 years during which the church was persecuted (12:6, 14). Note how this picture fits with the overall progression of the crowns in Revelation:
 - In 12:3 the crowns are on the heads because the pagan Roman Empire is still united and in control.
 - In 13:1 the crowns are on the horns because the Roman Church (the beast) and the nations of Europe share power in the beginning.
 - In 17:3 there are no crowns on the heads or horns because the woman (the Roman Church) now rides upon the beast (in full control of civil government and the nations).
 - In 19:12 the crowns now are on the head of Jesus because he has taken control (19:16) and it is the time of the destruction of the beast (19:20).
- ❖ The seven heads and ten horns represent the same seven heads and ten horns in Daniel chapter seven (lion-like head, bear-like head, leopard-like

³⁸⁰ Representing a class with varying degrees of power that supports the status quo. For more detailed discussion, see *Appendix D - Two Groups in Revelation Compared*.

³⁸¹ The word translated "scarlet" here is different from the word for the "red" dragon in 12:3. The word for "red" in 12:3 is *purros* (Gr. *πυρρος*) meaning flame colored (from *pyr* / *πυρ*) or fire) and only occurs in 12:3 and 6:4. See Vincent, M. R. (no date). *Vincent's Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2. (pp. 495 and 522). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.

The words for "scarlet beast" do refer to animal that is red, and Aune translates the words in 17:3 as a "red animal" and notes that the language is not comparable to the flame colored dragon in 12:3. See Aune, David E. (1998). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52b, 1st edition). (p. 908, note 3.d-d). Dallas: Word Books.

four heads, and terrible beast-like head with ten horns) and elsewhere in Revelation. The heads represent larger empires and the horns represent smaller individual kingdoms (cf. 17:9-10, 12).

- ❖ This "woman" is not the only woman of prominence in Revelation. See the section titled "Two Women of Revelation" just a few pages earlier comparing the harlot of this chapter to the future beauty of the faithful bride of Christ. The raiment and articles the harlot wears do not represent true beauty, but instead they illustrate her pretentious but false claims to represent the church of God. Also, compare the description of her power and riches to the description of the persecuted woman fleeing into the wilderness in 12:6, 14.
- ❖ The "purple" (royalty) and "scarlet" (the blood of sacrifice - cf. 18:24 for contrast) with "gold" (divine qualities) and "precious stones and pearls" (beauty of character) are hypocritical of the beauty of the true bride of Christ (cf. 18:16 for a parallel verse).
- ❖ The "golden cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality" contrasts with the cup of salvation that comes from the hand of the Lord (Ps. 116:13, Matt. 26:27-28, John 6:52-56).
- ❖ Once again there is writing on the forehead... which can be for good (7:3, 14:1, possibly 3:12) or for ill (13:16-18, 14:9-11) as indicated.
- ❖ There is a "name written" which is a "mystery." The reference to a mystery means that it is not generally known or apparent, and this indicates that like the rest of Revelation this description is symbolic rather than literal.
- ❖ Her name is "Babylon the Great"... a reference to the Old Testament city and empire by the same name. Revelation is written long after *literal* Babylon could be said to be a "great city," and thus it confirms the "mystery" label pinned upon the *symbolic* Babylon in this verse.
- ❖ Babylon is described as "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." This means that the Roman Church considers itself a "mother church" to others. The Papal Church actually calls itself the "mother church" and considers itself superior to all others.

Yet perversely there is a measure of reality to this description of the "mother of harlots." Many of the early Protestant churches also formed church-state relationships with countries where they predominated. Examples include the Lutheran Church in Scandinavian countries and in some princely states of Germany and the Anglican Church in England. Many later Protestant sects found themselves persecuted by the earlier established Protestant Churches (although generally not to the same extreme as Inquisition).

- ❖ The final verse of this opening section to the seventeenth chapter speaks of the persecution by Babylon the "mother church" drunk with the blood of the saints and the witnesses of Jesus. Ask any Huguenot or Waldensian or Lutheran or Mennonite that knows the history of their church for confirmation.

The modern day willingness to accept diversity is a healthy attitude in general, but it is an attitude that also runs amok with excessive ecumenicalism at the expense of truth. It is God's *love and concern* for His people wherever they are found and however they have suffered that drives these prophecies, not hate and intolerance. The present willingness to accept diversity combined with a prevalent ignorance of history and ignorance of the true tenets of the Roman Church have led to a rejection of the true identity of Babylon by many. The view presented herein is sometimes unfairly seen as archaic and intolerant, when in truth it is Babylon that historically has been the embodiment of intolerance.

And Babylon is also a place from which God's own people are called to flee (Rev. 18:4).

This current state of affairs will not last much longer. Words often said in the past, but words that are for the first time truly evident as seen through the eyes of present day fulfillments of prophecy. And while it seems surreal to many that the Roman Church will ever come to its end, even this attitude of incredulity becomes a fulfillment of prophecy:

"I sit as a queen and I am not a widow. I will never see mourning." (Rev. 18:7)

Babylon in Jeremiah and the Old Testament

The Babylon of Revelation is described long after the "great city" is mostly ruins and by no later than the 10th century AD is completely uninhabited. Yet a great deal of the description of Babylon in Revelation is drawn from the Old Testament prophetic books. Jeremiah in particular has a great deal of prophecy surrounding Babylon, some of which is referenced in this chapter of Revelation. For example (in a reference to 17:4-5) Jer. 51:7 reads,

"Babylon has been a golden cup in the hand of the Lord, intoxicating all the earth. The nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are going mad."

Also, in Jer. 25:12 (in a prophecy about judgment on Babylon), it says,

"Then I took the cup from the Lord's hand and made all the nations to whom the Lord sent me to drink it..."

Other passages in Jeremiah (51:8, 13) and elsewhere in the Old Testament (e.g. Is. 44:27-45:2/Dan. 5:28 compared to Rev. 16:12) are borrowed in part within Revelation. Since these prophecies are historically fulfilled upon a literal city long since gone, it corroborates the long-held Protestant tradition of Babylon as a symbol of their persecutor... the Papal Roman Church.

This arrangement also suggests that the Old Testament prophecies upon literal Babylon are illustrations of the final judgment on symbolic Babylon in Revelation.

Ancient Babylon's Religion and Symbols and the Roman Church

Alexander Hislop's book *The Two Babylons* is a strange and extremely detailed but challenging overview of the parallels between the ancient pagan religion of Babylon and the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. The correspondences between the two are extensive.

While some of the arguments of the book are now challenged based on more recent archaeological finds and studies since its publication, a number of other aspects remain credible and pose serious questions regarding the true nature of the Roman Church and its practices.

Now comes the fun part. However, it will be easiest to explain the remaining verses a little out of order.

17:7 and 8b

"Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery..."

This phraseology is a reference back to the use of the word "mystery" in verse 5, where it says "...a mystery, Babylon the Great..." The use of the word mystery confirms the highly deceptive nature of Babylon. In identifying Babylon, the clue given here is to look for the unexpected rather than the obvious. To Christians over many centuries, the true identity of Babylon remains a mystery that is outwardly clothed in Christian pretensions.

Note that in the second half of verse 8, those "that dwell on the earth" are the ones who continue to wonder at the beast because they do not understand the mystery. This class of people described as "those who dwell on the earth" are those that support the established church and state at the expense of true faith.³⁸²

An explanation of the symbols that are used to describe Babylon in this chapter follows.

17:8a, 10-11

"The beast that you saw was and is not and is about to ascend from the abyss and is headed for destruction."³⁸³

"And they are [there are - other translations] seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while."

This is a beast that goes out of existence and then returns to life out of the abyss of powerlessness, but it is eventually destroyed. The beast is described in a similar way in 13:3. There the beast appears to receive a fatal wound, but it is restored to life.

³⁸² See *Appendix D - Two Groups in Revelation Compared* for comparative lists of these two groups in Revelation.

³⁸³ Transl. from Aune, David E. (1998). *Word Biblical Commentary: Revelation* (Vol. 52c, 1st edition). (p. 907). Dallas: Word Books.

There are a number of variant interpretations for the significance of 17:8-11, but perhaps the most appealing continues to apply the seven heads here to the seven heads in Daniel chapter seven. To refresh the explanation, the four beasts in Daniel have a total of seven heads, since one of the four beasts - the leopard-beast - has four heads. These four heads of the leopard-beast represent the four divisions of the Grecian Empire after the death of Alexander the Great. These four heads represent the regions of:

- Macedonia/Greece (Alexander's homeland)
- Thrace/Asian Minor
- Syria (Damascus/Antioch/Babylon) - Seleucids
- Egypt - Ptolemies

Unlike the other three, the Thracian kingdom did not survive for long. It is also the *only one* of these four heads (empires) never to control the land of Israel. (Macedonia originally controlled it through Alexander.) The other three empires of Daniel seven...

- Babylonian Empire
- Medo-Persian Empire
- Roman Empire

...all controlled the land of Israel during their day.

This sequence of historical events helps to explain verse 10. The five kings (heads) that are fallen are:

- Babylonian Empire
- Medo-Persia
- Macedonia/Greece
- Syria Seleucid Empire
- Egyptian Ptolemaic

The king or head that "is" during the writing of Revelation represents:

- (the) Roman Empire

The final empire that has not yet come into full power is:

- Thrace/Asia Minor that becomes the Byzantine Empire (Constantinople)

...that is the successor to the (Eastern) Roman Empire and whose reach extends as far as Egypt and *the land of Israel*.

Having identified all seven heads, the "eighth head" that is of the seven (verse 11) can then be identified as the Latin Roman Empire that actually comes to full life when Charlemagne is crowned emperor in the west. This empire and its ten horns (the ten nations of western Europe that support Babylon) once controlled the land of Israel under the old pagan Roman Empire, and the new papal Roman Empire controls it once again for a century as a consequence of the Crusades.

Thus the king that is yet to come or the seventh head is the Byzantine Empire in the east, and the eighth and final head is a return of the Roman Empire to power "out of the abyss." This is the final head of the beast because the eighth head is eventually destroyed, and that is the last we hear of the beast.³⁸⁴

Rev. 17:9-13, 15, 18

Once the angel begins to explain the mystery of the symbols in this chapter, he continues item by item until all of them are identified. These symbols and their identification are listed below in the same order as in the chapter:

- ❖ The *seven heads* are seven mountains. Mountains are always a symbol of a major kingdom.³⁸⁵
- ❖ The *seven mountains* are seven kings, i.e., seven empires. The beast inherits its position of empire from those that go before it.
- ❖ The *ten horns* are ten kingdoms (of Europe) that rise after the fall of the pagan Roman Empire. These smaller kingdoms support the beast or "eighth head" from which "they receive authority as kings."
- ❖ The *many waters* on which the woman sits are many nations and peoples under the dominion of the Roman Church and "Holy Roman Empire."
- ❖ The *woman* is the "great city" of Babylon that "reigns over the kings of the earth." This is shown earlier the chapter by the harlot Babylon and its illicit church-state relationship with the kings of the earth.

Rev. 17:13-17 (the Destruction of the Woman and the Beast)

It would seem from the present relationship of church and state in Western Europe, that the time when they "...give their power and authority to the beast" is in the past.

³⁸⁴ Cf. Daniel 2:41:44, also.

³⁸⁵ See *Appendix B – Bible Symbolology in Prophecy* under "mountains".

Thus, the relevant verses in this passage (17:12-14, 17) align with the beast or the (papal) Roman Empire rising from the ashes and returning to power. This is the "one hour"³⁸⁶ of "authority as kings" to rule with the beast.

The eighth revived head of the seven heads is to go into destruction. There will not be another beast to follow. This is as a consequence of the people that support it when they finally reject the beast and the woman riding the beast. They "make her desolate [without support] and naked [strip away her pretensions] and will eat her flesh [consume her organization and hierarchy and appropriate it themselves]³⁸⁷ and [finally] burn her up with fire [final complete destruction]." This is the time when the will of God (17:14) is finally executed in judgment against the corrupt woman.

³⁸⁶ Some notes on "HOUR" in the New Albany-Louisville Revelation study include two relevant points that are simplified and paraphrased as follows:

(1) The word translated hour is used in a variety of settings in Revelation and refers to a non-specific period of time with particular characteristics.

(2) The Greek word translated "one" in 17:12 does not mean one as in one or two or three, etc. It means something singular or particular in nature. In modern language someone might say, "Remember that one time that..." It does not indicate brevity or limited quantity, but rather the singular nature of the event.

New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia. (2010). *The Revelation Notebook*, 1st bound ed. (pp. 316-317). Louisville, Kentucky: New Albany-Louisville Ecclesia.

³⁸⁷ The eating of the flesh is symbolism in the same way as the consuming of the eyes and tongues and flesh in Zechariah 14:12 is also not meant to be literal. It most likely represents the destruction of these nations. The loss of sight suggests lack of understanding or insight, the loss of the tongue a lack of explanation for these events, and the loss of the body the dissolution of the ability to govern. This symbolism is also found James 5:1-3 where "rust" eats the flesh of the wealthy. The passage in James is clearly meant to be taken symbolically. These descriptions of flesh being consumed can be compared in a reversed way to the description of the resurrection of Israel *as a nation* in Ezekiel chapter 37.

Revelation Chapter Seventeen – Appendix to the Chapter
Literal Uses of the Symbolisms of the Chapter

In this chapter some of the symbols proved to be in actual use by the pagan Roman Empire and by the Roman Church. It's almost as if someone read the Book of Revelation and bizarrely borrowed the symbolism and applied it literally. Two examples follow:

(1) A queenly woman sitting on the seven hills of Rome.

A woman seated on seven hills is actually on the reverse face of a Roman coin featuring Caesar Vespasian and minted in 71 AD (see picture and illustration below), thus illustrating that it was a common Roman image of their city.



(2) A queenly woman sitting on a globe of the earth (many waters / nations) and holding forth a golden cup.

Somewhat more bizarrely, in 1825 the Pope Leo XII printed a medal of himself (see picture below). On the reverse side is a picture of a woman with a crown seated on the world and with a cup in her outstretched hand. The wording on that side of the medal reads "sedet super universum" or "the whole world is her seat."

The imagery mimics the language of Revelation describing a corrupt woman picturing a church [Babylon, 17:5, cf. 19:7-8] that is a queen [or so "she" believes, 18:7], with a cup in her hand [the golden cup of her abominations according to 17:4] and seated on the world [or upon "many waters," 17:1, 15]. If there was ever a need to demonstrate how divorced from the Bible the Roman Church has always been, there is no need to look farther than this coin.



Revelation Chapter Eighteen ~ Babylon's Spiritual and Economic Fall

This chapter can be divided rather neatly into three parts:

- 18:1-8 - the warning of the impending doom of Babylon resulting from its spiritual compromises and corruption.
- 18:9-19 (20) - the lamentation of those in alliance with Babylon including kings and merchants and all made wealthy by her merchandise.
- 18:21-24 - the final destruction of Babylon and the end of the pretense of Christianity portrayed by the "great city" (cf. Matt. 7:21-23, 13:24-30, 36-43).

Verses 1-8 - Warning to God's People and Cause of Impending Destruction

Verse 1 describes a messenger with "great authority" and whose "glory... illuminates the earth." This great authority contrasts with the pretensions of the papal church with its historical claims of authority on earth identical to Christ. The illumination of the earth is even now going on through the increase of knowledge (Dan. 12:4) and through nearly universal access to information... as both spiritual and secular truth and corruption are exposed as never before (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5).

Verses 2-4 describe the condition of Babylon and make God's estimation of this institution clear to any who struggle with misplaced reverence and support for the "great city" that is highly esteemed by so many of God's people.

The various illustrations of Babylon all describe a religious institution that has lost all connection to faithfulness to the gospel.

"...Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird. For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality.

Consider two lists, first of Babylon's spiritual corruption in these verses (2-3), and a second list of spiritual attributes Babylon no longer possesses that are described in this chapter's closing verses.

Spiritual corruption of Babylon (18:2-3):

- A dwelling place of demons - a place of spiritual darkness (cf. 1 Tim. 4:1-3, Jude 4, 6, 8-13).
- A prison of every unclean spirit - corrupted teachings (cf. 1 Jo. 4:1-6).
- A prison of every unclean and hateful bird (19:17-21, Mark 4:3, 13-15).³⁸⁸
- The wine and acts of her immorality (17:1-6) and wealth of her sensuality (2 Cor. 2:17, 2 Pet. 2:2-3).

Some might be inclined to be generous and defend all of the various institution(s) that claim the Christian faith, and this inclination springs from charitable spirit. Yet some of the citations above – and others not listed here – make it clear that false teachers would appear *within* the church,³⁸⁹ and that these false teachers would not be recognized for who and what they are. We ignore the warnings of scripture at our own peril.

Spiritual attributes of Babylon no longer possessed (18:22-23):³⁹⁰

- The sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters (most likely those who praise God).³⁹¹
- The craftsmen of any craft. (Compare this idea of craftsmanship to the rich merchants of this chapter who apparently take advantage of others in their trade.)
- The sound of a mill (perhaps providing others the "bread of life").
- The shining light of a lamp (Ps. 119:105).
- The voice of the bridegroom and the bride (19:7-9, 22:17).

³⁸⁸ Birds or "fowls of the air" as a symbol has meaning based on context (far more than nearly any other symbol). Also the type of bird is significant to the interpretation. For example, eagles can represent good teaching and wisdom (Rev. 4:6-7, 12:14), large powerful birds and mothers of chicks can illustrate protection (Ps. 91:4, Matt. 23:37), little birds can represent the humble and vulnerable (Ps. 91:3, Luke 12:6-7), and unclean birds apparently corrupt teachers and leaders who take advantage of power for their personal gain (Rev. 18:2).

Jeremiah 5:25-29 describes wicked leaders who cage men like birds for their use. Perhaps also Luke 9:58 (cf. Luke 13:31-32 re: "fox"). The birds in the parable of the mustard seed (Matt. 13:31-32) are more problematic. This parable of the growth of the kingdom of God is generally treated as a positive thing as Christianity spread rapidly throughout beginning in the 4th century AD. However, it is more likely this growth is a mixed bag of both the tares and the wheat of the preceding parable (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43) in the tainted arrangement seen elsewhere in prophecy (including Revelation chapter eighteen). So, tempting as it may be to see the birds of the parable of the mustard seed as a positive symbol, in all likelihood the birds of that parable are those who see the growth of the kingdom of God as an opportunity for position and power. This interpretation matches the one other use of birds as a symbol in another of these parables of Matthew chapter thirteen, where the birds are compared to Satan in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:4, 19).

³⁸⁹ Cf. Acts 20:28-30, 2 Peter 2:all, and Jude 1:all.

³⁹⁰ Cf. Jer. 25:10.

³⁹¹ Compare these manmade instruments of praise to the voices of many waters and great thunder praising God a few verses later (19:6).

Hence, the call in verse four to "come out of her, my people," the call for the people of God to distance themselves from the plagues (18:8, Rev. chapter 16) that will come upon her. No clearer statement of the deceptive nature of this "great city" could be provided or its true identification. This is a place where God's people dwell, and they are warned to come out of this "great city" into the "wilderness" (cf. 12:6, 14) where they can see the true character of the so-called "great city" (17:3).

Verses 5-8 describe the retribution that will come upon Babylon for her sins. "Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double for her deeds..." etc.

"In the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her." Rev. 17:2-4 describes this golden cup of abominations and unclean things that Babylon held in her hand.³⁹² At one time the literal Babylon was a golden cup in the hand of the Lord (Jer. 51:7) that made the nations of the earth drunk with delusion (Is. 29:9-16), and this prophecy is now repeated upon the symbolic "great city" of Babylon, who "glorified herself" rather than humbling herself under the mighty hand of God.

"I sit as a queen and I am not a widow, and will never see mourning." Who would doubt otherwise throughout her history? Yet the walls have been crumbling for centuries and now fall even faster against the tides of modernity and secularism... "and she will be burned up with fire, for the Lord God who judges her is strong."

In verses 5-8 the judgment is described as "one day" or at a specific time. Later the judgment is also described as coming in "one hour". As sometimes seen elsewhere in Revelation the thought is "at that particular day" or "at that hour" rather than a brief period of time represented by a day or hour.³⁹³

The three plagues that result in her demise³⁹⁴ are just one of a few symbolic descriptions of the destruction of Babylon. Suggestions on their significance:

- Pestilence/Death – Death and destruction come first.
- Mourning – Those who are left weep and mourn for Babylon (11:15, 19).
- Famine – There is already a famine in the land for the hearing of the word of God (Amos 8:11-12), but it will be worse when Babylon falls.

³⁹² As bizarre as it sounds, yet at one time the Papal Roman Church actually printed a coin showing the church as a queen seated on seven hills (of Rome) with a golden cup in her outstretched hand. See the appendix to Revelation chapter seventeen.

³⁹³ See notes on 9:15 and 17:12. The full listing of every occurrence of "hour" in Revelation also illustrates the difficulty with proposing a common singular event everywhere that it occurs: 3:3, 3:10, [8:1], 9:15, 11:13, 14:7, 14:15, 17:12, 18:10, 18:17, 18:19.

³⁹⁴ Elsewhere in Revelation the destruction of Babylon is described in three parts (16:17-21) where it is also connected with [just] one plague. Three plagues are also described under the sixth trumpet (9:18), but these are three different plagues occurring at a different point in time. However, it seems likely that there is some meaning to the repetition of three in connection with the plagues of Revelation.

Verses 9-20 - Lamentation for Spiritual and Economic Collapse

As noted earlier in the section on *Revelation Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen ~ Two Views of Babylon*, it is possible to think of this chapter on two levels.

(1) The first level is "spiritual" and is described in the 2nd verse of this chapter – "Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great!" in advance of the actual destruction of the corrupt religious system that Babylon represents (18:4-24).

Other scriptures speak of the abuse of the spirit-led life to "make merchandise of the word of God" (2 Cor. 2:17, cf. John 2:13-16, 2 Pet. 2:2-3, Titus 1:11). Revelation itself speaks of the corruption of teaching by restricting those who can "buy or sell" without the mark of the beast (13:17) and also links "merchants" with the deception of the people (18:23).

(2) The second level of this chapter is "literal" wealth. In the portion of chapter eighteen now under consideration, there is a lengthy list of trade goods. Many, if not all, of these trade goods are connected to symbols used elsewhere in scripture, but it is unlikely that is the intent here. The wide variety of trade goods and luxury items more likely emphasizes the literal wealth of institutional Christianity and particularly the historical leadership of the church.

This is supported by the Old Testament prophetic connections to the city of Tyre, the foremost city of the merchant city-states of the Phoenicians. Tyre seems to represent the economic interests of Babylon and the western nations, and this is emphasized in the prophetic parallels between Ezekiel chapters 26-28 and Isaiah chapter 23 illustrated in the chart on the following page, and supported by the prophetic seventy year period described in Isaiah 23:17.³⁹⁵

³⁹⁵ *Tyre's Seventy Years*

Isaiah chapter 23 describes a period during which Tyre would be forgotten. This period of 70 years coincides historically with the 70 years of ascendancy of literal Babylon over the surrounding nations. It has been suggested that the seventy years during which Tyre is forgotten should have an anti-typical fulfillment, also.

One suggestion is 1917 (the Russian revolution) to 1987 (the beginning of the fall of communism and return to capitalism). Another possibility – a period from 1804 to 1874 – has some basis for dialogue, but it will not be considered in detail, since it is not the preferred choice here.

Revelation 17 and 18	Ezekiel 26-28 / Isaiah 23
<p>“...the great harlot... with whom the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality.” (17:1-2)</p>	<p>“Tyre... will go back to her harlot’s wages, and will play the harlot with all the kingdoms on the face of the earth.” (Isaiah 23:17)</p>
<p>“...the great harlot who sits on many waters... (17:1, 15)</p>	<p>“...O renowned city, which was mighty on the sea... your borders are in the heart of the seas...” (Ezekiel 26:17, 27:4)</p>
<p>“...and upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.” (17:5)</p>	<p>“Also her daughters...” (Ezekiel 26:6)</p>
<p>“To the degree that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously...” (18:7)</p>	<p>“...say to the prince of Tyre... because your heart is lifted up... your heart is lifted up because of your riches...” (28:2, 5)</p>
<p>“And the kings of the earth... will weep and lament over her... standing at a distance for fear... saying, Woe, woe, the great city Babylon... and the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her... the merchants of these things... and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance, and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying... ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth...’ (18:9-11, 15, 17, 19)</p> <p>the merchants of these things, who became rich from her... your merchants were the great men of the earth... (Rev. 18:15, 23)</p>	<p>“...shall not the coastlands shake at the sound of your fall when the wounded groan, when the slaughter occurs in your midst? Then all the princes of the sea will go down from their thrones... they will clothe themselves with trembling... and they will take up a lamentation over you and say to you, ‘How you have perished, O inhabited one, from the seas, O renowned city, which was mighty on the sea...’” (Ezekiel 26:15-17)</p> <p>“When your wares went out from the seas, you satisfied many peoples; with the abundance of your wealth and your merchandise you enriched the kings of earth.” (Ezekiel 27:33)</p> <p>“...Tyre, the bestower of crowns, whose merchants were princes, whose traders were the honored of the earth.” (Isaiah 23:8)</p>

MERCHANDISE & TRADE GOODS (see following chart)	MERCHANDISE & TRADE GOODS (see following chart)
<p>“The merchants of these things... threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, ‘Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth...” (18:15, 19)</p>	<p>“And they [sailors, ships, merchants] will make their voices heard over you and will cry bitterly. They will cast dust on their heads, they will wallow in ashes ...they will weep for you in bitterness of soul with bitter mourning.” (Ezekiel 27:30-31)</p>
<p>“And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “Thus will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence...” (18:21)</p>	<p>“Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up many nations against you, as the sea brings up its waves... and make her a bare rock... when I shall bring up the deep over you, and the great waters will cover you... all your company that is in your midst, will fall into the heart of the seas on the day of your overthrow... now that you are broken by the seas in the depths of the waters... and you will die the death of those who are slain in the heart of the seas.” (Ezekiel 26:3-4, 12, 19, 27:27, 34, 28:8)</p>
<p>“So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.” (18:21)</p>	<p>“I will bring terrors on you, and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again... and you will be no more...” (Ezekiel 26:21, 27:36)</p>
<p>“And the sound of harpists and musicians... will not be heard in you any longer...” (18:22)</p>	<p>“So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more.” (Ezekiel 26:13)</p>

Babylon is also connected to Tyre through the similarities in trade goods ascribed to Tyre in Ezekiel and to Babylon in Revelation and demonstrated in the chart to follow. The two lists have a number of differences, but enough commonalities to at least make the comparison an interesting correlation.

Revelation 18	Ezekiel 27
<p><i>Metals</i> Gold, silver, iron, copper</p>	<p><i>Metals</i> Gold, silver, iron, copper Ezekiel 27 adds: Tin, lead</p>
<p><i>Cloth and manufactured items</i> Fine linen, purple Revelation 18 adds: Wood manufactured items, chariots, silk, scarlet</p>	<p><i>Cloth and manufactured items</i> Fine linen, purple Ezekiel 27 adds: Wrought iron, saddlecloths, embroidered cloth, garments (blue and embroidered), carpets of many colors, tightly wound cords (rope?)</p>
<p><i>Precious Stones and Materials</i> Precious stones, ivory Revelation 18 adds: Pearls, marble, citron wood</p>	<p><i>Precious Stones and Materials</i> Precious stones, ivory (tusks), Ezekiel 27 adds: Ebony, emeralds, coral, rubies</p>
<p><i>Spices, Perfumes, and Foods</i> Spice, wheat, olive oil, wine Revelation 18 adds: Cinnamon, incense, perfume, frankincense, fine flour</p>	<p><i>Spices, Perfumes, and Foods</i> Spices, wheat, oil, wine Ezekiel 27 adds: Cassia, calamus, cakes (pavneg), honey, balm</p>
<p><i>People and Animals</i> Horses, sheep Revelation 18 adds: Cattle, slaves, people's lives</p>	<p><i>People and Animals</i> Horses, lambs Ezekiel 27 adds: Warhorses, mules, rams, goats</p>

<p><i>Additionally, the harlot in Revelation 18:16 is dressed in ~</i></p> <p>Fine linen, purple, scarlet, gold, precious stones, and pearls. (The same list occurs in Revelation 17:4 missing the fine linen but with the golden cup in her hand.)</p>	<p><i>Comparison</i></p> <p>Fine linen – see Ezekiel 27:7</p>
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There are three responses to the destruction of "the great city" of Babylon. The first two are the "kings of the earth" (18:9-10) or governments and the "merchants" and "shipmasters" (18:11-19) or corporations and business people. The loss of stability in society engendered by the destruction of the "great city" is a blow to their interests (cf. 16:19-21). However, the final response is for the people of God to rejoice and not despair at the events transpiring before them (18:20).

Verses 21-24 - The Completeness of the Destruction of Babylon

In verse 21, the totality of Babylon's destruction is described and then expanded in the remaining verses of this chapter. An example of the complete disappearance of Babylon is pictured by the throwing of a "great millstone" into the sea... sure to sink and disappear completely beneath the waves and never be seen again.

Then verses 22-23a provides a list of all the spiritual pretensions of Babylon that will be gone forever – first musicians representing praise and worship, then craftsmen or the theologians of the church, then the sound of a mill or the teachings of the church (providing spiritual "food" to the masses), the light of a lamp or the understanding of the Bible through the spirit of God, and finally the voice of the bridegroom and the bride calling to others to become a part of the people of God.

Verse 23b provides a reminder of the cause of this decimation of the once proud false church – her spiritual "merchants" or clergy became great only because Babylon deceived the nations.

Verse 24 remembers the final historical record that follows Babylon's destruction: wars, crusades, the inquisition, and the blood of those who remained faithful to the simplicity of the apostolic faith at the cost of their lives.

Revelation Chapter Nineteen ~ Marriage, Suppers, and War

A review of the chapters surrounding chapter 19 will help to locate this chapter in the stream of time and assist in defining the events in this chapter:

- Chapter 14 ~ Beginning of the period of harvest and tribulation by an overview of the entire progression.
 - Chapters 15 and 16 ~ An overview of the tribulation period divided into seven “plagues”.
 - Chapter 17 ~ The fall and destruction of Babylon the false church / social and political.
 - Chapter 18 ~ The fall and destruction of Babylon the false church / spiritual and economic.
 - **Chapter 19** ~ The rise of Jesus and the true church and their final victory.
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- Chapters 20-22 ~ The events described above – the harvest period, the great tribulation, the fall of Babylon, and the final victory of Jesus and the church over their enemies – these are followed by the Kingdom of God in heaven and on earth in the final three chapters.

The division by chapters in our modern Bibles doesn’t mean that chapter nineteen should be disassociated from the surrounding context. There is a natural progression from chapter 18 through chapters 20-22 that closes out Revelation.

The rejoicing in the early part of this chapter (19:1-6) is a response to the fall of Babylon seen throughout the previous chapter (18:21-24 in particular). Then there is an immediate contrast to the fall of the corrupt woman called Babylon to the description of the marriage of the true bride of Christ (19:7-10). Then following the victorious war that concludes this chapter (19:11-21) is the inauguration of the Kingdom of God on earth.³⁹⁶ Revelation chapter nineteen is very connected to the surrounding context in Revelation.

³⁹⁶ Also note that of the three enemies united in chapter 16:13 – the dragon, beast, and false prophet – that the beast and false prophet meet their end at the conclusion of chapter nineteen and the dragon meets his end early in chapter twenty – further connecting chapter nineteen to the surrounding context.

Still, we will see that – if you’re going to put a chapter division in the midst of this part of Revelation – there is good reason to place it where it is now. Whether it was understood or not.

When considering this chapter in particular, it is common to distinguish between the first ten verses and the final eleven verses. And in fact, there are two distinct tableaux played out in these two divisions of the chapter. However, these two sections still combine to form one common theme and one common story within the book of Revelation.

The two sections of this chapter (Revelation 19:1-10 and 11-21) illustrate the relationship of Jesus and the church at the time of the close of the great tribulation. These two sections view that relationship from the standpoint of the heavenly scene (19:1-10) and the earthly scene (11-21).

There are several parallels and contrasts between these two sections (vss. 1-10 and 11-21) that show their relationship to each other:

- ❖ Note in the following chart how many symbols and expressions of the first ten verses appear in the last eleven verses, also... either as direct parallels or direct contrasts.
- ❖ In contrast again, note in the list that follows the chart that there is one set of distinctive elements of language included in the first ten verses and missing from the last eleven verses, and all of these expressions in the first ten verses relate to the praise and worship of God.
- ❖ Finally, although not spelled out on the two charts that follow, note how many additional symbols are added into the last eleven verses from elsewhere in prophecy. These are symbols that do not appear in the first ten verses.

The chart and then the list that follow further illustrate first the parallels and then the contrast between the first ten verses when compared to the last eleven verses.

The following chart shows the number of similarities between the two sets of verses in Revelation chapter nineteen.

Verse	QUOTATION Verses 1-10	Verse	QUOTATION Verses 11-21
1	<i>...I heard... a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven...</i>	11	<i>...I saw one³⁹⁷ angel standing in the sun, and he cried with a loud voice...</i>
2	<i>...His judgments are true and righteous...</i>	13	<i>He... is called faithful and true, and in righteousness He judges...</i>
2	<i>...He has avenged the blood of His bondservants on her.</i>	17	<i>He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood..."³⁹⁸</i>
5	<i>... all you his bondservants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.</i>	18	<i>...all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.</i>
6	<i>For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns.</i>	12/16	<i>On his head are many diadems... and on his thigh... King of Kings and Lord of Lords.</i>
8	<i>...to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean...</i>	14	<i>...the armies... in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean...</i>
9	<i>...those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.</i>	17	<i>...come, assemble for the great supper of God.</i>
9-10	<i>...these are the true words of God... I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.</i>	20	<i>...the false prophet who performed the signs... by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image...</i>

³⁹⁷ The NASB margin notes that “an angel” should be literally translated as “one angel”. This forms a contrast with the “great multitude” in the earlier parallel passage.

³⁹⁸ Cf. Revelation 2:1 where Jesus walks

And as mentioned above and by way of contrast with the preceding chart, there are a number of elements of praise in verses 1-10 that are entirely missing from verses 11-21. These elements of praise in verses 1-10 are listed below.

Verse 1 – "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God..."

Verse 3 – "And a second time they said, 'Hallelujah!'"

Verse 4 – "And [they]... fell down and worshiped God... saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!'"

Verse 5 – "...Give praise to our God..."

Verse 6 – "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God almighty reigns!"

Verse 7 – "Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him..."

Verse 10 – "...worship God."

All of these elements are missing from the second part of the chapter (11-21). This combination of parallelism of symbols and language paired with the distinctive worship nature of the first set of verses (1-10) creates a united chapter in two parts.

About Jewish Wedding Arrangements in Antiquity

The protocols for [Jewish] marriage found in the New Testament are very different from the modern conventions of engagement and marriage. Some aspects of this arrangement can be seen in the language of this chapter of Revelation. To put this chapter into context with the language of the time, an abbreviated description of the Jewish arrangement found during the period of the New Testament is described below.

Engagement/Marriage – The father pays (endows) the bride's father and sends it by the hand of the groom and the marriage covenant is formalized. At this point the bride and groom are considered married, even though they are still living separately (cf. 2 Cor. 11:2).

Preparation – the son/groom returns home to prepare a place (home or residence) for the bride (John 14:2).

Bride Leaves for Her New Home – The bride is brought for the wedding and is made ready (John 14:3, Rev. 19:7, 21:2).

Wedding Ceremony and Consummation – The ceremony beginning the feast and honoring the marriage takes place (Rev. 19:7). The marriage is consummated.

Marriage Feast – The marriage feast or reception (Matt. 25:1-13, Rev. 19:9). The feast would commonly last 5-7 days.

At this point we are now prepared to consider the first half of this chapter.

Revelation 19:1-10 ~ Judgment and Marriage

Perhaps, after all the discussion on praise and worship throughout the first ten verses of this chapter, it seems a little odd to include "judgment" in the subtitle for this section of the chapter. Yet the praise to God in these verses is at least partially the result of the fall of Babylon.

It is the contrast between (1) the corrupted woman (17:1-2) that has been removed from the scene and (2) the virtuous bride of Christ who is being feted that results in the enthusiastic praise and worship seen in this chapter's first half.

There are some invited even to this heavenly marriage feast that are not a part of the church / bride (19:9). This summons to the wedding feast may include that class of God's people described elsewhere in scripture as the "great multitude" (Rev. 7:9-17, cf. 19:6) and the "foolish virgins" (Matt. 25:1-13, cf. Ps. 45:13-15, etc.).

Revelation 19:11-21 ~ Jesus and the Church Victorious

The contrast between the events on earth and the events in heaven is emphasized a second time by means of the parallels and contrasts in the two divisions of chapter nineteen. All of heaven rejoices in the marriage of Jesus and the church, but in one of those unique perspectives only found in Revelation, Jesus and the church go forth to conquer their enemies.

And so this chapter closes out the tribulation period with the completion of the church and the final victory over God's enemies. What follows in chapters 20-22 is the kingdom of God and the blessings that will come to all through the peaceful reign of Jesus and the church when Satan is rendered powerless (20:1-6, ff.).

In Rev. 19:11-21, Jesus is crowned with many crowns (lit. diadems) that were previously seen on the heads and horns of dragons and beasts. Now Jesus is King of Kings and Lord of Lords (19:12, 16). The remnants of the old order become an opportunity for a great feast (19:17-18, cf. Ezek. 39:17-22). The blood of the saints that suffered at the hands of Babylon (18:24, 19:2) now adorns the symbolic clothing of Jesus as justice is finally exacted (19:13, cf. 6:9-11). The institutions of the present world are destroyed forever in the lake of fire (19:20, cf. Mal. 4:1, 3). The "former things" pass away forever (21:4).

Revelation Chapters Twenty through Twenty Two ~ the Kingdom of God

The three chapters that close out the Book of Revelation end the book in a glorious series of visions of the future. These visions of a restored paradise form a contrast with the loss of paradise in the opening three chapters of the Bible. This is not accidental, but together they are a beautiful summary of God's plan for all.

After all of the anguish and the promises of the previous chapters, there follows a series of overwhelming visions of an incredible future.

Revelation Chapter 20:1-10 ~ The Millennial Age

These chapters open with the description of a new age that last for a thousand years and restores all of mankind who are willing to perfection. This chapter neatly breaks down into four parts, as follows:

- Verses 1-3 – the Binding of Satan.
- Verses 4-6 – the First Resurrection.
- Verses 7-10 – the Loosing of Satan.
- Verses 20:11-21:1 – the General Resurrection.

However, the description of the 1,000 year reign concludes in verse 10, and the last section listed above – 20:11-21:1 – begins a new vision that retraces the thousand-year kingdom from a new standpoint. That will be covered following this subheading that describes the 1,000 year Kingdom Age.

Verses 1-3 describe the binding of Satan "...so that he would not deceive the nations any longer..." While it is common for many Christians to describe the church in the present as the kingdom of God on earth, this is often a circumscribed view that diminishes the kingdom on earth to a shadow kingdom. It is true that the church of the present time represents the kingdom of heaven while on earth, but clearly there is an earthly kingdom coming, a kingdom in which Satan is bound and the nations are no longer deceived. That time is not yet.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁹ Note the dragon is still unchained as late as the sixth plague (16:13). Dragon destroyed Is. 27:1, Ps. 74:14, Ezek. 29:3-5, Job.41:1 ff.

The description of the binding of Satan occurs in five steps:

"And he

- [1] laid hold of the dragon,⁴⁰⁰ the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and
- [2] bound him for a thousand years; and he
- [3] threw him into the abyss, and
- [4] shut it and
- [5] sealed it over him...

so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed..."

Interestingly, these five humiliations of Satan are the apparent response of God to Satan's five boast in Isaiah 14:13-14:

- [1] "I will ascend to heaven;
- [2] "I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
- [3] "And I will sit on the mount of the assembly in the recesses [sides] of the north.
- [4] "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
- [5] " I will make myself like the Most High."

Verses 4-6 describe the resurrection and reward of the church.⁴⁰¹ Most of it seems fairly straightforward. In 20:4, thrones are made ready for the saints (cf. 5:10) and the time comes for them to judge the world (1 Cor. 6:2) and they are brought to life to reign with Christ. In 20:6 they are not only reigning kings, but also priests that intercede on behalf of the people to help them along they highway that leads to holiness (Is. 35:8-10).

However, there is a problem with 20:5. As it appears in a majority of translations, it makes little sense. "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection."

Clearly the rest of the dead coming to life a thousand years later is not the first resurrection. It is a later resurrection.

⁴⁰⁰ It is fitting that the "dragon" is the characteristic of Satan listed first in this verse, since the other two allies of Rev. 16:13 – the beast and the false prophet – are dealt with just a couple verses earlier. Cf. 19:20, 20:2, and 20:10.

⁴⁰¹ The verse specifically refers to those who are "beheaded" because of their witness for Jesus, etc. Since it makes little sense to believe that only those who are literally and physically "beheaded" reign with Christ, there must be something more involved. The symbolism of being "beheaded" is not strictly foreign to language elsewhere in the New Testament. For example, Col. 1:18 describes Jesus as the "head of the body, the church."

If the wording is correct as it appears in most translations, then the rest of the world of mankind who have already died in unbelief will have no opportunity in the future. The Millennial Age would be (at best) only for those who survive Armageddon, and not for those who died in ignorance and unbelief beforehand. Some would have an opportunity to know God in a way that the world in previous ages never got to experience. And it is precisely because of this scripture that many Christians embrace an understanding of the Day of Judgment that is limited to merely rehearsing sentences already imposed upon the world

However, in this instance there is a mitigating factor. Later manuscripts and some translations of the New Testament add words to the scriptures that are not contained in many of the oldest manuscripts. Textual criticism evaluates these different manuscripts in an attempt to determine which verses are legitimate, and which are not.⁴⁰² This is done by looking at the age of the manuscript (the older the manuscript, the more reliable it is likely to be), and also at the “family” of manuscript (those families of manuscripts closer to Palestine, i.e., the Syriac, the Coptic, and some Greek manuscripts are considered more reliable than those from further away, i.e., the Latin and some other Greek manuscripts, etc.).

When we look at the early manuscripts of the New Testament, we find that many of them (the oldest “families” of manuscripts that are closest to the area of Asia Minor and the Middle East) read quite differently for Revelation 20:5. Beginning with the end of Revelation 20:4, these manuscripts read as follows with the parts of verse 5 they omit enclosed by brackets: “...and they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. [The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed.] This is the first resurrection.”

The actual words of the Apostle John would appear to read much differently than the common version. And this is supported by the context. If the “rest of the dead” have a later resurrection than the church who come to life and reign with Christ at the close of verse four, how can “the rest of the dead” have the *first* resurrection in verse five? But if we omit those words, then the passage makes sense – “...they came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. *This* is the first resurrection.”⁴⁰³ This is earliest reliable manuscript record of the passage (before what was probably a marginal note and/or copyist error crept into the text).

⁴⁰² Not to be confused with efforts like the “Jesus Seminar” or other secular arguments that rely on opinion for deleting portions of the gospels and other NT writings rather than upon the manuscript evidence.

⁴⁰³ As previously noted, when this chapter of Revelation is structured, verses 4-6 are a description of the first resurrection of the church and verses 20:11-21:1 are a description of the general resurrection.

Verses 7-10 describe the loosing of Satan. At this point a progression can be seen in the first ten verses of this chapter.

(1) The beginning of the Millennial Age when Satan is bound in verses 1-3 and the nations are no longer deceived.

(2) The reign of Christ and the church in verses 4-6 throughout the 1,000 year Messianic Age.

(3) The loosing of Satan in verses 7-10 at the close of the millennial kingdom as a final trial.⁴⁰⁴

The loosing of Satan suggests a final test upon mankind. He attempts to deceive the nations. The reference to "God and Magog" connects this (final) battle against God to a running series of battles throughout history and prophecy. See the box on the next page for a detailed discussion of the historic and symbolic significance of these names.

One frequently misunderstood element of these verses is the phrase "the number of them is like the sand of the seashore." This is sometimes understood as the number of those deceived by Satan, but it is more likely that this clause is describing the number of the nations (peoples) and not the number of the deceived. That the nations are the object of this numbering is suggested by the use of the same term in the covenant promise to Abraham:

"...I will multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore... In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:17-18)

Here in Genesis all the nations – also described inclusively in Revelation as being "in the four corners of the earth" – are represented as sand on the seashore. They are also represented as stars of the heavens, and this gives us a further clue to the meaning of the Abrahamic promise. The promise would be made with two classes of people pictured as "the stars in the heavens" or the church in heaven and "the sand on the seashore" or the peoples of the earth.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ Note that Satan is loosed and the devil is thrown into the "lake of fire" while the "dragon" (20:1-3) does not appear again.

⁴⁰⁵ An interesting application of this promise can be found when it is passed on to Isaac and Jacob. Whenever the promise is made regarding Isaac (a type of the church - Galatians 4:28) in Genesis 15:4-5, 26:1-4, only the "stars of heaven" are mentioned. And, whenever the promise is made in relation to the land of Israel or to Jacob (who pictures Israel) in Genesis 13:16, 28:14, 32:12, Numbers 23:10, Isaiah 10:20-22, only the "sand on the seashore" or the "dust of the earth" is mentioned. Cf. also Daniel 12:2-3 where both dust and stars are brought together again, and Revelation 20:8 where the kingdom has extended from Israel throughout the world (Jeremiah 3:17, Zechariah 8:20-23) and all the nations are now described as the "sand on the seashore" for multitude.

The Four Defeats of Gog

The name Gog is derived from the king(s) of the Amalekites called Agag.⁴⁰⁶ The identification of Agag (Gog) with the king of the Amalekites is found as early as the period of the wilderness wanderings in Numbers 24:7 ~ “Water shall flow from his (Israel’s) buckets, and his seed shall be by many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.”

Since this name is given to us centuries before King Agag is defeated by King Saul (1 Samuel 15:1-33), it may be that Agag (Gog) is a title of the Amalekite kings or nobility rather than a proper name. The reference to Haman as an “Agagite” or descendant of Agag in Esther (3:1,10 and 8:3) suggests that Haman was more than just an Amalekite... that he may have been of noble blood.

This connection between Haman and Gog is further corroborated in Ezekiel 39:11. The reference to the valley of “Hamon-gog” connects Haman the Agagite (or “Gogite”) with the defeat of the forces that come against Israel in Ezekiel 38.

There are a number of confrontations between Israel and the Amalekites – either singly or in confederation with others (Exodus 17:8-16, Numbers 14:43-45, Judges 6:3, 33, 7:12, 1 Samuel 30:1-20, 1 Chronicles 4:43, Psalm 83:7). However, there are only four confrontations specifically between Agag/Gog and the people of God:

- The initial defeat of Agag and the Amalekites by King Saul (1 Samuel 15:1-33).
- The defeat and death of Haman the Agagite (Gog-ite) and his ten sons by Mordecai and Esther (Esther 7:10, 9:5-10), suggesting a larger prophetic picture may be buried within the story of Esther.
- The defeat of Gog and the armies that come against Israel at the climax of the great tribulation (Ezekiel 38:2-4,18, 39:1-6,11).
- The final destruction of the opponents of the kingdom rule (Gog) at the end of the 1,000 year reign of Christ and the church (Rev. 20:7-9).

The first recorded battle between Israel and the Amalekites results in a prophecy that “the Lord will have war against Amalek from generation to generation” (Exodus 17:16). Elsewhere in the early history of Israel, Amalek is referred to as “the first of the nations” (Numbers 24:20). This may mean first in the sense of chief or most powerful at that time rather than literally the first nation (or gentile people) in history.

This prophecy of war "from generation to generation" suggests that the drawn out series of confrontations with Agag/Gog⁴⁰⁷ really pictures the battle line between (1) the Kingdom of God represented by the people of God and (2) earthly human government represented in the Agagite (Gogite) kings of Amalek... the "first of the nations".

⁴⁰⁶ A study of the translation details of Haman/Hamon and Agag/Gog from the study notes on the Book of Ezekiel identifying Agag and Gog is lengthy and not included here. Agag and Gog are either the same name or similar forms of the same name.

⁴⁰⁷ The battles are four in number... perhaps a foreshortened version of forty picturing the judgment upon those nations and people who oppose God’s just and peaceful rule (Psalm 72).

The location of this battle is described as "the broad plain of the earth" in 20:9. This forms an interesting contrast with the previous verse that speaks of the nations (peoples) "in the four corners of the earth."

This verse becomes a little more complicated when the investigation of the Greek word *platos* (Gr. πλατος -ους, το) reveals that this word in this verse can be translated in two different ways:

- (1) As the "broad plain" of the earth in many translations including the NASB and KJV.
- (2) As the "breadth" of the earth in many other translations including the NIV and in most Greek-English Interlinear translations.

Most language aids translate this word in Biblical norm as *breadth* or *width* (in the sense of a great extent).⁴⁰⁸ This translation for the word in 20:9 is built on two points that are assumed to be limiting factors on the meaning here in Revelation:

- This Greek word is used two other places in the New Testament (including Revelation) where it clearly means width or a wide space (Eph. 3:18, Rev. 21:16).
- In the verse under consideration (20:9) the broad expanse is set in the context of nations in the four corners of the earth (20:7)... also indicating width.

However, this Greek word has a larger meaning than width and breath. It also includes the thought of a *plane surface* as in a flat area.⁴⁰⁹ Simply because the word has a more confined use in two other Bible verses should not limit the translation possibilities. And similarly, this translation has support from immediate context:

- Along with the following expressions "the beloved city" and the "camp of the saints" it defines a location for the supporters of Satan. Not a literal "broad plain" any more than the "beloved city" is a literal city (cf. Rev. 21:2, etc.), but a symbolic representation of the location where the conflict occurs.
- The "four corners of the earth" forms a contrast with the "broad plain" rather than a corollary. The "four corners" represent everywhere throughout the earth (the farthest reaches), whereas the "broad plain" represents a more specific location where the conflict takes place.

⁴⁰⁸ E.g. *Thayer's Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 17th Zondervan printing 1976, p. 515.

⁴⁰⁹ *Liddell and Scott – A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1940 ed. with 1996 supplement. (p. 1413). Oxford: Clarendon Press

"And they came up on the broad plain of the earth..." is language that indicates movement to the scene where the conflict occurs.

So, yes, of course... does this make any difference or mean anything important?

A broader meaning of the word allows for a translation that describes geography. It's a broad plain with none of the mountains, valleys, seas, or rivers described elsewhere in Revelation. This would suggest the type of society that will exist at the end of the 1,000 year messianic reign, after humanity has been restored to the perfection of Adam in the Garden of Eden (cf. Heb. 2:5-8, 1 Cor. 15:24-26, Rom. 8:19-23). All will be equal, and there will be no poor, no downtrodden, no castes, no racial disparity, no aristocracy, and no one ruling over another through abusive power, or social status, or wealth, or religion. Isaiah 40:4-5 describes it this way:

"Let every valley be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; and let the rough ground become a plain, and the rugged terrain a broad valley; then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see it together; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

In Isaiah the 35th chapter, a similar but different approach to this change in society includes the description of a highway leading to holiness. Consider one thoughtful translation of verse eight in that chapter:

*"And a highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called the way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those; the wayfaring men, yea [yes even] fools, shall not err therein."*⁴¹⁰

This road in Isaiah 35 is a highway for the exhausted and the feeble (35:3), a highway for the anxious (35:4), and a highway for the unclean and the fools (35:8). It does not favor power or social position.

In this manner the future kingdom on earth is much like the ideals of the church in the present, and even more so when realized fully in the kingdom of heaven. In the church "...everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 14:11).⁴¹¹

⁴¹⁰ Cohen, A. ed. (1983). *The Soncino Books of the Bible – Isaiah*. (p. 165). Soncino Press: London/New York. See also [1] Watts, J.D.W. (1987). *Word Biblical Commentary: Isaiah* (Vol. 25, 1st edition). (p. 5). Waco, TX: Word Books, [2] *Twenty-Four Books of the Holy Scriptures*, trans. Isaac Leeser, and [3] others.

⁴¹¹ Cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-29, 12:12-27, Gal. 3:28, Matt. 19:30 for other examples of this in the Christian church.

The society that Satan is confronted with once Christ and the church have completed their work is a far different society from the past. And this leveling process may possibly provide the explanation of Satan's ploy to challenge this new society built on love and justice and peace. He leads his forces against:

- ❖ The "beloved city" or the New Jerusalem (21:2, 24-27) that represents the heavenly rule of Jesus and the church.
- ❖ The "camp of the saints" that pictures the earthly representatives⁴¹² of the Kingdom of God.

These symbols represent the actual government of an earth with equality in society. It may be that Satan's challenge is that the time has come for the earth to rule itself, and that the kingdom has overstayed its welcome.

Once again there is a tendency to assign a literal interpretation of fire and torment to verses 9b and 10. As usual, there are multiple problems with that style of interpretation:

- Revelation is a book of symbols, and elsewhere in Revelation and other books of the Bible the fire is not literal. Note for example that just one chapter later the "lake of fire" is defined as "the second death" (21:8).
- Fire comes down from heaven and devours those who follow Satan. They are not preserved in torment, but instead they are destroyed completely.
- For review of the word translated "torment", see the previous discussion on Revelation chapter fourteen in the section *Special Note on Verses 14:10-11*.
- Note also that the torment also applies to the beast and the false prophet as well as Satan. Taking the beast as the most obvious example of the problem this creates, there seems to be little sense in physically tormenting a symbolic beast with seven heads and ten horns that receives power from a dragon that also has seven heads and ten horns and casts a third of the stars of heaven to the earth (12:3-4, 13:1-2, etc.).
- Eternal torment also implies that evil and suffering will be preserved in some form throughout eternity, a theological tradition that runs contrary to many scriptures (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:25-26, Rev. 21:4, etc.).

⁴¹² Cf. Heb. 11:13-16, 35, 39-40, Ps. 45:16, etc.

Revelation Chapter 20:11-21:1 ~ The Great White Throne Judgment

This section completes the four pieces of this chapter... the binding and loosing of Satan and the first and general resurrections.

That there is a general resurrection of the world is clearly stated elsewhere in the New Testament:

"But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; having this hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." (Acts 24:14-15)

"Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil to a resurrection of judgment [trial with outcome yet to be decided⁴¹³]." (John 5:28-29)

This white throne judgment is not the resurrection of the church. It is the resurrection of "the dead, the great and the small" (20:12) or all mankind at a time "when the earth experiences [God's] judgments" and "the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (Is. 26:9). This is not only a time of trial and testing, but the scriptures say it is also a time of rejoicing:

"Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all it contains; let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy before the Lord, for He is coming; for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness." Psalm 96:11-13

"And He will judge between the nations, and render decisions for many peoples; and they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war." Isaiah 2:2-4

So consider this great judgment scene in something other than the terror-filled vision of much of medieval theology. It is a time of trial for the world, but also a time of blessing and restoration, as well (Acts 3:20-21, Ps. 72:1-8, 19, Num. 14:21).

⁴¹³ The Greek word translated judgment in this verse is not *krima* or the word for a negative verdict and sentence. Instead, the Greek word for judgment in this verse is *krisis* and incorporates both a trial and an indeterminate verdict in the full sense of the word.

Daniel and Revelation

Some of the language of this chapter is picked up from Daniel chapter seven. That chapter of Daniel also describes thrones (7:9), God taking his seat on his throne (7:9), multitudes standing before the throne (7:10),⁴¹⁴ books being opened (7:10) judgment for and perhaps by the saints (7:10, 22, and 26), and the saints reigning (7:22). Other passages from Daniel can also be found in this chapter such as Dan. 2:35/Rev. 20:11 and Dan. 12:1/Rev. 20: 12 & 15.

The Great White Throne

The judgment scene begins with the vision of "a great white throne and Him who sat upon it..." The throne is not described earlier in Revelation chapter four and elsewhere, but here it is described as "great" and "white". The greatness of God's throne requires no explanation and the whiteness illustrates the purity of God's heart and the rightness of His justice.

It is difficult to realize the power of this symbol in our modern age. At the time the New Testament is written and throughout most of history, earthly kings arbitrarily and often unjustly exercised the power of life and death over their subjects. However, this is not the imagery of the New Testament itself. The Apostle Paul says, "...let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16)." This is a radically different prospect from an audience before the human kings of earth.

Heavens and Earth and Sea

As noted in the heading of this subsection, the chapter division appears to be off by one verse. There are three figurative elements used in this passage. The heavens and earth "flee away" and are found no longer (20:11) and are replaced with "a new heaven and a new earth" (21:1) after the previous ones pass away. The sea also is mentioned as giving up the dead within it (20:13), but it is not replaced at all. At the close of this passage "there is no longer any sea" (21:1). The language and symbols bracket the beginning and end of this passage and define its length.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Matt. 25:31-46 where the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats describes the judgment of – not the church – but the nations as a whole. While the lessons of this parable are universal and certainly apply to the past and present as well as the future, nevertheless this is a parable that applies at some point *after* Christ returns (Matt. 25:31) and it gives us some idea of the nature of the requirements of the Messianic Kingdom. It will be expected of the people of the world to pitch in and assist in the reconstruction of the world and the preparations for the billions returning to life. [Additionally, note that the fire in verse 41 is no more literal than the sheep and goats.]

The significance here is the replacing of the old social order of things (the heavens of spiritual and earthly power and the earth of established society) with the new kingdom authority. The symbolic sea is not replaced since it represents an element of the social order – the restless majority of peoples without significant power in this world – that will no longer exist after the kingdom work is complete. All three of these symbols are discussed and demonstrated in *Appendix B ~ Bible Symbology in Prophecy*.

The Book of Life and the Other Books

The discussion on the various "books" in 20:12 is confusing without close examination. The "books" have to be differentiated in order to understand this verse.

- ❖ First there are "books" (in the plural) that are opened. In the previous commentary on Revelation chapter ten, the question of the "little book that is open" in that chapter is discussed in relation to the "books" that are "opened" here in chapter twenty. The "little book" is the book of Daniel that is opened in chapter ten (compare that chapter to Daniel chapter twelve).

The "books" that are "opened" here in this chapter are all the books of the Bible. In that future kingdom these books – which have blessed the church so much in the present time (Acts 2:16-21) – will be opened to all the world when the spirit of God is poured out on all mankind (Joel 3:28-29). When Satan is bound that he cannot deceive the nations – anyone – any longer until the completion of the thousand-year kingdom (20:3), then the books are opened.

- ❖ The second book to be opened is "another book" or "the book of life." This book is in God's possession and has never been in mankind's possession, but each individual gets to determine if his or her name remains written in this book. Fortunately, the book is held in the hands of the one who sits upon a *white* throne and who welcomes back the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32).

Works Judged by the Things Written

One frequently overlooked pronouncement in this passage is the phrase "...and the dead were judged from things which were written in the books, according to their deeds."

The church of the present time receives salvation through faith and grace (Eph. 2:7-10). It's not that works aren't relevant, but the covenant with the church is based on faith.⁴¹⁵

Yet this is not the case with the world of mankind in the Millennial Age. Instead they will have the opportunity to be uplifted to actual perfection and holiness along that highway to holiness mentioned a little bit earlier (Is. 35:8). This is the same type of language also noted in an earlier footnote in this chapter on the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. Finally, it is also the same thought in the language of Revelation "...and the dead were judged... according to their deeds." There could be no clearer indication that the church are not subjects of this judgment, nor that those being judged were ever asked to become part of the church.

And the standard is nothing short of perfection, because their works are judged by God's perfect standard. They are judged "from the things which were written in the books" that are now opened to the world.

Death and Hades

Early on in Revelation, Jesus describes himself in possession of the keys to death and hades (1:18). Now those keys are being put to use.

Death and hades are probably two sides of the same subject divided by the moment of death itself. Death suggests the present state of the living who are under the sentence of death and dying even in life (Rom. 1:18, 5:12, 1 Cor. 15:21-22). Hades suggests those already buried in the grave.⁴¹⁶

Whatever the case, these are both destroyed in the lake of fire. This is the end of death in Adam (Rom. 5:12-19, 1 Cor. 15:22) leaving only the "second death" or the second time the death sentence is enacted (Rev. 21:8, cf. Jude 12) with a final annihilation. There is really no other way to interpret this verse, since it makes little sense to throw death or eternal torment into eternal torment.

And once this point is passed there is a new world without death. A new "heavens" and a new "earth" and the "sea" of troubled humanity is no more when all of mankind is at peace.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. Galatians chapter three for Paul's extensive argument on this point.

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Acts 2:27, 31 where Jesus is not left in the grave to suffer corruption of the flesh.

Revelation 21:2-8 ~ The Inauguration of the Kingdom of God

The New Jerusalem is not a literal city. It is a bride (21:2), a cube (21:16), and is clearly not the present city of Jerusalem since it comes down from heaven (3:12, 21:10). The city is "made ready as a bride" and thereby evoking the language of 19:7-8 "...and His bride has made herself ready... clothed in fine line... the righteous acts of the saints."

The Apostle Paul describes a "present" Jerusalem (Gal. 4:25) that corresponds to the literal city and a Jerusalem from "above" (Gal. 4:26, Heb. 12:22-23) that represents the church and particularly the heavenly government of the world. It is this government represented in the bride that now comes "down out of heaven" to earth to begin the messianic kingdom of God on earth. God through His agencies now comes to dwell among men so that the entire world – living and dead now that death and hades have given them up – may become His people. This is just as would be expected from the God who goes looking for the lost sheep, the lost coin, and waits and longs for the prodigal son to return home (Luke chapter fifteen).

The experience of the world is reversed. The lessons from God's permission of evil have taught mankind the consequences of sin. War, cruelty, starvation, poverty, prejudice, oppression, disease and pain, mental anguish... all of these things will be done away with in the kingdom. "And He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."

Perhaps it will be well to repeat a passage regarding the time of judgment from a few pages earlier:

"Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all it contains; let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy before the Lord, for He is coming; for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness." Psalm 96:11-13

Still other scriptures also describe the dramatic changes that will take place in the world. John A Meggison has summarized some of these passages in Isaiah beautifully:

"[This is] in harmony with the prophecies [of Isaiah]. Isa. 29:18 – 'In that day shall the deaf hear the words of this Book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out

of obscurity and out of darkness'; Isa. 29:24 – 'They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine'; Isa. 25:7 – 'He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations'; Isa. 57:14 – 'And shall say, Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling block out of the way of my people'; Isa. 62:10 – 'Prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway, gather out the stones, lift up a standard for the people'; Isa. 28:16 – 'Judgment will I lay to the line and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies and the water shall overflow the hiding place.' Satan will be bound so he can deceive the nations no more (Rev. 20:2-3)."⁴¹⁷

And now that mankind can see a world being re-made into paradise, and now that they can contrast a world in which good predominates rather than evil, they are able to make an intelligent choice on whom they will serve. In the millennial kingdom this choice can be made with freedom, but it can then also be made with the full understanding of the two paths that are open before them. They will make their choice for life or death knowing who God really is. This is wonderfully described in an Old Testament passage from which Rev. 21:4 is partially drawn:

"He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord God will wipe tears away from all faces, and He will remove the reproach of His people from all the earth; for the Lord has spoken. And it will be said in that day, 'behold, this is our God for whom we have waited that He might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation.'" (Is. 25:8-9)

Revelation 21:5-8 describes these blessings and the choices offered to mankind. All things will be made new and beautiful. All things. And these words are faithful and true. And all who choose – presumably the significant majority of mankind – will drink of the water of life and be satisfied with its refreshment. Unlike the church of the present time which pays a price for its great privileges (Luke 9:23, 14:26-29), the world will partake of the water of life without any cost. Every individual will still free to choose to be in relationship with God and with their fellow men and women... or they can choose a second death without a resurrection.

⁴¹⁷ Meggison, J.A. (2005). *Notes from the Bible of John A. Meggison*, 2nd Ed. pg. 317. Chicago Book Republishing Committee.

Revelation 21:9-27 ~ The Kingdom Government and Sovereigns

The discussion of the kingdom government and rulers represented through the New Jerusalem that follows is broken down into four parts:

- (1) An overview / general description of the New Jerusalem.
- (2) The New Jerusalem in relation to Old Testament and connections to the twelve tribes of Israel and to the breastplate of the High Priest.
- (3) The dimensions of the New Jerusalem and their numerical applications.
- (4) The concluding passage as the people of earth enter the city.

(1) The General Description of the New Jerusalem

Verse 10 – the holy city is seen in the spirit from a great and high mountain. Contrast this with the vision of the corrupt city Babylon which is also seen in the spirit, but from a wilderness condition outside the city (17:3). The difference in vantage points represents the respective vantage points of people of God during the Gospel Age (wilderness) and in the Millennial Age (great high mountain).

Verses 11, 14, 18-21 – the material that makes up the city includes precious stones, pearls, and a bright, clear, and transparent material.

In verse 11 the expression "crystal-clear" in the NASB means "to be of crystalline brightness and transparency, to shine like a crystal."⁴¹⁸ In verses 18 and 21 the word translated "glass" in the NASB is fairly accurate and "primarily denoted anything transparent, e.g., a transparent stone or gem, hence, a lens of crystal, a glass..."⁴¹⁹ In verse 21 the word for "transparent" in the NASB means essentially just that "...translucent or transparent."^{420, 421} In all of this language the thought of brightness, clarity, and purity is emphasized. Outstanding characteristics of God's kingdom are honesty, integrity, knowledge, and truthfulness. Transparency.

⁴¹⁸ The original word is *krustallizo* (Gr. κρυσταλλίζω). See Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under "crystal", B.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company.

⁴¹⁹ The original word is *hualos* (Gr. υαλος). See Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under "glass, glassy", A.1.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company.

⁴²⁰ See Vine, W. E. (1940). *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1966 ed.). (Under "dawn", A.2.Note.). Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H Revell Company.

⁴²¹ There is way too much discussion by skeptics regarding the expression in verse 21 that "...the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass." Since gold is not transparent, this is pointed to as a scientific flaw in the Bible.

There are several obvious issues with this particular type of rationalization: (1) John the writer would never have seen such a thing as transparent gold, nor is it reasonable that he would assume its existence. (2) It doesn't actually say the gold was transparent. It is not a comment on the transparency of the gold but the purity of the gold... pure like transparent glass. (3) It's in Revelation. There are beasts with seven heads and ten horns, and the concern is this verse in 21:21? If 21:21 actually suggests such a thing as transparent gold, this verse would still not be exceptional. It's a book of symbols. Yes, it is my friends. It says so in the book. It's a book of symbols. Really.

Verses 18 and 21 describe the city and the thoroughfare as "pure gold" using a symbol for divinity identical to that represented in the gold of the innermost precincts of the tabernacle and temple.

Verses 11, 14, and 18-20 mention various precious stones that seem to represent specific character aspects of the kingdom, perhaps such as the "fruits of the spirit" (Gal. 5:22-23) and the characteristics of "wisdom from above" (James 3:17).

Verse 21 describes gates made of a single pearl. The pearl is a beautiful precious gem that results initially from an irritation to the mollusk that forms it. Thus the entrances to the city illustrate the lessons learned from the permission of evil and the beauty of character that results from a healthy response.

Verses 12-17, 21-22 – describe the architectural features of the New Jerusalem. The city wall's length, width and height are all equal meaning that the city is a cube. Dimensions are given at 12,000 stadia in each direction. The wall is also given a thickness dimension of 144 cubits. There are twelve gates, three on each side facing one of the four points of the compass. There are also twelve foundation stones. The gates (with names of the twelve tribes of Israel) and foundation stones (with names of the twelve apostles) each have those names written on them (one name per gate or stone would be the assumption). The city has a street (literally a "broad way") but no temple (lit. sanctuary).

It's worth stopping to note those last couple points since they won't be considered further in these notes.

(1) The city has a "broad way" or a broad thoroughfare that runs through the city. Contrast this with the words of Jesus in Matt. 7:13-14:

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it."

Clearly these verses are a time-limited passage meant for the present Christian Age. In the messianic kingdom the gates will be flung open wide and a broad way, a highway, will be available for all the world of the living and dead to walk.

(2) The city has no sanctuary – no place to meet with fallen mankind – because God and Jesus are now the sanctuary. They meet with the church directly without

even the need for an advocate (1 Jo. 2:1-2). And Jesus and the church are engaged in bringing the world of mankind – all who are willing – to the same place.

(2) The New Jerusalem, the Tribes of Israel, and the Breastplate of the High Priest

The description of the New Jerusalem in the 21st chapter of Revelation contains a striking number of similarities to the breastplate of the high priest described in the 28th chapter of Exodus. For example, despite questions regarding the identification of specific gemstones and tribes, there are twelve gemstones in each instance (breastplate gemstones or New Jerusalem foundation stones). Most of them seem to have counterparts in the other list.

However, before proceeding to a comparison of the breastplate to the New Jerusalem, a comparison of the twelve tribes listed in Revelation 7:4-8 to the twelve gemstones of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:19-20 – at least as they are translated in the NASB – is worth considering first:

Tribes of Revelation 7	Gemstones of Revelation 21
Judah	Jasper
Reuben	Sapphire
Gad	Chalcedony
Asher	Emerald
Naphtali	Sardonyx
Manasseh	Sardius
Simeon	Chrysolite
Levi	Beryl
Issachar	Topaz
Zebulon	Chrysoprase
Joseph	Jacinth
Benjamin	Amethyst

One common view is that the precious stones that provide the twelve foundations for the New Jerusalem (including the foundation stones) and the twelve stones on the breastplate of the high priest represent beauties of character and fruits of the spirit of the church individually and collectively.



Traditional representation of Aaron's breastplate. The Bible does not record the order of the names to be inscribed on the stones, so that identification of a tribe with a certain stone is guesswork.

Breastplate of the High Priest Showing the Possible Appearance of the Gemstones

Further, that the meaning of the names of the tribes – with the name of one tribe written on one of the gemstones – are connected to the characteristics of the gemstones. Say, for example, that the first stone of the breastplate really is a ruby and the tribe named on that gemstone is Reuben, which is a common assumption. Reuben means "behold, a son" and he is the firstborn of the twelve sons. His stone is the ruby (often a "blood-red" color) that can be associated with blood and sacrifice. Putting the name and stone together means that the first stone and name on the breastplate connect the name of the first-born son with sacrifice and forgiveness.

This subject seems like it should be fruitful ground in lessons for the Christian. Unfortunately, the identification of some of the stones is difficult for both the breastplate and for the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. Therefore, the

subject of the correlation between names and gemstones will be set to the side at this point.

However, the relationship between the breastplate and the New Jerusalem does have a more immediately obvious and straightforward correlation than the significance of the gemstones. The following is a comparison⁴²² of the breastplate of the high priest (Ex. 28:15-30) to the description of the symbolic New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10- 21):

- ❖ Both the breastplate and the New Jerusalem are said to be “foursquare”.
- ❖ The breastplate is set with 12 precious gemstones. The New Jerusalem’s foundations are 12 precious gemstones.
- ❖ The 12 stones of the breastplate were in four rows of three stones each. The New Jerusalem has 12 gates with three gates on each of the four sides.
- ❖ The 12 stones of the breastplate had the names of the 12 tribes engraved on them. The 12 gates of the New Jerusalem also have the names of the 12 tribes on them.
- ❖ The breastplate stones were set in gold. The “street” and walls of the New Jerusalem are pure gold.
- ❖ The high priest wore the breastplate as part of the “garments of glory and beauty”. The New Jerusalem represents the church in glory and beauty.
- ❖ The breastplate was the means of judgment in Israel. The New Jerusalem will be the vehicle of judgment for the world in the future messianic kingdom (21:27).

The similarities between the breastplate of the Old Testament and the New Jerusalem of the New Testament cannot be accidental. And incidentally the connection of the “garments of glory and beauty” of the high priest to the time of the messianic kingdom is established.

As a final side note on this topic, the question might arise why the reference is to twelve tribes of “Israel” on the gates in Rev. 21:12 (and the numbering of the names of the twelve literal tribes in Rev. 7:4-8 in the same numbers connected to the New Jerusalem dimensions). Since the New Jerusalem is identified with the church – the bride of Christ – it seems out of place to find references to the twelve tribes of natural Israel in relation to the New Jerusalem.

⁴²² The list above is based primarily on the notes of Stanley Jeuck.

Yet, consider how the apostles describe a “spiritual Israel” that is frequently pictured by the literal nation of Israel. This relationship between the nation of Israel and the church is discussed in some detail in *Appendix K ~ Natural and Spiritual Israel*, where the prophetic and symbolic applications are applied to both the “house” of Moses / Israel and the “house” of Christ / the church (Heb. 3:1-6).

(3) The Shape and Dimensions of the New Jerusalem (21:15-17)

Introductory Observation – From the description, clearly the New Jerusalem is not a literal city since: it is a *bride* (21:2, cf. 19:7-8), it comes *down from heaven* (21:2, cf. Gal. 4:26), and it is *never night* there (21:5). The dimensions of the city only serve to put an emphatic exclamation point to this observation.

The dimensions of the city are described as “according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements” (21:17). Two points are made through this odd description of the system of measurements:

(1) The measurements are from a measuring system in common use by humans. They are not some supernatural and indecipherable units of measure.

(2) They suggest a spiritual dimension, also. That is, the point of the numbers is not the literal dimensions that result, but the spiritual significance of the numbers. In other words, the literal measurements have a symbolic meaning.

The angel is prepared to measure three elements of the New Jerusalem (21:15) – “the city, and its gates, and its wall.” Oddly, no dimensions are ever given for the gates. There is no apparent explanation for this in the immediate context, although perhaps the three things similarly measured elsewhere (11:1) may provide a clue.

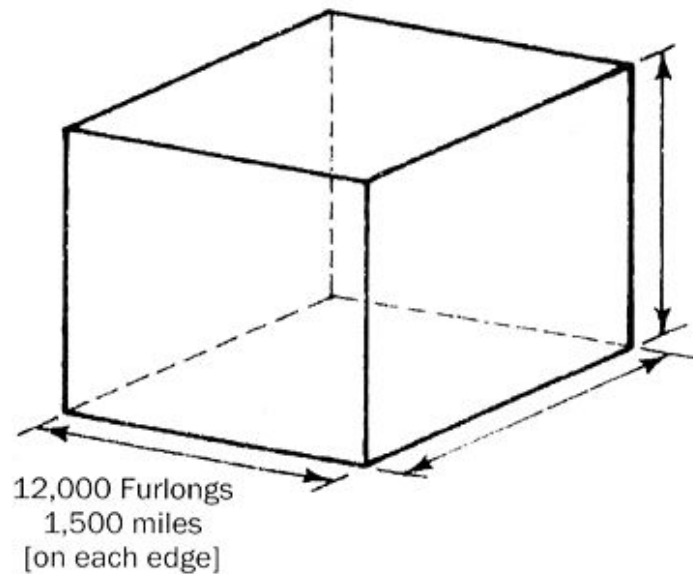
The minimal description of the dimensions of the New Jerusalem is fascinating for so limited a subject. The first thing of note is that the New Jerusalem is a cube. “And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width... its length and width and height are equal.” (21:16). Attention is immediately drawn to this odd fact,⁴²³ and curiosity regarding the meaning of this description is aroused.

The first thing of note is the length of each side or edge. Some of the modern translations have clouded the significance of this measurement by converting it

⁴²³ Building on previous discussion, this odd vision of the New Jerusalem as a cube only serves to emphasize the city's symbolic nature.

from the original units of measure (stadia) into modern measurements (miles). While no doubt trying to be helpful, the purpose of the dimensions is obfuscated and becomes clarified only when the original units of measure of restored.

Each of the edges is 12,000 stadia in length. This means that the length of all 12 edges added together X 12,000 stadia per edge is 144,000 stadia total.



Already mentioned is the idea that the numeral 144,000 from the twelve tribes (7:1-8) represents spiritual Israel or the church as Israel and the Jewish people do elsewhere in Revelation. These are the same twelve tribes whose names are written on the gates of the city (21:12) and the same number of 12,000 per tribe (7:4) represented through each of the twelve edges of the cube of the city (21:16). The same total sum of 144,000 for the twelve tribes (7:4) or 144,000 for the twelve edges of the city (21:16) reinforces the numerical symbolism in both chapters.

Yet there are other aspects to the dimensions of the city. Since the length of each side is 12,000 stadia. This means that the area of each side is 144 million (12,000 X 12,000), and that the total area of the six sides of the cube is 864 million (144 million X 6 sides).

This is an interesting number, because 864,000 miles is the diameter of the sun, which is a symbol of the church (Matt. 13:43, Rev. 12:1, etc.). When the diameter of the sun is multiplied by the 1000 years of the reign of Christ and the Church (20:4), it gives us 864 million – the surface area of the New Jerusalem in furlongs.

As if to emphasize that this point is intentional and relevant, the numerical value of the letters that make up the Greek form of the name for the city "Jerusalem" is also 864.⁴²⁴

Of course, the one obvious objection is that the measurement of the sun is given in miles. Yet English (Imperial) miles are not a recent development and appear related to other measurement systems from the past.⁴²⁵ Thus in the instance before us, the Roman stadia (660 English feet) is proportionally related to the English furlong at 1.1 English furlongs (600 English feet). Eight Roman stadia of 660 English feet equal one English mile (5,280 feet).⁴²⁶ It's also interesting how frequently the number *twelve* occurs in various English Imperial measures and in other uses of measurements and dimensions.⁴²⁷ (This connection between the number twelve and the dimensions of the New Jerusalem will be explored a little further when the other dimension of the city is described shortly.)

Before leaving the number 864 altogether, a few odd notes on this number:

- The radius of the moon (a smaller reflection of the sun) is 8640 furlongs.
- The perimeter of a square drawn on the circumference of the moon (a smaller reflection of the sun) is 8640 miles.
- Each side of the cube of the New Jerusalem is 1,440,000 British acres, which when multiplied by its 6 sides gives a total of 8,640,000 British acres.)
- Incidentally, 24 hours in a day X 60 minutes X 60 seconds = 8640 seconds.

Jim Shucker's personal notes on Revelation add an Old Testament parallel to the New Testament city and to the numerical picture of the church (144,000 for spiritual Israel). In Numbers 35:2-6 is a description of the cities of the Levites. The Levites as the priestly tribe received no inheritance in the land unlike the other tribes. Scattered throughout Israel, they did have six cities that belonged to them.

The Levitical tribe pictures the "church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23),⁴²⁸ in other words a class that has a heavenly inheritance that is separate from the people of

⁴²⁴ The spelling of Jerusalem in Greek is ιερουσαλημ or iota 10 + epsilon 5 + rho 100 + omicron 70 + upsilon 400 + sigma 200 + alpha 1 + lambda 30 + eta 8 + mu 40 = 864.

⁴²⁵ Neal, J. (2000). *All Done with Mirrors*, An Exploration of Measure, Proportion, Ratio and Number. (pp. 78-114 *passim*). The Secret Academy: Britain.

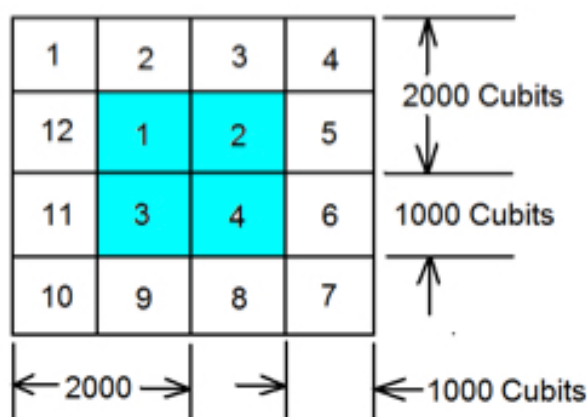
⁴²⁶ There are many examples not included... too many to include here or elsewhere in this commentary on Revelation.

⁴²⁷ A few of the examples: 12 inches to the foot, 12 X 440 feet to the mile, 12 X 660 miles to the polar diameter of the earth at 7,920 miles (with 660 the number of English feet in the Roman stadia used in the measurements of the New Jerusalem), 12 X 180 miles to the diameter of the moon at 2160 miles, etc., etc.

⁴²⁸ The Levites were exchanged for the firstborn in Num. 3:40-49, further cementing the Levites as a picture of the firstborn church.

the "land" or the earth. As a result, it should not be surprising to find a numerical correlation between the dimensions of the ancient cities of the Levites and the New Jerusalem of the church of the firstborn.

The passage in the Book of Numbers (35:2-6) describing the six cities of the Levites gives a perimeter of two thousand cubits to a side or eight thousand cubits for the perimeter of each of six cities. The passage then goes on to describe the suburbs of the cities that extend out another thousand cubits on all sides. The perimeter of the suburbs would then be four thousand cubits to a side for a total of sixteen thousand cubits. These dimensions are illustrated in the diagram below.



The two perimeters (8,000 + 16,000) added together sum up to 24,000 cubits for each Levitical city. Since there are six Levitical cities, the product of 6 (cities) X 24,000 (total cubits of perimeters per city) yields 144,000 cubits as the total of the perimeters of the six Levitical cities. Since the city of Revelation has 12 edges on its perimeter at 12,000 stadia per edge, the perimeter numbers for the Levitical cities and the city of Revelation are both 144,000.

Moving on to the other given dimension, the angel next measures the "wall" of the city. Since length, width, and height of the cube are already covered in the previous dimensions, it is likely that this measurement is describing the thickness of the wall. "And he [the angel] measured the wall, one hundred forty four cubits..." Again, the translation of the ancient measures into modern measurements in many Bibles does us a disservice in understanding the meaning of this dimension (although most modern translations note the literal language in marginal notes).

This measure once again reflects the repetition of the number twelve in these passages, since 144 is 12 squared.

The final aspect of the dimensions of the New Jerusalem requires us to make an assumption on the further intent of the dimensions. However, although some may consider it a bit of a leap, still it wouldn't be surprising to find additional meaning hidden in the numbers, as they are described below.

The two dimensions given to use – the city perimeter at 12,000 stadia per side and the dimension of the wall at 144 cubits – can be brought to commensurable proportions by adjusting for decimal equivalents of the numbers. The dimensions of the city then become relative in size, because a square of 12 furlongs exactly contains a circle of 14,400 cubits. Sheer coincidence is possible but not certain.

In any event, since the measurements of the New Jerusalem are decimal equivalents, then there must be a purpose and/or consequences for this arrangement. A few of the results of this re-orientation of the numbers can be seen in the diagrams and lists that follow. As seen below, resolving these dimensions to comparative size yields a circle of 14,400 cubits or 24,890 feet around.

The New Jerusalem

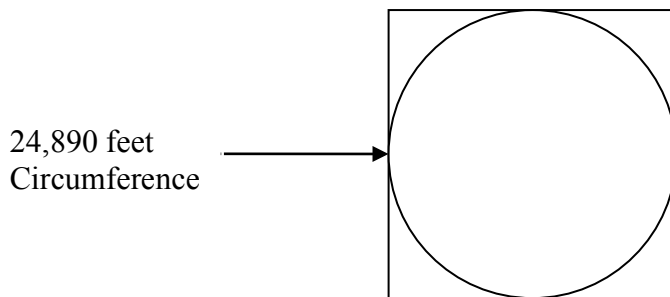


Figure 1

The diameter of this circle (Figure 2) based on the dimensions above would then be 7920 feet.

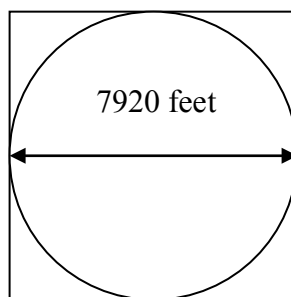


Figure 2

These and other dimensions correspond to the size of the earth in a number of ways:

- The number for the diameter of the inner circle (7920 feet) is the same as the number for the mean diameter of the earth (7920 miles).
- The circumference of the inner circle (24,883.2 feet) would then also be the same as the circumference of the earth (24,883.2 miles).
- The perimeter of the square (4 X 7920 feet) is 31,680 feet, or an even 6 miles. (5280 feet per mile X 6 miles = 31,680 feet.)

After this, a second circle whose circumference exactly touches the 4 corners of the square base of the New Jerusalem has a circumference of 6.666 miles which is $12 \times .5555$.

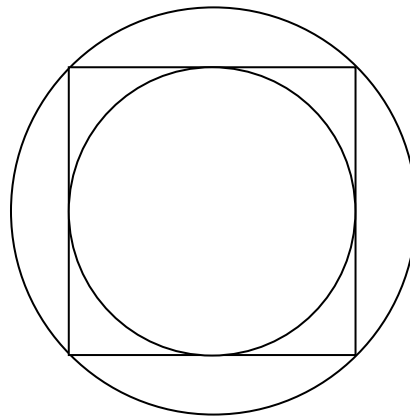


Figure 3

(There are additional numerical and astronomical aspects associated with this second circle that are too lengthy to consider here, but some of them are detailed in *Appendix L ~ Dimensions Related to the New Jerusalem.*)

A final topic regarding the city's dimensions is the means by which the angel measures the dimensions of the city and the wall. The description of this measurement tool is a "gold measuring rod" (21:15), and in only one other place in Revelation and two other places in the Bible in total is a similar instrument found.

A "measuring reed like a staff" is the unit used for the measurement of the temple and altar and worshippers (11:1)... similar to, but different from, the rod used in the measurement of the New Jerusalem in 21:15. This raises the question as to whether the same or a different unit of measure is used in both instances.

Beginning with the particular cubit in use for measuring the New Jerusalem, an Egyptian royal cubit of 1.728 feet is often cited as the correct unit of measure. This is an interesting unit of measure on its own (and is of importance elsewhere) since the decimal equivalent is 1728 or 12^3 ($12 \times 12 \times 12$).

Yet no definition of the type of cubit of Revelation is named in the context.

However, the other two passages describing a measuring rod *may* provide a clue, although the evidence is very sketchy.

(1) In Ezekiel 40:3-5, the cubit used to measure that temple is a cubit (1.728) plus one (handbreadth). It is larger than the normal cubit

(2) In Revelation 11:1, the numerical value the Greek words for “a measuring reed like a staff” is 1729. Of course, 1729 less “1” = 1728 or the decimal equivalent of the Royal Egyptian Cubit at 1.728.

This *may* tell us a couple things:

(1) That the expected cubit for measuring was typically understood as the commonly used Egyptian Royal Cubit... at least in the time of Ezekiel. Hence the need to explain the larger cubit used in the rod for measuring Ezekiel's Temple.

(2) The numerical value (1729)⁴²⁹ of the expression for the rod in Revelation 11:1 (1728 +1) *may* suggest this longer unit for measuring that temple.

If so, why not use the same cubit in Revelation 21:15?

The Greek word for reed (Gr. καλαμο) in Revelation 11:1 is the same as the word for rod in Revelation 21:15, and would be best translated as reed. The Greek word for rod (παβω) in Revelation 11:1 is a different word completely and is well translated as rod. So, in Revelation 11:1 something additional is added to the measure (a reed “like a rod”), but in Revelation 21:15 the expression is just a reed (“a golden measuring reed” to be precise) and does not have the numerical value of 1729 (1728 plus 1). Does this suggest a different measure? A Royal Egyptian Cubit of 1.728 with nothing added?

Granted, the evidence is sketchy, but at least it's a possible clue in the definition of a measure that is already demonstrated in the various relationships and

⁴²⁹ Incidentally, 1729 is the smallest number than can be expressed as the sum of two cubes in two different ways. 9 cubed plus 10 cubed equals 1729 and 12 cubed plus 1 cubed equals 1729. 12 cubed plus 1 cubed is – of course – 1728 plus 1.

applications of the New Jerusalem within itself and to other dimensions in the world and sky around us.

Summary examples of the number 1728:

- 1,728 is the size in feet of the Egyptian Royal Cubit (used in the construction of the Great Pyramid and elsewhere).
- 1,728,000,000,000 is the volume of the New Jerusalem in cubic furlongs.
- The moon's diameter is 17,280 furlongs.

The discussion of the dimensions of the New Jerusalem is suspended at this point, but see *Appendix L ~ Dimensions Related to the New Jerusalem* for other possible and unusual applications of these and other numbers to the New Jerusalem and elsewhere.

(4) Concluding Passage (Verses 22-27) – the People of the Earth Enter the City

The closing verses of this section of Revelation and for this part of the ongoing Kingdom description outline the relationship of the government by Jesus and the church (the New Jerusalem) to the peoples of the world.

The time will come when there is no longer any need for the sun (NT gospel) and moon (OT law)⁴³⁰ since truth will be universal. God and Jesus are the light of this city. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest of them..." (Jer. 31:34, cf. Rev. 20:12). The temple sanctuary where atonement was previously made is replaced by the reality of God and of Jesus... the [true] Lamb of God.

The gates of this city are never closed. Historically, city gates closed when night fell, but since there is no night in this city, the gates always remain open.⁴³¹

The government that is represented by the symbolic city is already described at the start of this section as having come down down to earth (21:10, cf. 21:3) out of heaven from God. "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10 KJV).

⁴³⁰ Is. 60:19-20, 30:26.

⁴³¹ In yet another parallel between Ezekiel and Revelation – particularly [once again] between the closing chapters – the Jerusalem described in Ezekiel's vision also has twelve gates into the city (Ezek. 48:30-35).

Now the nations (peoples) enter into the New Jerusalem. This shows that a significant majority of the world will accept the kingdom. The outliers that reject it will be exceptional and not the rule.

The people of earth bring their glory and honor into the city. Not the glory and honor from their previous life of sin and darkness (cf. Is. 26:9), but the glory and honor they now have as restored mankind. They become kings of the earth as Adam once had dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:26-28) until his disobedience.

The gates are there to determine who may enter⁴³² and determine the exceptions (cf. Is. 26:10) who cannot enter the city. So while the gates are never closed during the Millennium, some are excluded from the city by their own actions.

Revelation 22:1-5 ~ The Kingdom Blessings

Chapter 22 opens with the final vision of the kingdom and final vision of Revelation as a whole. And once again, something that would only happen in a book of symbols makes its appearance. The "street" or literally "broad way" of the city has a river in the middle of it. The origin of this river is a throne or more specifically "the throne of God and of the Lamb" which is the source of the pure "water of life."

On either side of the river are "trees of life" that bear 12 kinds of fruit once a month⁴³³ for 12 months of the year. This multiplies to 144 (12 months X 12 kinds of fruit once monthly). Later in this closing chapter a singular "tree of life" in the New Jerusalem (22:14) compares with multiple "tree[s] of life" on each side of the river of life (22:2). While the lesson of this symbolic language is mostly discussed earlier in this commentary,⁴³⁴ it bears repeating at this point with some expansion of the subject.

The tree of life in the paradise of God without a doubt references the tree of life in Eden (Gen. 2:9, 3:22). Yet, remembering that Revelation is a book of symbols, there is little reason to assume this is the same tree. And this is borne out by its use in this chapter. Since the church will no longer have need of a literal tree of life

⁴³² In the Old Testament the gates of the cities of Israel were commonly the place where judgment took place (cf. 2 Sam. 19:8 and Ruth 4:11), and in Ezekiel's vision of the future, there are guardhouses at the gates (Ezek. 40:6-37, cf. 44:5-9, Zech. 14:21).

⁴³³ Months refer to the lunar cycles / phases of the moon. As the moon represents the Law, so the use of moons here suggests a reference to a new and better covenant of works for the world now written in hearts rather than tablets (Jer. 31:31-34).

⁴³⁴ Cf. notes on 2:7.

to attain the resurrection (2:7),⁴³⁵ this tree of life in paradise in Revelation must represent something else. It must represent Jesus – nailed to a “tree” (Acts 5:30, 13:29, 1 Pet. 2:24) or cross – the “life giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45, John 3:16). It is through the blood of Christ that the church has access to life (22:14).

Jesus as the "tree of life" – the one most singular and important tree of life in Revelation – is later assisted by the church as a whole, who are promised an opportunity by God’s grace to share in the kingdom reign (20:4) and the work of giving life to others (22:17) as trees of life themselves (22:2, cf. Ps. 1:3).

This river of life is also pictured – not unexpectedly⁴³⁶ – in the closing chapters of Ezekiel (47:1-12) where a river of life flows from the temple with undying trees of healing on either side of the river that bear fruit each month.

There is no longer any curse. The favor of God is bestowed on the people as his face is turned towards them (cf. Acts 3:19). Other promises like those that close the preceding chapter and illustrate the universality of truth are repeated here.

Revelation 22:6-21 ~ Conclusion to Revelation

The remainder of the book consists of closing comments, exhortations, and warnings.

- Verses 6-9 express confidence in the truth of every word of the prophecy and the necessity for humility in the study and understanding of the book.
- Verses 10-11 and 14-15 are a warning that the prophecy will begin to unfold from the very beginning of the church (it is not all futuristic) and so every one of God's people should take personal responsibility for their actions and the associated consequences.
- Verses 12-13 & 16 are titles of Jesus, and are considered in detail in a moment.
- Verse 17 is very much like an altar call, except that it is not a call to a momentary choice or decision, but a call to the entire world sent out to all people willing to continually accept the laws of the Messianic Kingdom for all eternity.
- Verses 18-21 are a warning to treat the prophecy with respect and a closing benediction.

⁴³⁵ Cf. John 4:14, etc.

⁴³⁶ See *Appendix H ~ Parallels Between the Book of Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation*.

The Five Titles of Jesus

Jesus is given five titles in verses 12-13 and 16. These five titles end with his title as the morning star, as it does in all but one other occurrence of "morning star".

The five occurrences of "morning star" in scripture tell a story that doesn't end until reaching the very end of the last book of the Bible. The number of occurrences and their arrangement are all significant. They are listed below in the order in which they occur:

In *Job 38:7* we read about five challenges to men, but not challenges to the angels or to the morning stars who were present and rejoiced at the creation of the earth:

- (1) "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? [Tell me if you have understanding.]
- (2) Who set its measurements, [since you know]?
- (3) Or who stretched the line upon it?
- (4) On what were its bases sunk?
- (5) Or who laid its cornerstone [when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy]?"

Here we have the morning stars singing and the all of the angels of God shouting for joy at the creation of the earth. We don't know how many morning stars there were at this time, but since the term is plural there must be two at a minimum.

Also, since stars do not sing, we know some sort of metaphor must be involved. However, in order to determine who or what the morning stars are, we have to consider other passages.

At this point it is best to give the conclusion in advance. There are only two morning stars in Job. One is Satan who becomes a fallen star, and Jesus then becomes the lone remaining morning star with this symbol as one of his titles... "the bright morning star" (Rev. 22:16).

In *Isaiah 14:12-14* Satan is described as Lucifer the *son of the dawn*. Lucifer (perhaps never originally intended as a proper name) literally means *morning star*. In this passage Satan is described this way – "How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star..."

Following this description of Satan as a fallen morning star⁴³⁷ is the cause of his demotion. In verse 14 are Satan's five boasts against God...

- (1) "I will ascend to heaven,
- (2) I will raise my throne above the stars of God,
- (3) And I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north,
- (4) I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
- (5) I will make myself like the Most High."

All other references to the morning star include Jesus and end with "morning star" as one of his titles. Only here where Satan is the subject and described as a "fallen" morning star is this term "morning star" used of a past title.

Contrast this passage in *Isaiah* with something noted earlier. Satan's eventual overthrow and powerlessness in *Revelation 20:2-3* *also occurs in five* steps:

"And he...

- (1) lay hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, the devil and Satan, and
- (2) bound him for a thousand years, and
- (3) threw him into the abyss, and
- (4) shut it, and
- (5) sealed it over him so that he should not deceive the nations any longer until the thousand years were completed."

It could be that the use of the number five in connection with the morning star(s) in *Job* and *Isaiah* merely represents a coincidence. Yet when we add the comparison of Satan's *five* prideful boasts in *Isaiah* to the *five* steps of his defeat and imprisonment in *Revelation* and to exactly *five* occurrences of "morning star" in the scriptures... the use of five in connection with the morning star begins to form a pattern.

⁴³⁷ An interesting parallel to *Isaiah 14:12-14* is *Ezekiel 28:14-19*, where Satan once walked "in the midst of the stones of fire" (or among the stars) before being cast out.

2 Peter 1:19 is the third reference to the morning star.⁴³⁸ Here the description in verse 19 also seems to number *five* phrases:⁴³⁹

- (1) "and so we have the prophetic word made more sure,
- (2) to which you do well to pay attention
- (3) as to a lamp shining in a dark place,
- (4) until the day dawns and
- (5) the morning star arises in your hearts."⁴⁴⁰

So far, three of the five passages associated with the imagery of the “morning star” attach five specific phrases to that symbol.

Revelation 2:26-28 contains the fourth reference to the morning star, as one of five promises that are made to the fourth of the seven churches in Revelation. While there are *five* distinct phrases in every translation of these verses, it is less certain in many translations whether there are five distinct *promises*. An example of the common phraseology is the New American Standard Bible translation from which most verses in this commentary are drawn:

- “And he who overcomes, and he who keeps my deeds to the end,
- (1) to him I will give authority over the nations; and
 - (2) he shall rule them with a rod of iron,
 - (3) as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces,
 - (4) as also I also have received authority from My Father; and
 - (5) I will give him the morning star.”

There are five clear-cut phrases in this promise to the church. Yet, should we consider the fourth phrase as a part of the promise or as supplementary information? Does it matter either way? Still, if the fourth phrase is a distinct promise, it provides additional support for a five-fold pattern.

⁴³⁸ The word translated as morning star in this verse (Gr. φωσφορος or phosphoros) is different from the other two NT occurrences (in Revelation where two separate words are used for “morning” and “star”). The word that Peter uses means “light-bringing” and is used specifically and especially for the morning star (the planet Venus) in Greek. Phosphoros is also the Greek equivalent of the Latin word “lucifer” used in that language to name the morning star or the planet Venus. (Note that Venus was also a goddess... a separate word in Latin.)

⁴³⁹ These distinct phrases can be seen in some translations such as *The Emphasized Bible* by J B Rotherham and others that stress the phraseology and points of emphasis from the original language.

⁴⁴⁰ Incidentally, the preceding verses are directly connected to the mount of transfiguration experience (2 Peter 1:16-18), and it's at least of passing interest to note there were five other people represented (if we include the vision of Moses and Elijah) who are with Jesus on the mount (Matthew 17:1-3).

As already noted, the majority of translations favor the idea that the fourth phrase is not a separate promise. However, consider the following translation example:⁴⁴¹

“To the victor in the battle of life, and to the man who to the end lives the kind of life I have commanded him to live,

- (1) I will give authority over the nations.
- (2) He will shatter them with a rod of iron;
- (3) they will be smashed like broken pieces of pottery.
- (4) His authority will be like the authority I received from my Father.
- (5) And I will give him the morning star.”

David Aune in his excellent study of Revelation discusses the ambiguity of the original language with regard to this fourth phrase.⁴⁴² He notes that the object of “I received” is left unstated. He suggests the most probable explanation is that it refers back to the authority mentioned earlier in this passage (referring to the first phrase). If this is the case, then the fourth phrase is another definition of the authority given to the church.

This last translation not only breaks the passage into five phrases, but the fourth phrase is defined as a separate and unique element. It becomes one of five distinct promises to the fourth church. In Barclay’s and other translations, the fourth phrase becomes a new and different description of the type of authority received.

In that arrangement the passage would then be understood as a series of five promises, as follows:

- Authority over the nations.
- Authority to shepherd them with a rod of iron.
- Authority to dash them to pieces.
- Authority identical to what Jesus receives from the Father.
- And also receiving the morning star.

So it seems reasonable – maybe even probable – that this passage in Revelation consists not only of *five phrases*, but also *five distinct promises*.

⁴⁴¹ From *The New Testament / A New Translation by William Barclay*.

⁴⁴² Aune, D. *Word Biblical Commentary* (Vol. 52a, 1st edition), p. 212.

In *Revelation 22:16* Jesus is identified as "the bright and morning star." The language suggests that He is the only morning star left once Satan has fallen from his position in the heavens.

The number five also seems associated with Jesus as the morning star in these verses. In this chapter of Revelation, Jesus gives himself *five* titles (verses 13 and 16) with "morning star" as the final descriptor once again:

- (1) "I am the Alpha and Omega,
- (2) the first and the last,
- (3) the beginning and the end...
- (4) I am the root and offspring of David,
- (5) the bright morning star."

Here Jesus now says I am the [singular] bright morning star.

It now seems reasonable to conclude that there are only two morning stars altogether, since Jesus and Satan are the only ones ever identified in this way. One of these morning stars... Lucifer [or "morning star"]... fell from his position of privilege and power. This leaves just one morning star remaining... "I [Jesus] am *the* bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16).

Altogether we now have *five scripture passages* that reference "morning star" (Job 38:7, Isaiah 14:12, 2 Peter 1:19, Revelation 2:28, and Revelation 22:16), and each of these scriptures is associated with *five phrases* of varying types. Taken collectively, these five occurrences describe for us the significance of the morning star in connection with creation, the fall and the binding of Satan, the future hope in the return of Jesus, the deliverance of the church, and the deliverance of the world in the messianic age to follow. It is a microcosm of God's plan.

At this point we've considered all the references to the morning star in scripture. However, there is still one aspect of the morning star and its connection to the number five that we've ignored until now. That property is found in the relative movements of Venus and the Earth. A little explanation of two astronomical facts is necessary at this point.

(1) In our night sky there are actually two morning stars. Venus and Mercury travel closer to the sun than our planet, and as a result are most commonly visible after sunset and in the morning before sunrise. Venus is more frequently seen than Mercury by a significant margin and is by far the brighter of the two planets. In

fact it is the brightest object in the night sky other than the moon. Consequently, it is often referred to as the morning star, even though both Venus and Mercury are both morning stars in reality.

(2) When two (or more) planets line up with each other and the sun as viewed from the earth, this is called a conjunction. An *inferior* conjunction occurs whenever the Earth and Venus (or another planet) are aligned with the sun on the same side of the sun, and a *superior* conjunction occurs whenever the Earth and Venus are aligned on opposite sides of the sun.

A set of five superior or inferior conjunctions of the Earth and Venus – when plotted over one set of five conjunctions – forms a nearly perfect five-pointed star.⁴⁴³ See the example below:

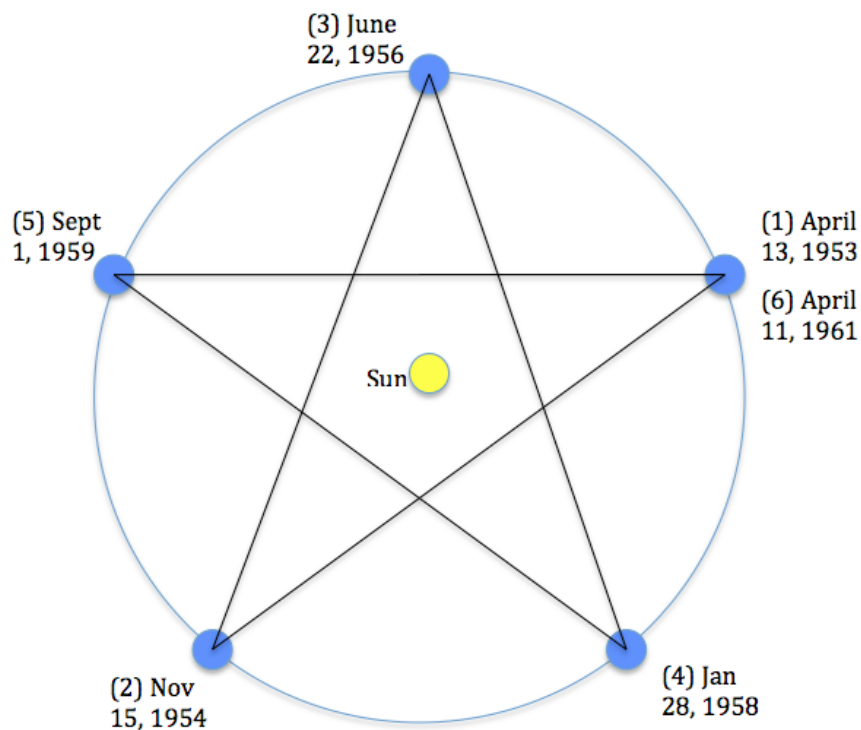


Diagram – The Earth’s Location and Its Relationship to the Sun and the Points of Inferior Conjunctions with Venus

⁴⁴³ Accurate to less than two days over eight earth-solar years

The morning star. Five scriptures. Five questions, boasts, phrases, promises or titles in each one. Venus, the literal morning star, forming a five pointed, well... star of its own. Surely God has gone to great lengths (from our perspective to speak to us.

Closing Passages from Revelation

"And the Spirit [Jesus] and the bride [the church] say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears [of the world of mankind] say, "Come."⁴⁴⁴ And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

"And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them and shall be their God. And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain; for the former things have passed away."

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Matt. 25:31-46.

Appendix A ~ Revelation for Everyone

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is at hand.” Revelation 1:3

Revelation for Everyone

Almost anyone who reads Revelation for the first time eventually finds themselves in one of four groups:

- (1) those who read it as children and hid under the bed while doing so, and have been afraid to read the book ever since,
- (2) those who think the book has no personal meaning or practical value,
- (3) enthusiastic students of Revelation who hold technical and conflicting theories regarding the meaning of the book, and
- (4) skeptics who think of Revelation as a book that can be interpreted in a multitude of contradictory ways.

Is there a chance that anything can make sense of this book for everyone? While this appears to be a daunting task, here are three basic rules for the book of Revelation that will satisfy all four positions above to one degree or another. These rules are:

- First Rule – Revelation is a Book of Symbols
- Second Rule – Revelation is a Book of Passion and Hope
- Third Rule – Revelation is a Book of Structure

Together these rules help to balance the need for an analytical understanding of Revelation with the compassionate and just character of God and a practical value to the book’s message.

First Rule – Revelation Is a Book of Symbols

One reason that so many people are afraid of Revelation is that, when they read the book, they read it as a literal description of events. Yet, the first verse of Revelation seems to suggest otherwise. *“The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God*

gave unto him, to show unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” (Rev. 1:1). The Greek word translated “signified” in the King James Version of this verse can mean (more specifically) “expressed through signs” (or “expressed through symbols” in modern language).

In some places in Revelation the symbols are defined for us, as in Revelation 1:20 where *“the seven lampstands are the seven churches”* or Revelation 17:12 where *“the horns which you saw are ten kings.”* In other places the symbols are not defined, and yet clearly the language these passages is not to be taken literally. Consider Revelation 12:1-4a (NASB) as an example:

“And a great sign appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars; and she was with child; and she cried out, being labor and pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems. And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth.”

This concept of Revelation as a book of symbols does away with much of the gloominess and fear often associated with this book. Also, understanding that Revelation uses figurative language to describe real world events provides a more reasoned and satisfying approach to both students and critics of the book.

This still leaves open the question of how to determine the meaning of unidentified symbols in Revelation. Looking elsewhere in the scriptures can help to identify these symbols. This aspect of the subject is too lengthy for a complete study here, but consider several examples:

(1) Mountains represent kingdoms, as in Daniel 2:35, 44 where the mountain that fills the earth is interpreted as the future Kingdom of God, and in Isaiah 2:2-4 where the mountain of God above the other mountains also represent the future Kingdom of God ruling over the other nations (or mountains). When Revelation says there will come a time when the mountains (earthly governments) will vanish (Revelation 16:20), it is referring to this era of the future Kingdom of God.

(2) The sea represents unstable elements in society that are restless and demanding change (Psalm 65:7, Isaiah 57:20, Luke 21:25). When Revelation 21:1 says *“and there is no longer any sea,”* this is another reference to the future

Kingdom of God, when all will be satisfied and those once represented by the sea will be at peace. In contrast, when speaking of this time in plainer language, the bible includes the seas and says the messiah “*will rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth*” (Psalm 72:8).

(3) Finally, consider the woman mentioned earlier who is clothed with the sun and with the moon under her feet and with a crown of twelve stars on her head:

- A virtuous woman represents the faithful church (2 Cor. 11:2, Revelation 19:7-9) contrasted with a faithless woman representing false religion (Rev. 17:1-6, 18:2-4).
- Light in general represents truth and knowledge (Ephesians 1:17-18, 2 Cor. 4:4-6).
- The sun represents the gospel (compare Psalm 19:4-6 to Romans 10:17-18).
- Stars represent teachers (Daniel 12:3, cf. Jude 13).
- The moon is never directly identified in scripture, but given that the sun represents the gospel and the moon is a reflection of sunlight, it seems reasonable that we are expected to identify the moon with the teachings of the Old Testament (cf. Hebrews 10:1).

Putting all this together, we have a picture of the early Christian church clothed with the gospel of Jesus, supported additionally by the lessons of the Old Testament, and crowned with the teachings of the twelve apostles.

Second Rule – Revelation Is a Book of Passion and Hope

This is an area that often gets lost in the more technical discussions of the book. Revelation is an exceptionally emotional book full of vivid and powerful imagery, and it reveals God’s hunger for justice and peace and relationship with man.

Even a cursory view of the book can surprise us with some of the most naturally appealing traits of God’s character. We’re quickly plunged into an incredibly passionate book. Far from the remote, uncaring, and almost untouchable God of much of medieval theology, we see a God in pain at the injustices of the past and present. Throughout the book we are reminded that God intends to rectify the wrongs of the past and bring peace to the world.

The vivid language of the book - when rightly understood - merely adds emphasis to the passionate longing of God to set things right in his creation. While there is a great deal of distress in the book, this is actually the consequence of man’s failures

in juxtaposition to God's love for his people and his desire to rescue the entire world. The book eventually concludes with God's celebration of the homecoming of the church (Revelation 19:1-8), and God's acknowledgement of the pain that the world has suffered and his desire to make that suffering a thing of the past (Revelation 21:4-5 and 22:1-6).

Additionally, if it can be shown that the book of Revelation has anticipated history in advance, there is also a clear personal application of this book to our own small lives. To the God who oversees the destiny of entire nations, our own personal struggles cannot represent any possible obstacle to his providential care.

Yes, there is a design to the book that is both intriguing and assuring. Yet we are constantly reminded throughout Revelation that its message is not just an intellectual exercise. Revelation is a book describing a passionate and emotional God through wild imagery, powerful feelings, and the relentless pursuit of a perfect future. The message of this book has a keen sense of justice (social, economic, political, and religious), and often expresses a God angry at the constant strife in the world and the suffering of others. He wounds to heal, expresses feelings of closeness and love for his people, and longs to restore the world.

Revelation consistently maintains a strong sense of hope through a confident anticipation of the future... a future expressed in the visions and promises of God's final victory over the present darkness of the world. In doing so it gives depth of meaning to the book's introductory words in Rev. 1:3 ~ *"Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy"*.

Third Rule – Revelation Is a Book of Structure

Although Revelation can be a very complex study, it has a universal structure to it that is consistent with nearly every interpretation of the book. To those used to thinking of Revelation as a mind bending series of unrelated events, it might come as a surprise to know that the book is highly organized.

Revelation can be fairly conveniently divided into 5 sections, and these can be further subdivided. Some who are familiar with the book of Revelation may quibble over minor details, or even suggest a slightly different arrangement – adding or subtracting a section or describing it a little differently – but most would probably concede that the outline presented here is relatively accurate.

Part 1 – Revelation chapter 1 ~ Prologue / Introduction to the book.

Part 2a – Revelation chapters 2 through 11 ~ The Seven Series (7 Churches, 7 Seals, 7 Trumpets).

[This section is broken by one or two interludes, the most commonly agreed being the Throne Scene in chapters 4 and 5, and the other being the Sealing of the Chosen and the description of the Great Multitude in chapter 7.]

Part 2b – Revelation chapters 12 and 13 ~ The Dragon and the Beast.

Part 3 – Revelation chapters 14 through 19 ~ A Harvest and a Time of Trouble and Transition.

Part 4 – Revelation chapters 20 through 22 ~ The Kingdom of God.

Part 5 – Revelation chapter 22 – Epilogue / Conclusion to the book.

The book of Revelation can be structured in much greater detail than the outline above suggests without any disagreement over interpretation. For those who are initially skeptical of the book of Revelation, this may be a bit unexpected. The book of Revelation is challenging, but not because there is anything chaotic about it. For those who are enthusiastic students of the book of Revelation, this is probably not surprising news. The consistency of the book is encouraging even when interpretations on the meaning differ from one person to the next.

Faith is strengthened when we see the highly ordered arrangement of this book. The kind of layered detail that is found in Revelation almost certainly extends well beyond the understanding of the original writers of the Old and New Testament prophecies (cf. Daniel 12: 8-9).

Final Thoughts – From Genesis to Revelation

Revelation does not stand on its own. It is part of a much larger mosaic of prophecy and promises. Revelation is a microcosm of the central themes of scripture... the atonement for the fall of man and the eventual deliverance of mankind back to life and paradise.

It is in the first three chapters of the bible (Genesis chapters 1-3) that mankind loses life and paradise. It is in the last three chapters of the bible (Revelation chapters 20-22) that life and paradise are restored to mankind. (And between the

beginning and the end of the bible there are a myriad of passages that synchronize with Revelation and help us to interpret the book.)

It is the promise of a very different future that infuses Revelation with hope even when things are at their darkest. It is the passionate longing of God to bring peace and justice to the world and to bring the church home to heaven that drives every event in the book. This aspect of the heart of God is revealed in the final chapters of Revelation and of the entire bible. God's desire for a restored relationship with mankind is clearly stated in a passage from one of these closing chapters of Revelation.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” ~ Revelation 21:4

Appendix B ~ Bible Symbology in Prophecy

"And so we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation." - 2 Peter 1: 19 and 20

It should be clear to anyone that the Bible is a book with a rich diversity of writing styles - from poetry to songs, to homilies, to history, to parables, to allegories and metaphorical language. If we ignore this part of the Bible's legacy, including its vivid symbolism, we will miss out on much of what God is trying to communicate to us and find ourselves denying the vastness of the God we would claim to worship.

As to whether any particular symbol has been interpreted correctly, I leave that to the reader to judge. I have attempted to provide a definition in each case that comes directly from the Bible, so that I would not be 'privately interpreting' the scriptures as Peter cautions in the verses above. I do not ask that you necessarily accept the interpretations I have suggested (and that have often been used by others in the past), but that you wrestle with this issue, so that you may be familiar with "the whole counsel of God," and not just that part currently in vogue for the present.

(Note - All quoted verses are from the New American Standard translation of the Bible.)

1) LIGHT - Truth / Understanding

Ephesians 1: 17 and 18
2 Corinthians 4: 4-6

2) STARS - Teachers / Messengers (Givers of "light")

Daniel 12: 3
Revelation 1:20

WANDERING STARS - False Teachers
Jude 13

3) SUN - the New Testament Gospel or any powerful truths

Psalm 19: 4 - "Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world. In them (i.e., in the Christian church - Romans 10: 17 and 18) He has placed a tent (a dwelling place) for the sun (gospel)."

(Note - There is also a comparison of the sun in Psalm 19: 4-6 with the word of God in Psalm 19: 7-9.)

4) WOMEN

VIRGIN / BRIDE - The true church of God.
2 Corinthians 11: 2
Ephesians 5: 22-32
Revelation 19: 7 and 8

ADULTEROUS / IMMORAL WOMAN - The false or counterfeit church.
Revelation 17: 1-6
Revelation 18: 2-4

Notes: (1) There is an allegory in Galatians 4: 21-31 where women represent covenants. Although the church is connected closely with covenants, this is a departure from what we typically see symbolized by "women" in the scriptures. However, the scriptures in Galatians are interpreting an "allegory" rather than a "prophecy". To some this might seem like a subtle shade of distinction, but in the bible these are two very different classes of scripture (as different as Psalms is from Revelation, for example), and they often picture things in very different ways.) (2) Israel, as the Old Testament people of God, are also pictured as a woman, but generally a faithless one (Isaiah 66:7, Jeremiah 3:6-11, Hosea 3:1, 4:7-19, esp. 12-14, Micah 4:10).

5) SUN, MOON, STARS

"... a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." - Revelation 12: 1

WOMAN - the church of God (see above)

SUN - the New Testament gospel (see above)

MOON - the Law:

- 1) The moon is reflected sunlight and has no light of its own. In just the same way, the Law is a picture, a 'shadow', a reflection of the Gospel that Jesus taught (Hebrews 10: 1), and not the actual reality.
- 2) The woman stands on the moon, but is clothed with the sun. So the Christian church is supported by the Law, but the actual message she 'wears' (or proclaims) is the New Testament gospel.

TWELVE STARS - If stars represent teachers (see above), then logically these represent the twelve apostles. (See also Revelation 21: 14.)

During the Kingdom the sun (gospel) and moon (law) are no longer needed, because truth come directly to everyone from the presence of God and the Lamb and is embodied in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:23, 22:5).

6) MOUNTAINS - Kingdoms / Strong Nations

Daniel 2: 35 with 2: 43 and 44
Isaiah 2: 2-4

(Compare Revelation 16: 20 in context.)

7) CITIES - Governments (as opposed to nations) and WILDERNESS - Condition of those outside the "great city" belonging to Christ

Wilderness – Revelation 12:6 and 14, and 17:3 (cf. Revelation 21:10), Hebrews 13:14, Song of Solomon 8:5

City / Babylon "the great city" (government of the false church or antichrist) – Revelation 17:5, 18, 11:8

City / New Jerusalem (the government of God extending down to the earth) – Revelation 21: 2, 9-10 (consisting of Jesus and the church in power and glory, Revelation 19: 7-8, cf. 21:2, Revelation 3:12)

Cities (National Governments) – Revelation 16: 19

8) WATER(S) - Water seems to symbolize both **truth** and **life**, perhaps because the two are almost inseparable. It is the truth about Jesus that brings us life. When everlasting life is given abundantly, it is sometimes represented as a river of life.

On the other hand, **bodies of water** seem to represent **classes** or **nations** of people. The **sea** in particular seems to represent a class of people who do not have respect for government and religious institutions, and who eventually rebel against all authority in the great tribulation.

WATER (truth and life)
Isaiah 28: 14-18 (truth)
John 4: 10-14 (life)
Ephesians 5: 26 (truth)
Revelation 22: 17 (life)

WATERS (many people)
Revelation 17: 2 and 15
Revelation 19: 6

SEA (restless masses)
Psalm 65: 7
Isaiah 57: 20
Jude 13 (individuals)

Also: Luke 21: 25, Revelation 15: 2,
Isaiah 60: 5, and Revelation 21: 1

9) HEAVENS AND EARTH

(Note – This explanation does not mean that there is no literal heaven. The symbolic is always patterned after the reality. The fact that there is an actual place or condition (or whatever) that is heaven allows us to also use it as a symbol in obviously prophetic symbology.)

HEAVEN(S) - The 'ruling powers' of earth, much like mountains represent kingdoms or strong governments as we noted previously, but possibly including also the 'spiritual' rulership of the world.

In our time this would be Satan and his followers (2 Corinthians 4: 4 and Ephesians 6: 12), and in the 'world to come' it would be our Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation 11: 15).

Ephesians 6: 12 (again)

Luke 21: (25 and) 26

2 Peter 3: 13

Isaiah 34: (1 through) 4

EARTH - The 'social order' as it exists under the ruling powers or 'heavens' of this world, or the world to come.

Psalm 66: 4

Psalm 67: 7

ADDITIONAL NOTE

Compare 2 Peter 3: 6 'the world at that time', to the following verse in 2 Peter 3: 7 and 'the present heavens and earth'. Note that in the first verse (verse 6) the actual earth was not destroyed, only 'the world at that time' – or the existing society – was destroyed in the flood.

So likewise, couldn't the same be true of 'the present heavens and earth'? Could it be that the planet itself will not be destroyed, but only our existing social order? A society to be replaced instead by the kingdom of God (verse 13)?

Compare the destruction of the heavens and earth in the prophecy of 2 Peter 3: 7 with the promises of God that the literal earth will be preserved forever in Ecclesiastes 1: 4 and Psalm 104: 5.

Another interesting passage in this regard is Isaiah 45: 18. In Zephaniah 3: 8 and 9 where unconverted people survive the fiery destruction of the earth and are converted afterwards.

10) FIRE - Trials (which destroy impurities) / Trouble and Destruction

Zephaniah 3: 8 and 9

1 Corinthians 3: 15

Revelation 21: 8

Isaiah 34: 8-15 (See also Isaiah 34: 16 through the end of Isaiah 35.)

1 Peter 1: 7

11) CLOUDS – Divine Judgments (historical or prophetic)

Isaiah 19:1

Revelation 10:1

Jeremiah 4:12-13

*Other examples of “apocalyptic metaphor”, some using clouds and some not:
Joel 2:1-2, Isaiah 13:1 and 9-13, Luke 21: 26-27, Psalm 18:7-15, Psalm 97:1-6,
Psalm 104:3*

12) GRASS - The fallen and dying race of mankind.

Psalm 102: 11

Psalm 103: 15 and 16

Isaiah 40: 5-8

1 Peter 1: 24

13) LAMP - the Bible, the word of God

Psalm 119: 105

2 Peter 1: 19

14) OIL - Holy Spirit

(Note: In the time of the Old Testament, the priests and others were 'anointed' with an anointing 'oil' as in Exodus 30: 22-31, picturing the church receiving or being 'anointed' with the actual Spirit of God as in 1 John 2:27.)

Isaiah 61: 1-3 (compare Luke 4: 16-21)

Hebrews 1: 9

2 Corinthians 1: 21-22

Psalm 133 (all)

Zechariah chapter 4 mixes the symbols of lamps and oil together in one prophetic picture. The lampstand then would represent the church who have the word of God in them (Revelation 1: 20, Colossians 3:16), the lamplight represents the knowledge of God, and the two olive trees could picture the Old and New Testament (Revelation 11: 3 and 4) which help us receive the oil, the spirit of God.

(Note: In the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins in Matthew 25, the meaning behind the foolish virgins lacking oil is probably not that they didn't have the Holy Spirit at all, but rather that they weren't "filled" with the Spirit. The Wise Virgins "wisely" instructed the Foolish Virgins to "buy for themselves". However, they are virgins, i.e. Christians, and possibly the 'tribulation saints' of Revelation 7: 9-17.)

15) BEAST(S) - Empires and governments controlling many nations and peoples.

Daniel 7: 2-7 and 17
Revelation 17: 9-11

16) HORNS - Divisions of power, i.e., nations or peoples, etc., under the control or part of a larger government or empire, or, successive governments of one continuing nation or empire.

Daniel 7: 7 and 8, 23 and 24 (Compare also Daniel 2: 43 and 44. There are 4 kingdoms or empires in each chapter, and 10 kings represented by the 10 toes in chapter 2 and the 10 horns in chapter 7.)

Revelation 17: 12

17) FIG TREE - Israel (also 'Spiritual Israel' in one instance in Revelation)

Jeremiah chapter 24
Hosea 9: 10
Luke 13: 1-9
Matthew 21: 19 / 23: 36-39 / 24: 32 (Luke 21:29-30)

18) ZION AND JACOB - Zion is a name for Israel, except that when it is used prophetically it almost always becomes a name for spiritual Israel or the church. **Israel** is also usually a reference to natural Israel, but sometimes in the New Testament it is used for spiritual Israel or the church. **Jacob** is always a name for natural Israel, the Jewish nation.

ZION - The Church

Romans 11: 25 and 26

1 Peter 2: 6 and 7 (4-9)

(Note: A word of caution here. Some Christians have become accustomed to applying all the promises of Israel to themselves alone. This is known as “Replacement Theology” in the present day. This is a mistake that should be avoided. A careful study of Romans chapter 11, especially the latter part of the chapter, will show that the promises to Israel still belong to them.)

JACOB / ISRAEL

Romans 11: 26 (25 -32)

Jeremiah 30: 7 (4-11)

(An interesting application regarding Jacob can be found in Genesis, where Abraham is promised that his seed would bless the all of the earth. His seed is described in Genesis 22:16-18 as “the stars of the heavens” and “the sand which is on the seashore.”

Yet, whenever the promise is made regarding Isaac (a type or picture of the church - Galatians 4:28) in Genesis 15:4-5, 26:1-4, only the “stars of heaven” are mentioned. And, whenever the promise is made in relation to the land of Israel or to Jacob (who pictures Israel) in Genesis 13:16, 28:14, 32:12, Numbers 23:10, Isaiah 10:20-22, only the “sand on the seashore” or the “dust of the earth” is mentioned.

Cf. also Daniel 12:2-3 where both dust and stars are brought together again, and Revelation 20:8 where the kingdom has extended from Israel throughout the world (Jeremiah 3:17, Zechariah 8:20-23) and all the nations are now described as the “sand on the seashore” for multitude.

SPIRITUAL ISRAEL - The Church

Romans 2:28-29, 9:6-8

Galatians 6:16

Philippians 3:3

Colossians 2:11

19) RIGHT (as opposed to left) - the position of favor, as opposed to disfavor

Psalm 110:1 (Matthew 22:44, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42, Hebrews 1:13)

Matthew 26:64, Mark 14:62, Luke 22:69, Acts 2:33, 5:31, 7:55 and 56, Romans 8:34, Ephesians 1:20, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 1:3, 8:1, 10:12, 12:2, 1 Peter 3:22

Matthew 25:33 and 34 (41)

Revelation 1: 16, 20, 2:1

20) FEET - Dominion or control or inheritance

Deut. 25:9 (5-10), Ruth 4: 7 and 8 (1-12)

Acts 7:4 and 5

Matthew 3:11, Mark 1:7, Luke 3:16

In prophecy:

Psalm 110:1

Isaiah 52:7

Daniel 2: 34 and 43-44 (31-45)

Zechariah 14: 3-4

Revelation 11:2, 14:2

Symbolism – Numbers and Times

1) DAY(S) = Years (in time prophecies)

Ezekiel 4: 1-6

Numbers 13: 25 with 14: 34

Examples of Time Prophecies using “Days” (for years) -

1260 days - Revelation 12: 6, 11: 3

42 months - Revelation 11: 2, 13: 5

3 1/2 times (or years) of days - Daniel 7: 25, 12: 6 and 7, and Revelation 12:14

(Note: At 30 days per month, 3 1/2 years, 42 months, and 1260 days are all the same period of time - 1260 years.)

70 weeks (490 days) - Daniel 9: 23-27

2300 days - Daniel 8: 14

1290 / 1335 days - Daniel 12: 11 and 12

10 days - Revelation 2: 10

5 months (150 days) - Revelation 9: 5 and 10

2) The Number Forty

Forty (40) in scripture is representative of a period of trial and/or judgment.

Genesis 7: 4, 17

Numbers 13:25, 14: 33, 34

Deuteronomy 25: 3 (2 Cor. 11:24)

1 Samuel 17:16

Ezekiel 29: 11-13

Jonah 3: 4

Matthew 4: 2, 3

Revelation 14: 20 (40 x 40)

(An odd but interesting side note is that the number seven, which is by far the most prominent number in the book of Revelation, occurs in Revelation... 40 times.)

Appendix C ~ Special Note on “Heaven” in the Book of Revelation

The first thought of most Christians when first opening Revelation is to assume that heaven – everywhere in this book – is the place where God dwells. Yet, there are problems with this limiting assumption.

Note on Translation of “Heaven”

To begin this study, note that the English words “heaven” or “heavens” everywhere in the New Testament with only two exceptions come from the Greek word *ouranos* (NASB Conc. #3772 οὐρανός). This Greek word is also nine times translated as “air” and twenty-two times translated as “sky” in the NASB.

Possible Significance for Heaven in Revelation

In reality there are three possible meanings for the word heaven in Revelation, and it seems plausible that all three of these possibilities are true at some point in this book. The three explanations are:

- ❖ That heaven represents the sky in a literal sense as John is receiving the vision. This seems to be the likely explanation nearly everywhere the word “heaven” occurs in the book.
- ❖ Heaven is also the place where God dwells in a few instances.
- ❖ Much more frequently than the second suggestion above, heaven is not only the literal sky as John saw it with his eyes, but it is also symbolic of something greater... in the same way that sea and earth also represent something more than the literal sea (e.g. 17:15, 15:2, 21:1) and earth (e.g. 12:16, 13:11, 20:11) in Revelation.

The focus in this appendix will be on the third meaning of “heaven” in Revelation. Heaven in Revelation and elsewhere represents a position of power for whoever is “in” it. Let’s assume this will become obvious as we proceed to look at “heaven” in the scriptures.

Heaven Symbolic of Power and Authority

The thought of heaven being symbolic does not detract from the reality of an actual heaven (whatever and/or wherever that may be). Heaven is frequently used in the Bible to picture authority and power (spiritual and/or earthly) in the religious world.

First, examples of heaven used symbolically from outside of the Book of Revelation:

- Ephesians 2:1-2 – *And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course⁴⁴⁵ of this world, according the prince of the power of the air [i.e., the same word translated heaven elsewhere], of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.*

This verse pronounces Satan as the ruler (prince) of the present heavens, a denotation that is echoed in slightly different form in other verses of the New Testament. Two examples follow:

Ephesians 6:12 – *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, [and] against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

2 Corinthians 4:4 – *...in whose case the god of this world⁴⁴⁶ has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

- Luke 21:26 – *...men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

Here in this verse the language of the verse is strange unless we see heaven(s) as something other than the above of God. The heavens in this verse have “powers” and they are going to be “shaken” in the great tribulation.

⁴⁴⁵ The margin of the NASB notes that the literal meaning of the word translated “course” means “age”. Other translators have commented on the meaning of the associated phrase, and perhaps a reasonable synthesis of their comments renders this part of the verse as “according to this age’s [ungodly] arrangement(s).”

⁴⁴⁶ NASB margin, literally “age”

There are other examples from outside of the Book of Revelation where heaven used symbolically (cf. Is. 34:1-4 for one example). Instead of continuing in other examples from elsewhere in the Bible, let's turn now to examples from Revelation itself:

- Rev. 4:1 – *After these things I looked, and behold, a door open in heaven...*

This verse raises the question as to whether heaven has doors. Elsewhere doors are used symbolically as in the door of our hearts (Rev. 3:20) or the symbolic door in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matt. 25:10, cf. also Luke 12:36).

- Rev. 8:1 – *When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*

There doesn't seem to be any reason to think that God or anyone else ever stops speaking for half an hour. Literally John is describing a point at which his visions stop for a short period. Any suggestion of a symbolic meaning in this event will be set aside for this discussion.

- Rev. 9:1 – *Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key to the bottomless pit was given to him.*

Symbolism is clearly a part of this verse. Imagery such as a star falling to the earth and a bottomless pit with a key to open it has no place in the real world. Most significantly the star is a person because the key is given to him. It then becomes problematic to think of a person described as a star falling from the literal heaven, especially since the star which is a celestial body is clearly symbolic.

- Rev. 12:4 – *And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth.*

If the third of the stars of heaven thrown to the earth are symbolic stars, the heaven from which they are thrown is no more likely to be literal here than the stars which came from it.

- Rev. 13:13 – *He [in context the two-horned beast in league with the beast and image of the beast] performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.*

This opponent of God and His people and servant of Satan brings fire from heaven. Certainly he is not reaching into the abode of God for this fiery sign. One of the most difficult issues with making “heaven” everyone in Revelation mean where God dwells.

- Rev. 15:5 – *After these things I looked, and the temple [margin – lit. sanctuary – evidently meaning the Most Holy compartment] of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened.*

The term sanctuary of the tabernacle of the testimony is simply a long but specific term to identify the final compartment of tabernacle of the Old Testament that travelled with the Israelites on their journeys. Solomon’s Temple later replaced it.

Yet here it is described as being “in heaven” against all evidence from the Old Testament. Contrary to the thought of the literal tabernacle being literally in heaven is the symbolic use of the tabernacle (and the temple, also) in Revelation. (See *Appendix E ~ The Temple and the Tabernacle in the Book of Revelation.*)

- Rev. 20:11 / 21:1 – *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence heaven and earth fled away, and no place was found for them... Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.*

These verses raise the question of whether God will destroy the heavens where he lives and start over. Although we cannot know the ways of God perfectly, this destructive act seems out of character.

This becomes even more challenging when we consider the other two locations of earth and sea in these verses. Destroying the literal earth runs counter to other scriptures that describe the permanence of the earth (Eccl. 1:4, Ps. 104:5) or where the earth stands for the “world” of people (Ps. 66:1, 67:7, etc.). Likewise the sea is not excluded from the future Kingdom of God, but Jesus shall “rule from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth” (Ps. 72:8, Zech. 9:10).

It seems much more likely that the symbols in these verses represent other things that pass away: heaven representing Satan's spiritual control of the institutions of this world, earth representing the corrupt society of the world, and sea representing the disenfranchised masses of people under these arrangements.

Brief Conclusion

Collectively, these examples from Revelation and elsewhere in scripture give us a definition for a symbolic use of heaven in addition to the description of the literal heaven where God abides. This is particularly true in the Book of Revelation.

Throughout Revelation the case can be made that "heaven" represents the power and authority of the religious world. This is true whether on a spiritual level (Satan is described as the ruler of this world's spiritual realm in this age) or on an earthly level (referring to the authorities and powers of the present arrangement of things).

Appendix D ~ Two Groups in Revelation

A Comparison of "those that dwell on the earth" with "every tribe and tongue and people and nation"

Applying the principles of topical bible study is especially important in the last book of the bible. It helps us to keep our imaginations from going astray in a book that is already sufficiently imaginative.

Many wonderful pictures in Revelation appear when we study it topically. One of these is the way classes of people are represented. In one instance, two groups of people come forth... defined as "those who dwell upon the earth" and "every tribe and tongue and people and nation". These two descriptions represent two distinct classes of people in the book of Revelation.

(Note that Revelation 13:7-8 specifically shows the "saints", "every tribe and tongue and people and nation", and "those who dwell upon the earth" as three separate and distinct groups.)

"Those who dwell upon the earth" is the first group to consider. A complete description of this group can be had by summarizing the testimony of all their occurrences in Revelation. They have the following characteristics and history:

- a. The hour of temptation is designed, at least in part, to test this group. (3:10)
- b. This group is guilty of shedding the blood of the saints. (6:10)
- c. The final three trumpets are a special woe to this class. (8:13)
- d. This group opposes the bible and is delighted to see its defeat. (11:7, 8, 10)
- e. This group worships the ten-horned beast. (13:8)
- f. At some point in history this group comes back to the worship of the ten-horned beast. (13:12)
- g. This group is deceived by the two-horned beast. (13:14)
- h. They are involved in making an image of the ten-horned beast. (13:14)
- i. The true gospel is, at some point in history, preached to this group. (14:6)
- j. This group has become intoxicated by (overcome with the spirit of) the mixture of church and state. (17:2)
- k. They find wonder in the return of the beast. (13:8)

“Every tribe and tongue and people and nation” is the other group under consideration. This group has the following the following history and characteristics:

- a. The church comes out of this class. (5:9)
- b. The tribulation saints come out of this class. (7:9)
- c. This group does not permit the burial of the scripture. (11:9)
- d. They were under the forced rule of the ten-horned beast. (13:7)
- e. This group also, at some point in history, has the true gospel preached to them. (14:6)
- f. This group is called “waters”. (17:15)

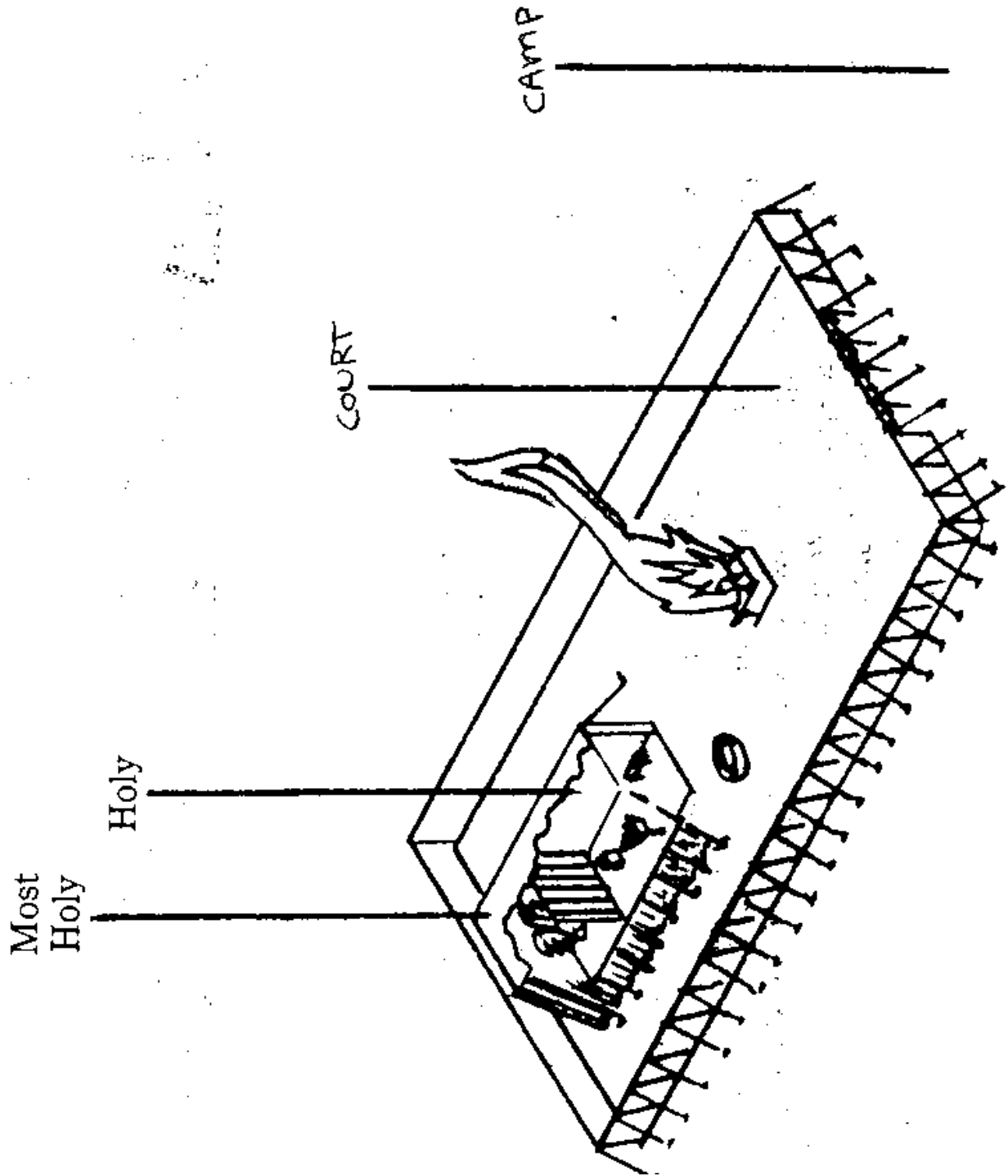
From the foregoing it should be obvious that these two groups have very different characteristics. A suggested interpretation for each of these two groups is as follows:

“Those who dwell upon the earth” seems to represent those who favor the false church of Revelation in chapters 13/17/18 and it’s church-state relationship (Revelation 17:1-6). They support the religious status quo.

“Every tribe and tongue and people and nation” would seem to represent those people (perhaps especially in nominally Christian lands) that do not completely support the institutional church and are at least sympathetic to the gospel where it differs from the distorted interpretations of medieval times.

The consistency of the descriptions suggests that the interpretation above – or at least something similar – is the understanding that the Lord intended.

Appendix E1 ~ The Layout of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness



Appendix E2 ~ The Temple and the Tabernacle in the Book of Revelation

The tabernacle, the temple, and the artifacts and furniture in each are frequently found in the Book of Revelation. Elsewhere, the writer of Hebrews confirms the symbolic nature of the tabernacle (Hebrews 9:8-11), its sacrifices (Hebrews 10:1), and its priesthood (Hebrews 8:4 and 5) when he speaks of “the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man” (Hebrews 8:2).

So the tabernacle and also the temple(s) that succeeded the tabernacle have significant meaning for us and serve as physical illustrations of the Christian life. Consider how the tabernacle itself is described in figurative terms in the Book of Hebrews:

“...we have such a high priest, who has taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a minister... of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man. Now if he were on earth, He would not be a priest at all... those... serve as a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For there was a tabernacle prepared, the outward one... the Holy Spirit signifying this, that the way into the holy places had not yet been disclosed while the outward tabernacle was still standing, which is a symbol for the present time. Christ... entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle... Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed... but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself... For the Law... had only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very reality...” – selected from Hebrews 8:1-5, 9:2, 8-11, 23-24, 10:1.

Like the tabernacle in the wilderness, Solomon’s Temple is an illustration of the church, but unlike the tabernacle, the temple is a permanent structure illustrating the final conclusion of the Christian life in heaven:

“He who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God... you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood... So then you... having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord... Do you not know that you are the temple of God?” – selected from Rev. 3:12, 1 Pet. 2:5, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Cor. 3:16, cf. Rev. 11:19).

Aspects of the tabernacle and temple are also picked up and used as symbols of a greater reality throughout the Book of Revelation. It is surprising just how often they occur.

To lay the groundwork for understanding the symbolism used in Hebrews and Revelation and elsewhere, we note that in the tabernacle arrangement there are four “areas” – the Camp, the Court, the Holy, and the Most Holy. Along with the furniture and artifacts of the tabernacle, these four areas are described in great detail in Exodus chapters 25-27, and also in other places in both the Old and New Testament.

What These Four Areas Represent Symbolically

Hebrews 13:11-14 seems to suggest that the camp represents the world. Hebrews 10:19 and 20 suggests that the Holy represents the spiritual life of the Christian. And Hebrews 6:19 and 20 and 9:24 suggest that the Most Holy represents heaven itself. There is no direct interpretation of the Court, but it would reasonably represent the condition of “justification”, i.e., those who have accepted Jesus as a sacrifice for their sins. (Revelation 11:1-2 at first glance seems to suggest otherwise. Note however that, unlike the tabernacle, the temple arrangement had more than one court, including an outermost court known as the Court of the Gentiles.)

From this perspective, the tabernacle would then represent the course of the Christian life: from the Camp (the “world”) to the Court (acceptance of Christ’s sacrifice for sin) to the Holy (the committed and spirit-filled life) to the Most Holy (heaven).

As we shall see, the interpretation of the furniture and artifacts in each of these four “areas” seems to support the conclusions above.

The *Camp* is where the worst parts of the animal sacrifice were burned (hide, entrails, etc.). Perhaps this is how the world views the sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 13:11-14).

In the *Court* (which was surrounded by a white linen curtain wall representing righteousness – Revelation 19:8) there was the Altar of Brass (literally “copper”). This is the altar where the choice parts of the animal sacrifices were burned. At least some of these sacrifices would represent of the sacrifice of Christ since this altar has the power to confirm the righteousness of God’s justice (Revelation 16:7).

(Some of the animal sacrifices might possibly represent the sacrifice of the church as well (Hebrews 13:10, 11-13), although the church has no righteousness of their own, but depends on the sacrifice of Christ. This idea of the church being sacrificed on the altar is suggested in Revelation 6:9-11 where the saints are pictured as the ashes... the “souls” or sacrificed lives... that are under the altar crying out for justice.)

In the Court, there was also a basin just before entering the Holy for washing up, which seems to fit well with interpreting the Court as a condition just prior to “sanctification”.

In the *Holy* there were several pieces of furniture.

There was the Golden Candlestick, which seems to represent the church at the present (Revelation 1:20), and the light from which seems to represent the Holy Spirit (Revelation 4:5).

The Table of Shewbread as a symbol is not identified anywhere, but it seems to suggest truth and righteousness (1 Corinthians 5:8) and perhaps more specifically, the bible.

Finally, in the Holy there is the Golden Incense Altar that seems to represent prayer (Revelation 5:8, Psalm 141:1-2, cf. Luke 1:9-11). (Interestingly, the Golden Incense Altar (prayer) is the piece of furniture closest to the Most Holy (or heaven), being just outside the veil between the Holy

and the Most Holy. A censer with burning incense from the Golden Incense Altar was apparently brought into the Most Holy on certain occasions.)

Revelation 8:5-8 also suggests prayer is represented by the Golden Altar, although it requires a little more explanation. To start, note that the first altar in these verses (where the angel is standing) is the Altar of Brass... because this is where the fire is. He could not be standing at the Golden Incense Altar, because that altar did not have its own fire, but required fire from the Altar of Brass.

The angel has a “censer” in his hand. According to the original language this is a “frankincense” (a rather awkward sounding phrase in English, but the most accurate translation of the word). This frankincense in the censer is *not* the prayers of the saints, but this frankincense is offered at the Altar of Brass *with* the prayers of the saints which are on the Golden Incense Altar, where they should be.

Frankincense seems to represent “justice” or “righteousness” in the scriptures (Leviticus 2:1-3, Leviticus 5:11, Numbers 5:15, and Leviticus 24:7/cf. Psalm 19:7-11). It comes from a root word in Hebrew meaning “white”, which also suggests righteousness.

This suggests that Revelation 8 verses 3-4 represent the righteousness of Jesus now added to the prayers of the saints after his death. Note also, that it is the “Brazen Altar” – representing justice (and also where Christ is sacrificed) – from which the angel gets his fire in these verses. In a historicist interpretation of Revelation, the earthquake in verse 5 would then symbolize the destruction of the Jewish nation shortly after the death of Christ and at the start of the Christian Age and the seven trumpets.

In the *Most Holy*, there was only one piece of furniture, the Ark of the Covenant (Revelation 11:19). Possibly this represents the church in glory. There are some rather lengthy reasons why this might be so. Suffice it to say for now that God was somehow present (as a supernatural light and power) between the cherubim on the mercy seat that covered the ark, and likewise God is present in the church and is her light when the church experiences her resurrection glory (Revelation 21:2, 22-23).

The Tabernacle and the Temple

In a broader sense, the tabernacle (which was a portable structure and accompanied the Israelites in their wanderings) may represent the church on earth in its present “wilderness” condition. The temple, being a larger and more permanent structure, would then represent the church in glory.

This would fit well with not only Revelation chapter 21, but also Revelation 3:12 – where one of the promises made by Jesus to each member of the church was to be a “pillar in the temple of My God.”

The Covenant Sacrifices

There were many types of sacrifices, both inside and outside of the tabernacle and temple arrangement, but only one type of sacrifice was used to seal a covenant.

In the Old Testament period, a covenant was sealed by two parties passing through the pieces of the animal sacrifice. (See Genesis 15:5 and 15-16, Genesis 21:27 – literally “cut a covenant”, and Jeremiah 34:18-20, cf. Hebrews 9:16-19.)

And so, in Revelation 2:1 when we see the Lord walking among the Seven Lampstands that represent the seven churches, it’s possible that the intended picture is the same type of covenant sacrifice. The Lord passing through the sacrificial church represents the sealing of the New Covenant.

The Weight of a Talent

In the tabernacle construction, there were silver sockets that supported the boards that framed the tabernacle itself, i.e., the Holy and Most Holy, and the veils between the compartments (Exodus 26:17-25). Each socket weighed one talent (Exodus 38:27).

The silver came from a tax on the people of Israel (Exodus 38:25 and 26). Somehow, this tax was considered an “atonement” for Israel (Exodus 30:12-16). In this way it differed from the offerings of gold (vs. 24) and copper (vs. 29 – rendered “brass” in many translations) in Exodus chapter 38.

The mention of “atonement” suggests that the silver talents each represent the sacrifice of Christ in some way. Silver seems to represent the truth (Psalm 12:6) of our Lord’s sacrifice of his sinless human life, perhaps also represented in the 30 shekels or “pieces of silver” Judas received for his betrayal of Jesus (Matthew 26:15).

Whether this is the case or not, there is at least one passage in 1 Kings 20 (especially vss. 39-42) that suggest that a talent of silver is representative of the value of a man’s life.

So when we read in Revelation 16:21 that at the conclusion of the 7th plague “huge hailstones, each about the weight of a talent, came down from heaven upon men...” it naturally suggests a connection with the Old Testament symbolism of the silver talents. If “water” represents *truth*, then “hailstones” represent *hard truths*, and if “the weight of a talent” represents the *value of a man’s life*... then perhaps this plague of hailstones represents hard truths about the value of man and his institutions. These hard truths will be made manifest in the collapse of social order at the conclusion of the “seven last plagues” or “great tribulation.”

“And huge hailstones, each about the weight of a talent came down from heaven on men, and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.”

Appendix F ~ Four Views on Revelation

Introduction

Revelation is not just an intellectual exercise. It gives us faith when we see the consistency of structure and interpretation, the fulfillment of God’s prophecies, and the kind of layered detail that extends well beyond the understanding of the original writers of the Old and New Testament prophecies (as in Dan. 12: 8 and 9).

Revelation is a book describing a passionate God through wild imagery, powerful emotion, and the relentless pursuit of a perfect future. The message of this book has a keen sense of justice (social, economic, political, and religious), and often expresses a God angry at the constant strife and the suffering of others. It wounds to heal, expresses a feeling of closeness and love for the church, and longs to restore the world. And Revelation maintains throughout a strong sense of hope... through a confident anticipation of the future found in the visions and promises of God’s final victory over the darkness of this world.

“Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy...”

The Four Views

The synopsis of the viewpoints given below is brief to a fault and over-simplifies each school of thought. As such, it cannot possibly be entirely fair to, or descriptive of, each viewpoint. Any attempt to sketch these four views of Revelation in abbreviated form no doubt results in doing a certain amount of violence to each view, and of necessity will present only a partial description of each.

Preterist (Postmillennialism and Amillennialism / Kingdom Now or Dominion Theology)

Classical Preterist – 1st Advent only / Fall of Jerusalem

Revisionist Preterism 1 – 1st Advent, Kingdom Rev 20-22

Revisionist Preterism 1 – 1st Advent, Fall of Rome Rev 14-19,
Kingdom Rev 20-22

Futurist (Premillennial / Dispensational)

Classical Dispensationalism
Progressive Dispensationalism

Historicist (Premillennial)

Classic Reformation Historicist
Second Adventist Historicist

Idealist or **Spiritual** (Amillennial)

Various Interpretations

Definitions

Preterist View ~

- (1) Becoming increasingly popular in our day.
- (2) The book of Revelation fulfilled at the time of the first advent of Christ.
- (3) Rev. 1:1 and 3 - Revelation is a book of “things which must shortly come to pass” and that “the time is at hand”, and other similar passages.

Revelation 1 – Vision of Risen Christ

Revelation 2-3 – Situation of Early Jewish Christianity

Revelation 4-5 – Heavenly Scene of Christ’s Reign

Revelation 6-18 – Judgments on Jerusalem

Revelation 19 – The Coming of Christ (in Judgment) to Complete the
Judgment of Jerusalem

Revelation 20-22 – The Kingdom Reign in Believers of all
Nationalities

Strengths:

- A logical fulfillment of the verses in Rev. 1:1 and 3
- A strong correlation with Jesus’ comments in Matthew chapters 23 and 24 and the parallel gospel accounts (“this generation” and “those who are in Judea” in Matthew 24)
- A thoughtful and reasonable interpretation of prophecy
- A clear fulfillment of the book at the first advent according to its proponents

Weaknesses:

- A lack of a consistent choice of literalism or symbolism as the interpretative mechanism (i.e., a shifting back and forth from one to the other almost at random with no consistency and no reason other than what seems to fit this particular interpretation of the book)
- Wildly varying applications among various authors for the time setting of the fulfillment of later portions of the book (which is not necessarily a flaw if one of these applications is correct, but it does suggest issues with interpretation)⁴⁴⁷
- The limited range of its fulfillment (and benefit?) for those who hold to the strictest applications (that all was fulfilled at the first advent)
- A dispute over the dating of the book (because *if* the book of Revelation was written after the fall of Jerusalem, then the whole interpretation falls upon that one point alone)

Futurist View (Classical Dispensationalist) ~

- (1) Currently still the most popular in our day. Popularized in the 60's and 70's through books such as *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey.
- (2) Nearly all of the book of Revelation is fulfilled at the Second Advent.
- (3) Emphasizes the importance of viewing passages as literal unless they clearly cannot be interpreted that way.
- (4) Telescoping view of the "sevens series". Seven trumpets compose the seventh seal. Seven bowls (seven last plagues) compose the seventh trumpet.

Strengths:

- Possible signs for the nearness of the second advent
- The concept of accepting the passages for what they literally say without trying to force an interpretation upon them
- Oddly, the lack of objective criteria to refute interpretations (since almost none of the book of Revelation has actually been fulfilled yet)

Weaknesses:

- The literalism of the interpretation (which – while it may seem simpler of interpretation – lacks a certain conviction amidst all the imagery that seems in evidence throughout the book of Revelation)

⁴⁴⁷ Note for example Rev. 22:6. The question of whether "the things which must soon take place" includes fulfillment of the Revelation 22nd chapter around the same time as the fall of Jerusalem in 69-70 AD cannot be avoided.

- A lack of a consistent choice of literalism or symbolism as the interpretative mechanism (i.e., a shifting back and forth from one to the other and highly speculative interpretations for passages identified as symbolic)
- The sensationalist interpretations of its more media-driven proponents (which could be seen as more of an issue with popular expressions of this viewpoint rather than the viewpoint itself)
- The difficulty with passages such as Revelation 1:1 and 3 and the narrow time frame of fulfillment.

Historicist View ~

(1) Very few proponents today (outside of historic second advent churches – the largest and most notable being the Seventh Day Adventists and also the Jehovah’s Witnesses).

(2) It was the universal view of the Reformation from the beginning of the Reformation under Waldo and Wycliffe, and on through Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Campbell and a multitude of others.

(3) The book of Revelation is a continuous unfolding prophetic history from the first advent throughout the Christian age through the second advent until the close of the millennial age of 1000 years.

(4) Revelation is almost exclusively symbolic in nature. (Revelation 1:1 suggests a consistent use of symbolism when it says “He signified it” (KJV)... the original Greek word for “signified” here meaning the use of signs and symbols.)

(5) It shares aspects of both of the two previously mentioned views of Revelation, as well as properties unique to its own perspective.

(6) Most known for interpreting the antichrist as the institution of the Roman Catholic church.

Strengths:

- Prophecies that are clearly fulfilled during the preceding centuries (according to its proponents, at least)
- A thoughtful and extensive history for the interpretation of this prophecy
- A rich and biblically consistent interpretation of symbolism
- An application of the book throughout the entire history of the church on earth and into the future that does not exclude most of the history of the church

Weaknesses:

- A constant need for revision as history continues to unfold and prove past interpretations of some passages as premature
- The question of whether some passages should be interpreted as literal or symbolic
- Varying interpretations (which like the differing viewpoints within Preterism and Futurism is not necessarily a flaw if one of these applications is correct, but does suggest issues with interpretation)
- The very complex nature of the viewpoint (which can be seen as a strength also depending on perspective)
- What can be considered the disparaging nature of some of its interpretations of church history (which is more of an issue with popular sentiment rather than biblical and historical interpretation)

Idealist View ~

(1) Gaining in popularity in our day, but not as popular as the Preteris and Futurist Views.

(2) Sometimes called the “Spiritual or Symbolic View” of Revelation.

(3) This viewpoint was represented historically as early as the start of the third century by Origin, the eminent leader of the Alexandrian church. Some of the basic tenets were later adopted by Augustine, among others.

(4) More similar to historicism than to the other views (because it views Revelation as almost exclusively symbolic and because it sees Revelation as beginning at the first advent and unfolding into the future).

(5) Also differs radically from Historicism because it does not suggest specific events in history as fulfillments of the prophecy, but rather sees general themes in the book which are applicable to many times and circumstances. It sees Revelation as a book teaching spiritual precepts through symbols rather than as predictive prophecy.

(6) Events are cyclical – the same events happen over and over. For example, the seven churches are an example of what can happen in congregational life in all times and places.

(7) Revelation is more personal, more about the experience of the Christian and less of an academic exercise.

(8) Examples pgs 105-106 and pages 117-118.

Strengths:

- A consistent use of symbolism in its explanation while other interpretations fight over which parts are symbolic and which are literal
- Its emphasis on practical applications of the prophecy throughout the experiences of the church which it is suggested makes it more relative to the Christian life
- A flexible understanding of the book which avoids a constant conflict in interpretation between various interpreters (this constant conflict showing that the book is not clear to the other viewpoints)

Weaknesses:

- The implication that only this view really expresses the timeless spiritual themes embodied in the book of Revelation
- The detailed descriptions in Revelation that appear to be satisfied only by concrete historical events
- The fact that Revelation makes extensive use of Old Testament prophecies that can only be satisfied by historical fulfillment (for example, if we compare Daniel chapters 2, 7, and 8 with Revelation 12 and 13, etc., etc.)
- The time frame indicators in the prophecy (that even some idealist interpreters are forced to acknowledge to a degree)
- The vagueness of the interpretations and the question of whether Revelation is a prophecy with a specific interpretation

Detailed Strengths of the Historicist Viewpoint

- It covers the entire sweep of history from first advent to second advent and beyond. There's a certain logic to Jesus giving us a book that applies throughout the entire course of the church on earth and in glory – instead of the narrow time frames of the Preterist and Futurist viewpoints.
- It partakes of some of the strength of the Preterist and Futurist viewpoints while avoiding the narrow chronological applications these viewpoints bring to the table.
- It consistently interprets biblical symbolism throughout the entire breadth of scripture in such a way as to give confidence in the inspiration of the bible and the fulfillment of prophecy.
- It consistently respects the symbolic nature of Revelation.
- It can point to very specific fulfillments of prophecy in the past to support its ongoing fulfillment... to encourage us that God is present and that history is

proceeding toward the Kingdom just as He foretold all along... even as new events continue to unfold around us.

- It maintains a link to the first advent and sees the book as beginning its fulfillment immediately (like Preterism), while maintaining the tension of the anticipation of the second advent (found in most Futurist views).
- Many of its tenets are in agreement with the Idealist interpretation of scripture, but at the same time it provides a scope to the detail present throughout the book that is not present in the Idealist interpretation.
- But, as in all interpretations of Revelation, it must (and does) give us enduring lessons for our day like the Idealist interpretation if it is to have practical value for us.

Various Theological Systems Related to Interpretations of Revelation

Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, Amillennialism

Premillennial – Christ returns before the millennium

Postmillennial – Christ returns at the end of the millennium

Amillennial – Christ's return is the millennium

Dispensationalism (generally considered at odds with Covenant Theology)

Classical Dispensationalism

(1) Premillennial (different from historic premillennialism)

(2) Pre-tribulation rapture

(3) 8 Ages – Innocence, conscience, government, promise, mosaic law, Christian/grace, tribulation, millennium

(4) Emphasizes literal interpretation wherever possible, and sees a distinction between Israel and the Church.

(5) Grace age only exists because Israel failed to accept their Messiah

(6) New covenant is fulfilled in Israel

Progressive Dispensationalism

- (1) Kingdom age began at first advent and progressively unfolds to its full realization at the 2nd advent.
First advent = inauguration of Kingdom
Second advent = full realization of Kingdom
- (2) “already/not yet” interpretation (Rev 1:19)
Historical fulfillment – Caesar worship, Jewish persecution of Christians, etc.
Future fulfillment – those prophecies still awaiting fulfillment (trib., antichrist, millennium, etc)
- (3) The church is not a parenthesis in the plan of God, but part of the one people of God
- (4) Reign began at the resurrection of Jesus
- (5) New covenant is fulfilled in the Church

Second Advent Movement (some examples of the theological impact of this movement in the mid 1800’s on current Evangelical theology)

- (1) History (worldwide and US)
- (2) Literal future return of Christ
- (3) Literal 1,000 year reign of Christ
- (4) Literal return of the Jews to Israel
- (5) The resurrection of the dead at Christ’s return
- (6) The time of the end and the tribulation
- (7) The tribulation saints

Appendix G ~ Parallels Between the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation

1) The Four Empires in Daniel:

<u>Daniel 2</u>	<u>Daniel 7</u>	<u>Daniel 8</u>	<u>Interpretation</u>
Head of Gold	Lion-like Beast		Babylon (2:36-38)
Chest and Arms of Silver	Bear-like Beast	Ram with Two Horns	Media-Persia (5:25-30 & 8:2-4)
Belly and Thighs of Brass	Leopard-like Beast	Goat	Greece (8:5-8)
Legs of Iron	Terrible Beast		Rome
Feet and Toes of Iron	Ten Horns		Europe
...and Clay	Little Horn	Small Horn	Anti-Christ

The Little Horn of Daniel 7 and the Beast of Revelation 13 are the same...

Both...

...have a mouth speaking “great” or “arrogant” words (Daniel 7:20 and Revelation 13:5)

...make war on the saints and overcome them (Daniel 7:21 and Revelation 13:7)

...rule for the 3½ times / 42 months / 1260 days (Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 13:5)

The Little Horn and the Beast both seem to be symbolic descriptions for the “Man of Sin” of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8 and the “Anti-Christ” of 1 John and 2 John (see 2 John 1:7).

2) Daniel 7 also has connections to Revelation chapter 20 where much of the language of Daniel is picked up and incorporated into the chapter in Revelation.

In both chapters, judgment is given to the saints (to execute on the nations and the world – Revelation 2: 26 and 27 / 1 Corinthians 6:2 and 3) in Daniel 7:22 and 27⁴⁴⁸ and Revelation 20:4. The Ancient of Days (God) and the saints both sit in judgment in Daniel 7:9, 10, and 26 and in Revelation 20: 4 and 11.

In each chapter the “books were opened” as part of the judgment (Daniel 7:10 and Revelation 20:12). In each chapter there is a judgment on the nations (Daniel 7:26 and 27 and Revelation 20:11).

3) Also, there is a connection between Daniel 2 and Revelation chapter 20. The expression that the earth and heaven⁴⁴⁹ “fled away, and no place was found for them” (Revelation 20:11) is probably taken from the expression that the wind “carried away” the remnants of the great image of empires “so that not a trace of them was found” (Daniel 2:35).

4) There is an extensive relationship between Daniel chapter 12 and Revelation chapter 10. This is discussed in detail in the section on Revelation chapter 10.

⁴⁴⁸ The translation of these verses in some translations is suspect. The translation seems unclear as to whether judgment is (1) being given to the saints to execute or (2) being passed in their favor. I’ve suggested that the clearest sense of these passages is the first version, but the matter remains somewhat unsettled.

⁴⁴⁹ The expression “heaven and earth” is understood to mean the nations of the world here. See the section on *Bible Symbolology* for the reasoning behind this.

Appendix H ~ Parallels Between the Book of Ezekiel and the Book of Revelation

There are so many points of correspondence between the books of Revelation and Ezekiel, that it is difficult to question the parallel nature of the two books. The parallels occur in roughly the same chronological order in each book with only a few minor deviations. The examples below represent some obvious similarities:

Ezekiel	Revelation
“I also heard the sound... like the sound of abundant waters... like the voice of the Almighty...” (1:24)	“...and his voice was like the sound of many waters.” (1:15)
The “heavens were opened” at the beginning of the book just before the vision of the four living beings. (1:1)	There is “a door open in heaven” near the beginning of the book just before the vision of the four living beings. (4:1)
The four living beings are described near the beginning of the book. (1:3-10)	The four living beings are described near the beginning of the book. (4:6-8)
<p>Following the four living beings are chapters two and three describing a scroll with writing on both sides (2:9-11) that contains judgments (2:1).</p> <p>Ezekiel is commanded to eat the roll (2:8) that is sweet as honey (3:2) and is sent forth to prophesy (3:1,4).</p> <p>The third chapter concludes with the words “he who hears, let him hear” (3:27).</p>	<p>Following the description of the four living beings is the opening of a scroll that contains judgments in chapter five, written on both sides (5:1).</p> <p>Later John is commanded to eat a little book that is sweet as honey (10:8-10) and told that he will be sent forth to prophesy again (10:11).</p> <p>The expression “he who has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches...” is repeated to each of the seven churches (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:8, 13, 22, cf. Rev. 1:3).</p>

<p>One third of the people die in four different ways: plague, famine, sword, and scattering with sword behind them. (5:12)</p>	<p>The first four trumpets each bring death (fire, blood, bitter waters, darkness) to one third of the affected element. (8:7-12)</p>
<p>In Ezekiel one of the four living beings is responsible for granting the means of destruction to the responsible agent. (Chapters 9 and 10, especially 10:2, 7)</p>	<p>In Revelation one of the four living beings is responsible for granting the means of destruction to the responsible agent. (15:7)</p>
<p>Coincidental with the destructive agent granted by the living being is the smoke filling the temple (or “sanctuary” meaning the Most Holy) from the glory of God. (10:3-4)</p>	<p>Coincidental with the destructive agent granted by the living being is the smoke filling the temple (or “sanctuary” meaning the Most Holy) from the glory of God. (15:5-8)</p>
<p>Near the end of the book there is a time of trouble against Israel as the Lord goes to battle against the nations who are gathered together against Israel. (Chapters 38 and 39)</p>	<p>Near the end of the book the battle of Armageddon takes place wherein the Lord goes to battle against the opponents who are gathered together against Him. (Chapters 14-19, particularly 16:13-21 / 19:11-16, 19)</p>
<p>There is a great supper with those invited feasting on the remnants of the enemies of Israel. (39:17-21)</p>	<p>There is a great supper with those invited feasting on the remnants of the enemies of God. (19:17-21)</p>
<p>Following the trouble there is a new building described - Ezekiel’s Temple. The building is described and measured. (Chapters 40-46)</p>	<p>Following the trouble there is a new building described - the New Jerusalem. The building is described and measured. (Chapters 21-22)</p>
<p>Immediately following the description of Ezekiel’s Temple there is a river of life at the end of the book. (Chapter 47)</p> <p>This river has trees on each side for healing. (vss. 7, 12)</p>	<p>Immediately following the description of the New Jerusalem there is a river of life at the end of the book. (Chapter 22)</p> <p>This river has trees on each side for healing. (vs. 2)</p>

Appendix I ~ The Sevens of Revelation

Seven is by far the most common number found in a book with many numbers in it. There must be a reason for it.

One likely explanation is that seven is the number of the church throughout the Christian or Gospel Age. This can be seen in the fact that this book is written to seven specific churches, but evidently intended for the church as a whole throughout the age. It can also be seen in the seven candlesticks of the tabernacle and temple the represent the church and are linked to the seven churches in Revelation.

Since Revelation is specifically intended for “his bondservants” and not for the world of mankind as a whole, it is not surprising that the most common number in Revelation is the number of the church. Seven.

Many occurrences of the number seven are obvious and directly stated in the text:

- Seven Candlesticks
- Seven Churches
- Seven Stars
- Seven Angels (Messengers)
- Seven Horns
- Seven Eyes
- Seven Spirits
- Seven Seals
- Seven Trumpets
- Seven Thunders
- Seven Golden Bowls
- Seven Last Plagues
- Seven Heads
- Seven Mountains
- Seven Kings
- Seven Diadems

The number seven thousand also occurs once in Rev. 11:13. Counting this passage, the number seven occurs 55 times in Revelation altogether.

However, the number also occurs in more subtle ways throughout the book. One interesting use of the number seven is the parallel between the seven trumpets and the seven last plagues. In each case the trumpet and numerically corresponding plagues have similar subjects:

Trumpet	Plague
Earth	Earth
Sea	Sea
Rivers and Fountains	Rivers and Fountains
Sun, Moon, Stars	Sun
Darkness	Darkness
River Euphrates	River Euphrates
Heaven	Air and Heaven

The parallels shown above suggest that the events that occur throughout the age under the seven trumpets have consequences at the end of the age for those as a collective group that do not learn from their earlier experiences.

Other interesting occurrences of the number seven are not directly stated in the book as a number. For example, there are:

- Seven [as a word] Christ (1:2, 1:5, 11:15, 12:10, 20:4, 20:6)
- Twice Seven [as a word] Jesus (1:1, 1:2, 1:5, 1:9 twice, 12:17, 14:12, 17:6, 19:10 twice, 20:4, 22:16, 22:20, 22:21)
- Seven Amens (1:7, 5:14, 7:12 twice, 19:4, 22:20, 22:21, and excepting 3:14)

Seven continues to occur in other prominent words and phrases. It also occurs in gematria or the numerical value of the letters in the original language (Greek).

A little more speculative but interesting, Bonnie Gaunt notes in her book *Apocalypse ...and the Magnificent Sevens* that the numerical value of the Greek letters for seven is 386 and that the numerical value of the Hebrew letters for Jesus is also 386.

Finally, one interesting and beautiful example for the occurrence of seven in Revelation is the beatitudes (or blessings) that appear in the book. There are seven of them altogether:

“Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.” (1:3)

“And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, ‘Write, ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them [or “continue on” – some transl.]’ ” (14:13)

“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.” (16:15)

“The he said to me, ‘Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’ ” And he said to me, ‘These are the true words of God.’ ” (19:9)

“Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.” (20:6)

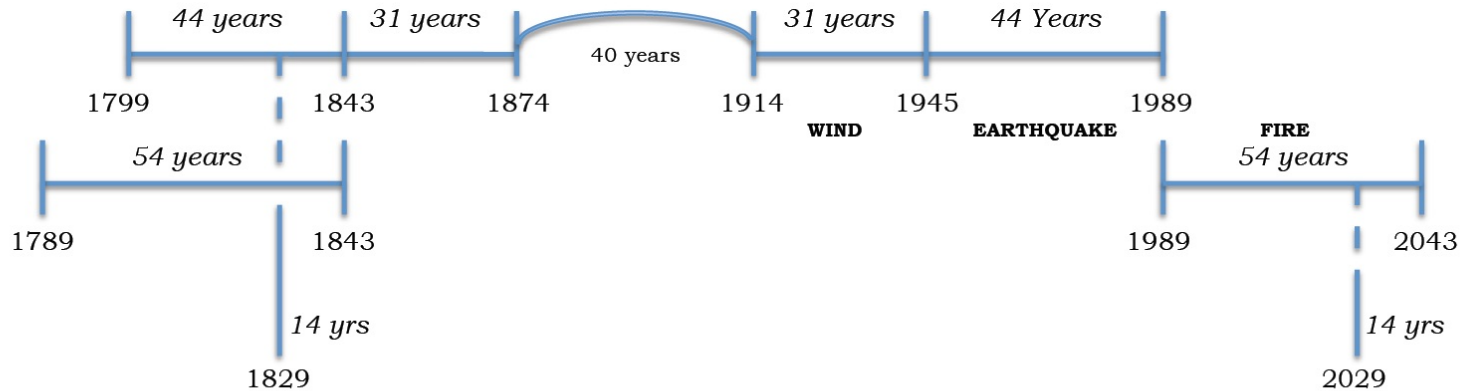
“And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book.” (22:7)

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.” (20:14)

Appendix J ~ Chronological Chart of the Time of the End

Parallel Time Periods in the Time of the End

“...and a great and strong wind was rending the mountains... but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind and earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, and after the fire a still small voice.” (1 Kings 19:11-12 NASB and KJV)



Explanation of the Dates (with the “days” all being found in the prophecies of Daniel at “a day for a year” – Ezek. 4:1-6):

1789 AD – The French Revolution begins.

1799 AD – The end of the 1260 days/years or “3½ times”. Pope dies in a French prison.

1829 AD – The end of the 1290 days/years. Second Advent movement begins. Increase of spiritual knowledge.

1843 AD – The end of the 2300 days/years. Second Advent movement ends. Increase of spiritual knowledge.

1874 AD – The end of the 1335 days/years. Second Advent period begins “the blessedness” (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43).

1914 AD – The end of the 2520 days/years or “seven times”. WWI (the winds of war) begins.

1945 AD – The end of WWII. Winds of war overtaken by the earthquakes of revolution. Communist takeovers and break up of colonial empires in wave of national revolts.

1989 AD – The fall of the power of communism (Berlin Wall, etc.) Earthquake of revolution overtaken by the rise of the fire of anarchy. Terrorism on the rise and the failure of nation-states begins. Society show increasing fragmentation.

2029 AD – Perhaps the beginning of massive financial failure. Possibly pictured in the storm of 14 days prior to shipwreck during Paul’s last journey to Rome (Acts 27:27). Ninth plague on Egypt of “thick darkness.”

2043 AD – The end of 6,000 years of sin and death. The fall of Babylon and the nations (Rev. 18:21, 16:19). The “still small voice” of the messianic kingdom begins in Israel (Jer. 3:17, Isaiah 2:2-4, Zechariah 14th chapter).

Appendix K ~ Natural and Spiritual Israel

Many thoughtful Christians have considered the question of the promises made to Israel and the prophecies about this people and nation in light of the New Testament promises to the church. Are the Old Testament promises and prophecies of Israel still valid? Or should all of them be applied to the Christian church? And Christians are of two minds about this.

What should be understood is that both of these viewpoints are valid.

(1) The promises to natural Israel have never been withdrawn. They have not been transferred wholesale to the church (a theological viewpoint known in everyday vernacular by the term of "replacement theology").

What is clear from Romans chapter eleven, especially 11:1-2, 25-29, is that in accepting the Gentiles into the church along with Jewish believers has change nothing with regard to the promises to the nation. Nor does Jesus ever challenge this notion. His acceptance of a special future for the nation of Israel is implicit in his response to the disciples in Acts 1:6-7.

Nor is the issue related to the New Testament alone. Prophecies from the Old Testament are also difficult to reconcile with "replacement theology". For example see Zechariah 8:20-23, 14:16-21, and Ezekiel chapters 36 through 39.

For that matter, even the passage describing the New Covenant is difficult to apply to the church. The prophet speaks of this covenant as different from the one made with their "fathers" (of the nation of Israel) who came out of Egypt... a "covenant which they broke..." (Jer. 31:31-34). A covenant that occurs after they are restored to their land and the curse of Adamic sin is removed (Jer. 31:27-30).

(2) There is another side of the promises to Israel not foreseen by the nation as a whole. That is the Kingdom of God is both heavenly and earthly or as "the stars of heaven" and "the sand on the seashore" as promised to Abraham.

It is clear from the New Testament passages that Israel as a nation consistently embodies lessons for the people of God in the Christian Age or Age of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul is clear that the law and the experiences of the nation of Israel were designed to teach those of us who would come after them (1 Corinthians

10:11, Galatians 4:21-31, Hebrews 9:8-11, 23-24, 10:1, etc.). This is because those experiences would illustrate a greater reality for the Christian church. Even the nation itself would picture a people of God that would be offered a "higher calling" in Christ. Consider how the apostles describe a "spiritual Israel" in the following passages of scripture that is frequently pictured through the literal nation:

- "For *he is not a Jew who is one outwardly*; neither is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh, but *he is a Jew who is one inwardly*; and circumcision is that which is *of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter*; and his praise is not from men, but from God." (Romans 2:28-29)
- "But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants, but "through Isaac your descendants will be named." That is, it is *not the children of the flesh* who are children of God, *but the children of the promise* are regarded as descendants." (Romans 9:6-8)
- "And those who will walk by this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon *the Israel of God*." (Galatians 6:16)
- "...for we are the *true circumcision*, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ and put no confidence in the flesh." (Philippians 3:3)
- "...and in Him you were also circumcised with a *circumcision made without hands*, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ..." (Colossians 2:11)

The book of Revelation also has a number of interesting expressions that also identify the reality of a spiritual Israel and even a counterfeit spiritual Israel:

- "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." (Revelation 2:9)
- "Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews, and are not, but lie – behold I will make them to come and bow down at your feet, and to know that I have loved you." (Revelation 3:9)
- "And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand from every tribe of the sons of Israel." / "And I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads." (Revelation 7:4 /14:1)

- “And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem (cf. Galatians 4:25-26), coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride (Revelation 19:7) adorned for her husband.” (Revelation 21:2)

This entire subject seems like it should be fruitful ground for lessons for the Christian. Should Christians apply the descriptions of Israel in Revelation to Christian character and the Christian church? What of character lessons and prophetic meaning attached to things like the descriptions of the 144,000 or the New Jerusalem?

However, many Christians think otherwise based on the references to twelve tribes of “Israel” on the gates of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:12 and the names of the twelve literal tribes of Israel in Rev. 7:4-8. Yet the references in both the NT as a whole and Revelation in particular to a “spiritual Israel” are definite and indisputable.

Consider the possibility that both viewpoints – promises and prophecies of natural Israel and of spiritual Israel – each find a place in scriptural interpretation.

Appendix L ~ Dimensions Related to the New Jerusalem

The following is a rather loosely organized collection of subjects related to the dimensions of the New Jerusalem. Think of the subjects as in a very unstructured progression.

(1) Gematria

The ancients formulated a system of alphabetical numbers in which each letter of the alphabet had a numerical value. Words then had numerical value, also. (This is known as Gematria.) Both the Greek and Hebrew alphabets also had numerical value, and so words in the Bible also have specific numerical value. It is thought that the numerical values of the words may have some significance.

(2) Astronomical Dimensions

12,000 stadia X 660 feet each is 7,920,000 feet or the diameter of the earth in miles X 1000.

Mean Circumference of the Earth 24,883.2 Miles = 12 X 12 X 12 X 12 X 1.2

Earth's Diameter... 7920 Miles = 12 X 12 X 55

Moon's Diameter...2160 Miles = 12 X 12 X 5

Sun's Diameter.....864,000 Miles (prox.) = 12 X 12 X 12 X 500

(Speed of Earth around the sun...66,600 Miles Per Hour = 12 X 5550)

More details to follow.

(3) Ancient Dimensions

In Revelation 21:16 and 17, we have both furlongs (or stadia) and cubits mentioned. Below are suggested conversions into current English measurements. For our purposes, both the original units of measure and their conversions will be important.

- Furlong (stadion) – 600 (Summerian) feet X 1.1 English feet = 660 English feet.
- Summerian foot – 1.1 English feet (almost exact).
- Cubit (Egyptian Royal Cubit) – 1.728 feet for our purposes.

Note that the size of the Egyptian Royal Cubit varied some in accordance with each particular trade. 1.718 to 1.72 were also common sizes.

In this case, the significance of 1.728 is that 1728 is 12 X 12 X 12. The pre-eminence of the number 12 throughout the Bible and in the astronomical measures cannot be questioned, strongly suggesting that this was the cubit intended. More exhaustive explanation can be provided, but it is too lengthy and detailed to include here.

(4) The Dimensions of the New Jerusalem and the Dimensions of the Earth

Already noted to a large extent in the main body of the comments on chapter twenty-one.

(5) The Great Pyramid

There is good reason to think that the Great Pyramid is referred to in Isaiah 19:19-20. This passage says, “in that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the Lord near it’s border [the ancient division between Upper and Lower Egypt]. And it will become a sign and witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt... [brackets mine]

Space and subject matter does not allow for detailing all the many scientific and biblical features of the Great Pyramid.

Among the scientific features demonstrated in various ways are: the pi ratio, the “golden section” ratio, the amount of land mass verses water on the earth, the direction of true north (not magnetic north), the exact number of days in a solar year (365.242), plus other scientific facts.

Among the biblical connections are: the dates for the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Jewish Law, the number of years from the giving of the Law to the baptism of Christ, the dimensions and arrangement of the biblical Tabernacle, an indication that he would be born in Bethlehem, and many other biblical connections.

(6) The Great Pyramid and Stonehenge

Two striking observations relate the Great Pyramid to Stonehenge, as illustrated in the following figures (Figures 6 through 8).

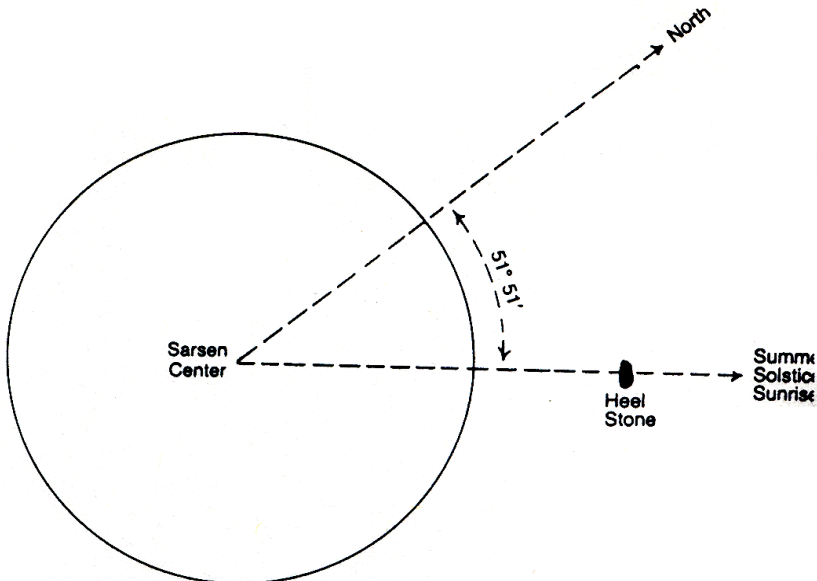


Figure 6

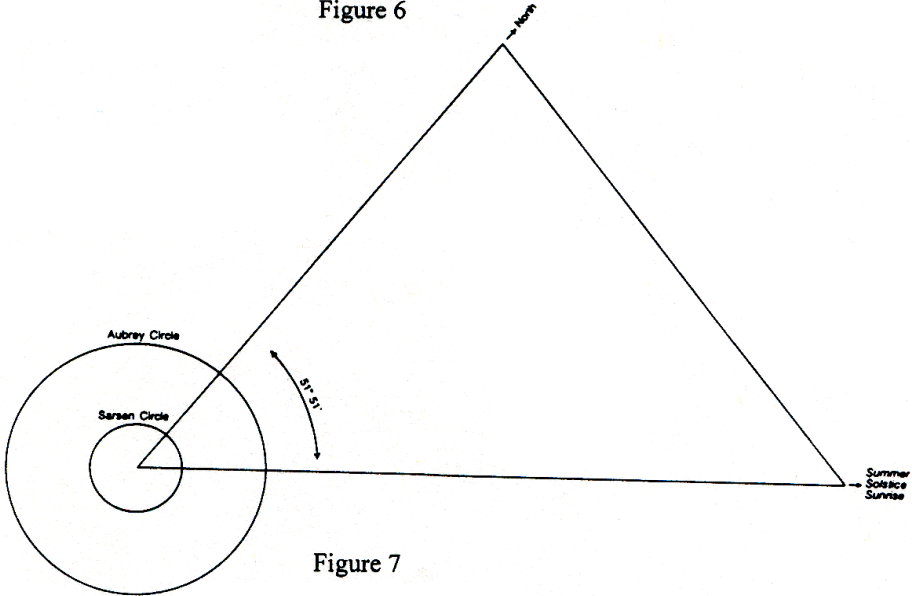


Figure 7

In Figures 6 and 7 above, note that the angle between the direction of the Heel Stone of Stonehenge (and the summer solstice) and the direction of true north is the same as that of the outside angle of the Great Pyramid. The degree of accuracy (51 degrees and 51 minutes) is noteworthy.

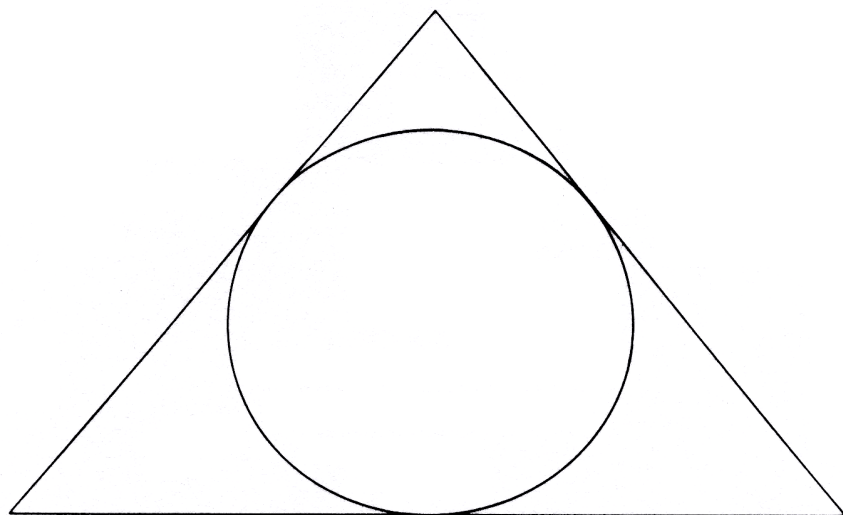


Figure 8

Figure 8 illustrates the correlation between the outermost circle of Stonehenge (the “ditch” – a feature made by the original builders) and the interior dimension of the Great Pyramid. The outermost circle fits precisely into the triangle of the Great Pyramid, just scribing the three sides.

(7) The New Jerusalem and Stonehenge

The figure below illustrates the square base of the New Jerusalem, the circle of the inner “wall”, and now a second outer circle whose circumference is the same dimension as the perimeter of the square.

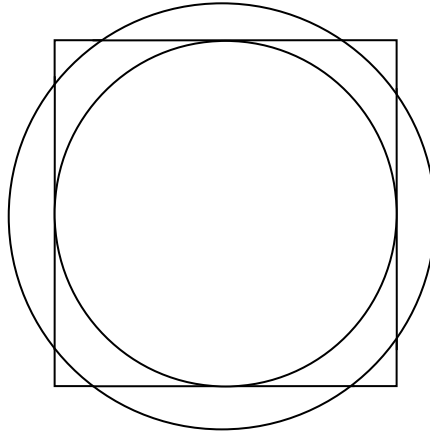
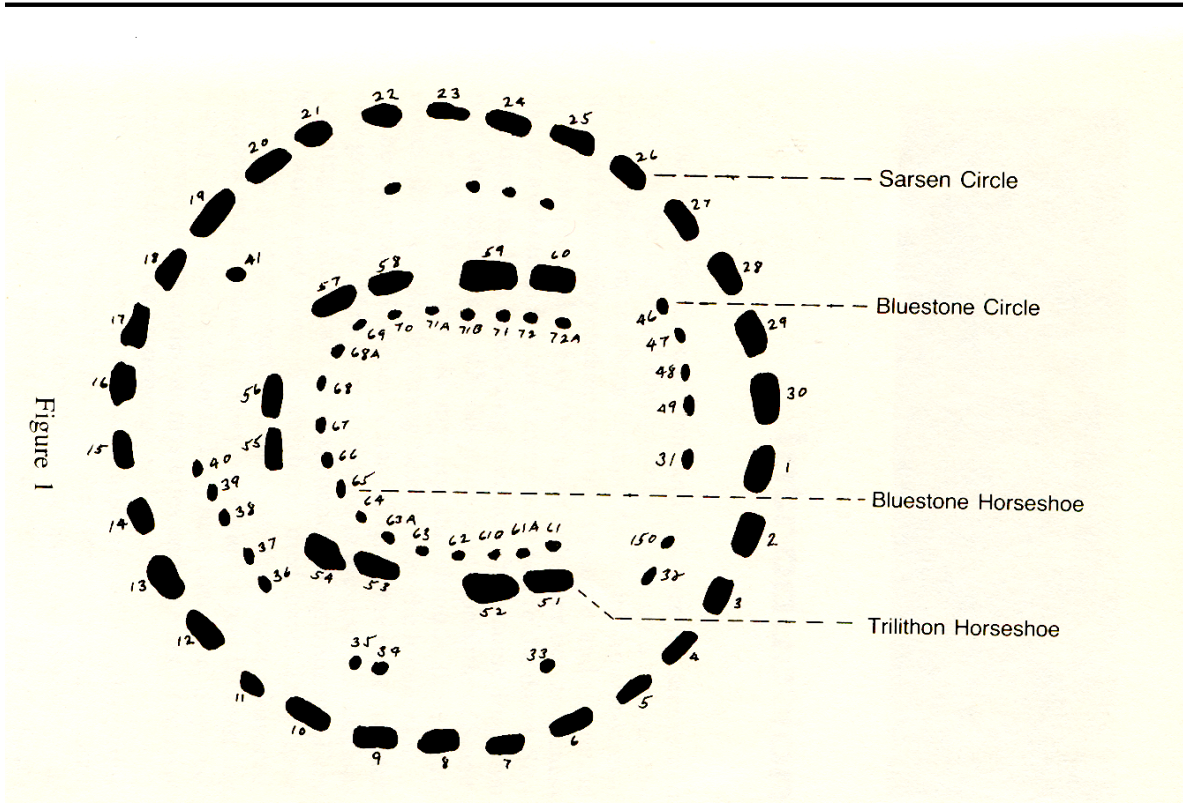
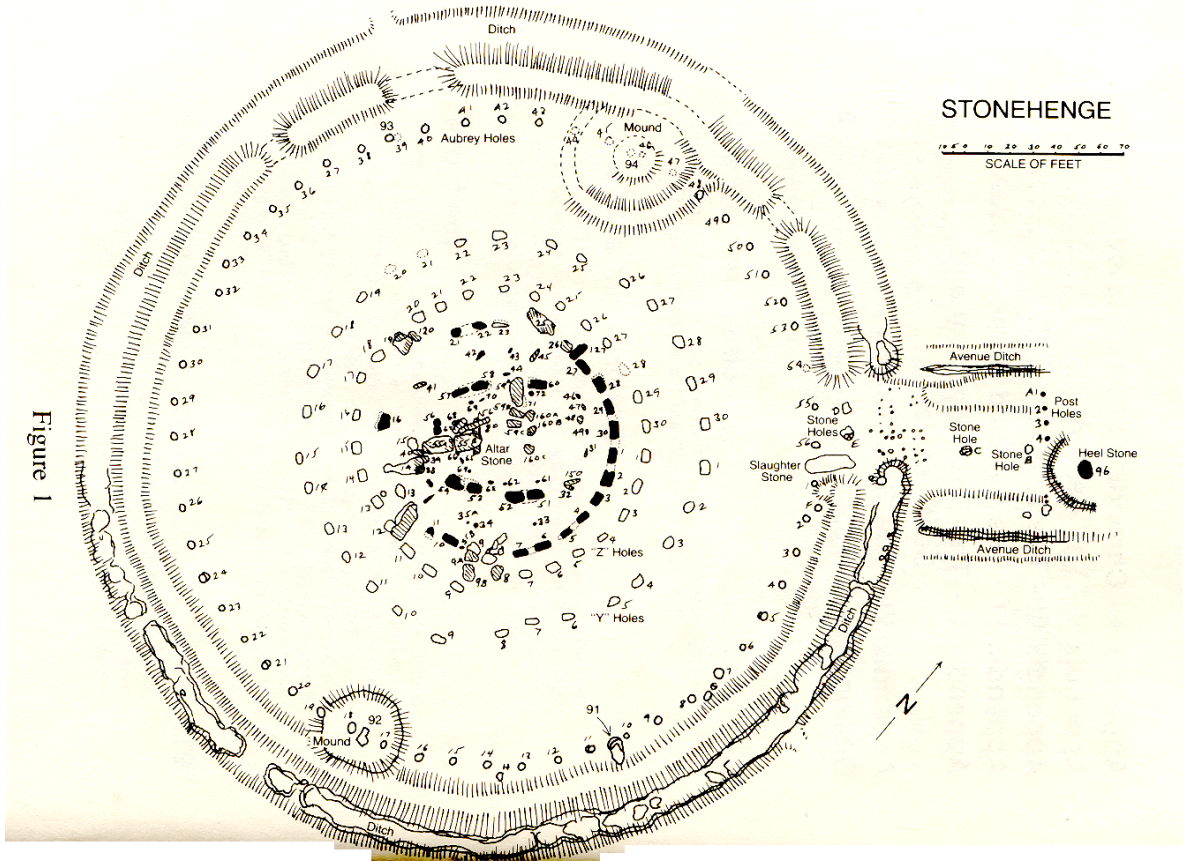


Figure 4

The circumference of this second circle (whose dimensions are the same as the square “base” of the New Jerusalem) is 31,680 feet.

The New Jerusalem has many dimensions in common (but scaled down) with the circles at Stonehenge. To begin the comparison, see 2 diagrams on the following page to get a view of Stonehenge and to learn the name of the various circles and stones.



The previous diagram in Figure 4 has been reproduced below as Figure 5, but as if superimposed in the left diagram on two of the Stonehenge circles – the Bluestone and Sarsen circles.

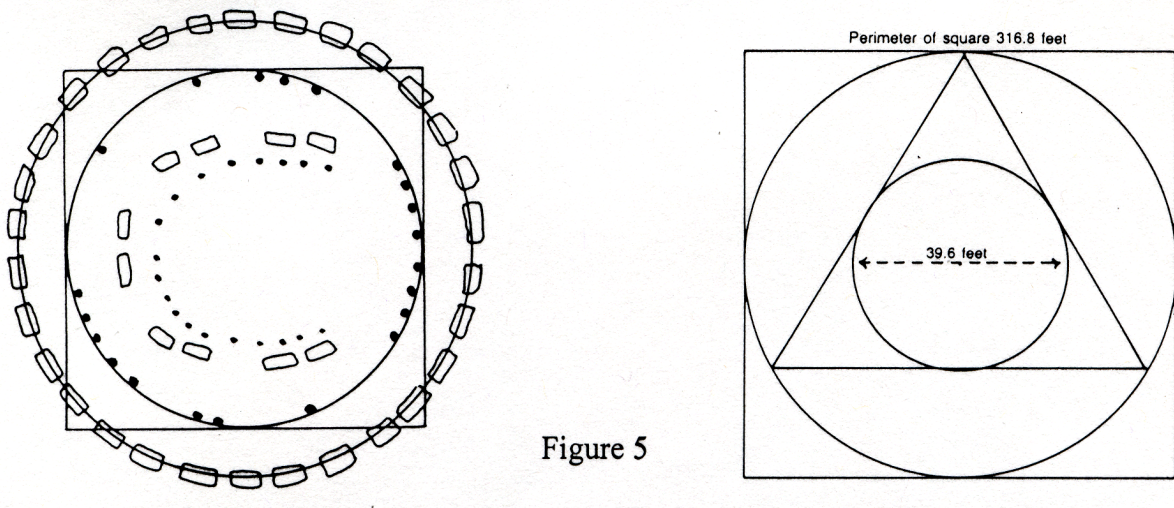


Figure 5

Also, note in the diagram on the right above, that if an equilateral triangle is drawn in the inner circle, and then a circle is inscribed within that triangle, the radius of that circle would be 39.6 feet. 39.6 feet is the diameter of the circle upon which the Bluestone Horseshoe is built. Also, the radius of the earth is 3960 miles.

(8) The New Jerusalem, Stonehenge, the Great Pyramid, and the Dimensions of the Earth and the Moon

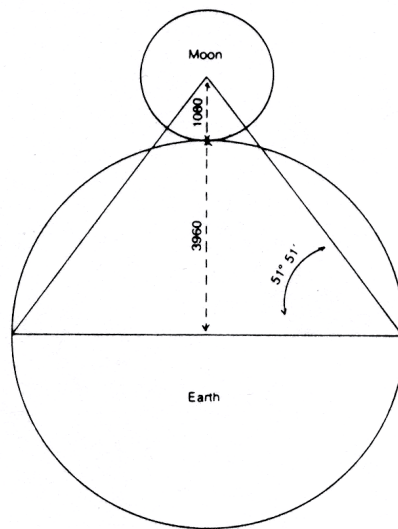


Figure 9

Figure 9. Place the moon directly on top of the earth. Draw a diameter line across the center of the earth at its equator. Put a dot at the exact center of the moon. Make the diameter of the earth the base of a triangle with its peak at the center of the moon. What is the angle of the two sides of the triangle?

51 degrees and 51 minutes. This is the exact same angle as the triangle of the Great Pyramid. This is the exact same angle as the difference between north and the Heel Stone (and summer solstice) at Stonehenge.

Then take the New Jerusalem dimensions and apply them. The “wall” or inner circle whose diameter of 7920 feet (see Figure 2) compares to earth’s diameter of 7920 miles represents the earth. Below in Figure 10 is the same illustration as back in Figure 2 with the circular “wall” and the square “base”, except that we’ve added a circle representing the moon on top in exact proportion to the circle representing the earth and a dot at it’s center. (The diameter of this circle is 2160 feet which compares to the 2160 mile diameter of the moon.)

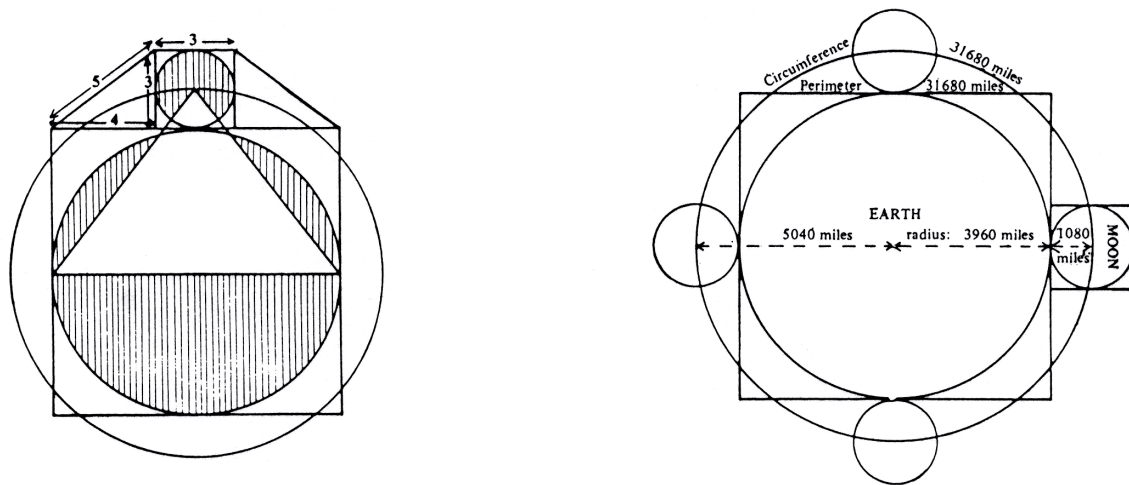


Figure 10

Next is overlaid a circle whose circumference is the exact same dimension as the perimeter of the square “base” of the New Jerusalem. (See Figure 4.) Note that this circle passes exactly through the center of the circle representing the moon! So the New Jerusalem also identifies the dimensions of the earth and the moon through a different but similar arrangement as Stonehenge and the Great Pyramid.

Another interesting dimension is the circumference of a circle drawn through the center of the moon, and having the perimeter of a square of the earth as its circumference. The circumference of this circle (and the perimeter of the square around the earth) would be 31,680 miles. By comparison, the perimeter of the square “base” of the New Jerusalem (and the circumference of a circle based on that dimension) is 31,680 feet! (And in an odd note on 31,680, the radius of the earth is 31,680 furlongs.)

(9) The New Jerusalem and the Tabernacle and Temple

The dimensions of the Most Holy of both the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple represent a cube. In the case of the tabernacle, the dimensions (measured from the outside) were 10 cubits X 10 cubits X 10 cubits. The Holiest of the temple was 20 cubits X 20 cubits X 20 cubits. As the Most Holy represents heaven, this connects us with another representation of heaven in the Book of Revelation. The New Jerusalem there was “laid out as a square” and “its length and width and height are equal” making a cube.

(10) Summary of Some of the Numbers and Geometry

Having covered a lot of ground, it might be well to step back and get the big picture of how all this fits together by summarizing some of the data and adding it together.

12

The diameters of the sun, earth, and moon are all divisible by multiples of 12. The dimensions of the New Jerusalem are divisible by 12 or multiples of 12.

864

- * The area of the six sides of the New Jerusalem is 864,000,000 furlongs.
- * The diameter of the sun is 864,000 miles.
- * The value of the Greek letters which spell the word Jerusalem is 864.
- * The radius of the moon (a smaller reflection of the sun) is 8640 furlongs.
- * The perimeter of a square drawn on the circumference of the moon (a smaller reflection of the sun) is 8640 miles.

51/51

- * The angle of the outside edge of the Great Pyramid is 51 deg. 51 mins.
- * The degree of angle at Stonehenge between summer solstice and true north is 51 deg. 51 mins.
- * The angle from the ends of the equator to the center of the moon (with the moon placed on top of the earth) is 51 deg. 51 mins.

Geometric Parallel

Based on reversing the relative proportions of the two dimensions of the New Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem's interior circle or "wall" and a circle of the same perimeter dimension as the square "base" have the same relative dimensions as the Bluestone Circle bears to the Sarsen Circle at Stonehenge – only on a larger scale.

7920

- * The diameter of the interior circle or "wall" of the New Jerusalem is 7920 feet.
- * The mean diameter of the earth is 7920 miles.
- * The diameter of the Bluestone Circle at Stonehenge is 79.2 feet.

31680

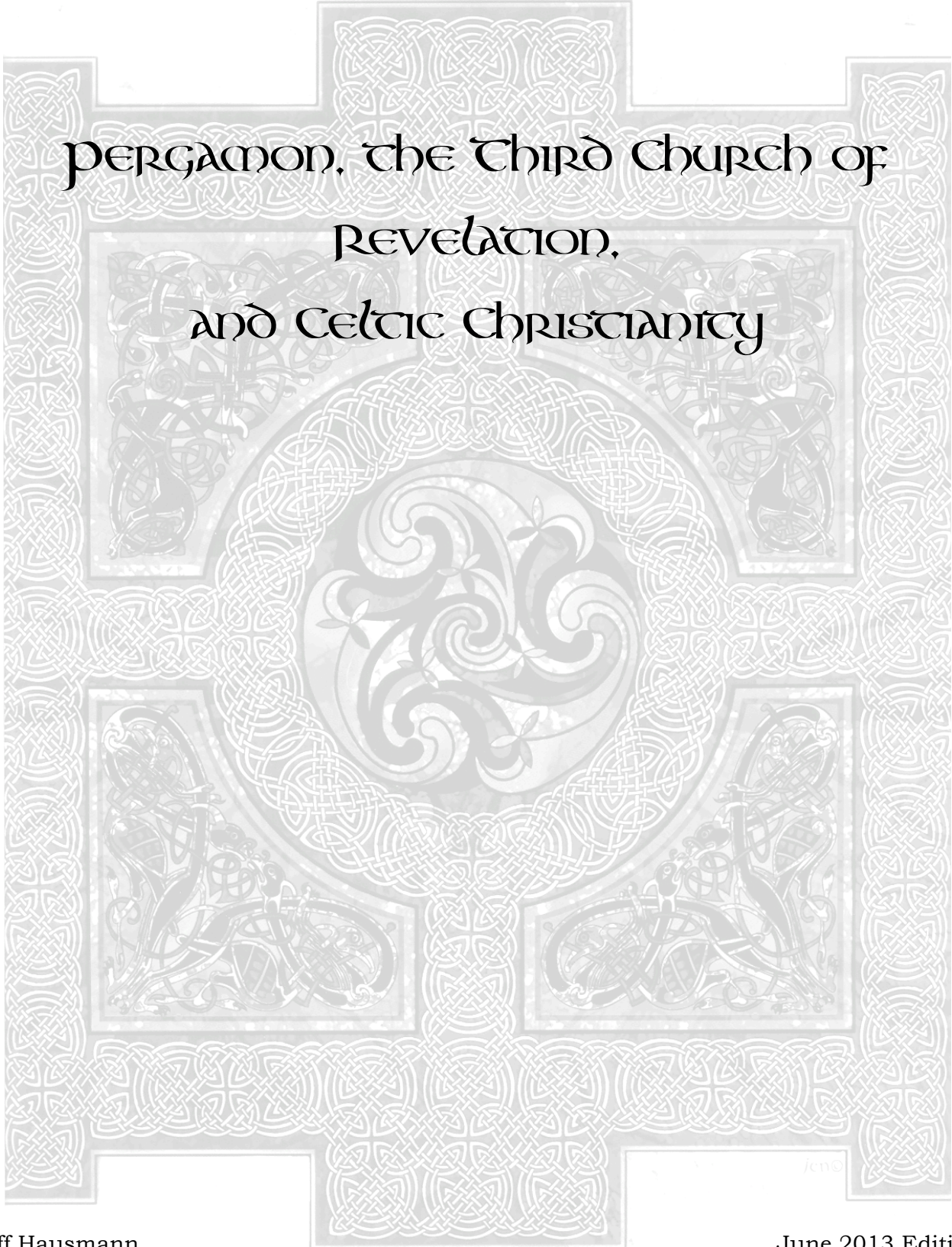
- * The perimeter of the square "base" of the New Jerusalem is 31,680 feet (4 X 7920 feet).
- * The original perimeter of the New Jerusalem (without the change in dimensions) is 48,000 furlongs or 31,680,000 feet.
- * The diameter of the Sarsen Circle at Stonehenge is 316.8 feet.
- * The circumference of a circle drawn through the center of the moon (if placed on top of the earth), with the earth's equator as part of its diameter, and having as the size of this circumference the perimeter of a square that completely enclosed the earth's circumference, would be 31,680 miles. (Figure 10.)
- * The radius of the earth is 31,680 furlongs.

Finally, the significance of the New Jerusalem and it's incorporation of the Solar and Earth dimensions

So what is the significance of all these numbers? Why bother with all these details? The purpose of all these is twofold:

- a. It illustrates that the universe has a design, and the design is illustrated in the Book of Revelation and in the monuments that God had a hand in designing in ways that ancient man could never have known.
- b. More importantly, it illustrates the future that elsewhere is stated in plain terms in the Book of Revelation – that the New Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God, will come down out of heaven from God and will bless the earth, and these two realms will become as one in peace and harmony. As the sun and the earth were both contained in dimensions of the New Jerusalem, so likewise all things in heaven and in earth will find themselves joined together in Christ (Ephesians 1:9 & 10).

Appendix M ~ The Church of Pergamos [extended discussion]



PERGAMON, THE THIRD CHURCH OF
REVELATION,
AND CELTIC CHRISTIANITY

Jeff Hausmann

June 2013 Edition

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Pangur Ban

Part 1 - An Overview of Celtic Christianity

Celtic Christianity is unique in the world, being the only Christian tradition of any size that did not have its beginnings in the Roman Church. Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and to a certain extent Orthodoxy all grew out of the rational philosophy and western traditions of the Roman Empire. Only Celtic Christianity is unique in this regard.

Even before Patrick's visit to Ireland, the Celtic church in Britain had formed distinct features found nowhere else in the Christian world. It developed perspectives on Christ unique to the culture in which it grew. These perspectives were not departures from apostolic Christianity, but instead represented a different emphasis – a different way of viewing the same truths.

As an introduction to Celtic Christianity this description will be far too brief. However, it should help distinguish between the Romanized Christianity of the western world today and the Celtic Christianity of the 5th through 11th centuries and later. Celtic Christianity should not be understood as some strange new cult, modern day fad, or Roman Catholic theology, and it should not be confused with the current infatuation with Celtic mysticism.

One word of caution... the mindset that looks for a strictly rational understanding of Celtic Christianity will not appreciate all the distinctions that make it so unique. If western Roman Christianity were physics, then Celtic Christianity would be art. It is understood intuitively as much as rationally.

SECTION 1 - The Background of the Development Celtic Christianity

Ireland. For two hundred years the light of European civilization clung to the shores of this small country at the very edge of Europe as the Roman Empire collapsed in ruins. The gospel of Christ burned brighter in this land than anywhere else in Europe. It was from Ireland that missionaries went out to bring Christ to Scotland, Britain, and northern Europe. The patron saint of Switzerland is a Celtic monk named St. Gall who brought Christianity to that land, and Celtic monasteries were founded as far south as Bobbio in northern Italy and northward throughout Germany. Many of the major towns, cities, and universities of France and Germany owe their very existence to these wandering Irish monks.

Until recently, the image of Ireland was that of a drunken Irishman, simple people, and a backward country. Not that everything about that picture is bad or means that the Irish do not have many wonderful qualities. Today the image is changing with the change in economic fortunes and technology in Ireland. Still Ireland is hardly thought of as a land and people to whom civilization and religion owe a great debt.

But Ireland was not always like the image many people have of the Irish today and of Irish history. At one time it was a nation of evangelists and spiritual leaders, scholars, and teachers. Only in recent years has this surprising and wonderful period of Irish history in which these people lived begun to receive the attention it deserves, and to understand it we have to take a brief trip back in time to the closing years of the Roman Empire.

It is the year 433 A.D., about 40 years from the final collapse of the Roman Empire. The Pax Romana (peace of Rome) had ruled the civilized lands of the empire for a thousand years; while outside its boundaries was largely barbarism and ignorance. Yet, in another generation the empire would crumble into the dust and disappear forever from the face of western Europe.

This same year a man with the Roman name of Patricius returns to the land from which he had escaped over 20 years earlier. He brings with him a passion for the gospel that would turn three fourths of Ireland from paganism to Christianity in his lifetime and the rest of the land in the following generation.

Patricius, or Patrick as he later became known, had been kidnapped from Britain as a 16 year old boy and had been a slave in Ireland for 6 years. While the Celts of Britain were to a large extent Christian (and had been for some time... since Christianity had reached Britain ahead of even the Roman Empire), the Celts of Ireland were not Christian. After his escape from Ireland, Patrick spent years studying and preparing for the ministry, but he couldn't get the Irish out of his mind, and he constantly felt the call to return to the land where he had been captive for so long.

Patrick initiated possibly the first "cultural" witness since the days of the Apostle Paul on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22 and 23). He brought a Christianity that was unique to the people and culture that he found. The Celtic Christian tradition he established in Ireland is the largest Christian tradition in history outside of Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism, and while it is certain that Celtic Christianity existed in Britain before Patrick ever arrived in Ireland, it is the Irish that were to ensure that the whole of Europe became its beneficiaries.

Some selections from *How the Irish Saved Civilization* by Thomas Cahill may best illustrate what Patrick accomplished, and how Patrick could achieve so much in so short a period of time ~

"This thirty year span of Patrick's mission in the middle of the 5th century encompasses a period of change so rapid and extreme that Europe will never see its like again. By 461, the likely year of Patrick's death, the Roman Empire is careening in chaos, barely fifteen years away from the death of the last western emperor. The accelerated change is, at this point, so dramatic we should not be surprised that the eyes of historians have been riveted on it or that they have failed to notice a transformation just as dramatic – and even more abrupt – taking place at

the empire's periphery. For as the Roman lands went from peace to chaos, the land of Ireland was rushing even more rapidly from chaos to peace.

“How did Patrick do it? We have noted already his earthiness and warmth. But these are qualities that make for a lowering of hostility and suspicion; of themselves they to not gain converts among the strong-willed. We can also be sure that the Irish found Patrick admirable according to their own highest standards: his courage – his refusal to be afraid of *them* – would have impressed them immediately; and, as his mission lengthened into years and came to be seen clearly as a lifetime commitment, his steadfast loyalty and supernatural generosity must have moved them deeply. For he had transmuted their pagan virtues of loyalty, courage and generosity into the Christian equivalents of faith, hope, and charity. But, though this singular display of virtue would have made friends, it would not necessarily have won converts – at least, not among a people as stubborn as the Irish.”

[At this point there follows some discussion on how Christianity had become Romanized as much as Rome had become Christianized. Later Cahill continues...]

“There were characteristic aspects of Irish civilization that Patrick had taken to heart and on which he chose to build his new Christianity. These aspects would have included Irish courage which he admired greatly, but even more would he have been impressed by the natural mysticism of the Irish, which already told them that the world was holy – all the world, not just parts of it. It was on this sturdy insight that Patrick choreographed the sacred dance of Irish sacramental life, a sacramentality not limited to the symbolic actions of the church's liturgy but open to the whole created universe. All the world was holy...”

“This magical world, though full of adventure and surprise, is no longer [as it was in the druidic traditions prior to Christianity] full of dread. Rather, Christ has trodden all pathways before us, and at every crossroads and by every tree the Word of God speaks out. We have only to be quiet and listen, as Patrick learned to do during the silence of his “novitiate” as a shepherd [his 6 years of slavery] on the slopes of Sliabh Mis.”

“This sense of the world as holy, as the Book of God – as a healing mystery, fraught with divine messages – could never have risen out of Greco-Roman civilization, threaded with the profound pessimism of the ancients and their Platonic suspicion of the body as unholy and the world as devoid of meaning. Even Augustine, whose synthesis of pagan and Christian attitudes is the most remarkable philosophical creation of Christianity's first five centuries, can come nowhere near Patrick's originality. True, Augustine's theories on sin will haunt the Middle Ages, and cast their shadows still. But from the celebratory spirit of [Patrick's] Breastplate [and as reflected in the spirit of Celtic Christianity's poems and art and writings] will spring the characteristic art and poetry of the western world – the immense symbolic power of medieval liturgy, the smiling angels of Gothic art, the laughable demons, the sweetness of poets like Francis of Assisi

(whose “Canticle of the Sun” could almost be mistaken for a Celtic poem), Dante (who spoke of “the love that moves the sun and the stars”), and Chaucer (whose “Creatour of every creature” is almost a line from the “Breastplate”). Nor did the spirit die at the close of the Middle Ages...”

“Patrick’s gift to the Irish was his Christianity – the first de-Romanized Christianity in human history, a Christianity without the sociopolitical baggage of the Greco-Roman world, a Christianity that completely inculturated itself into the Irish scene. Through the Edict of Milan, which had legalized the new religion in 313 and made it the new emperor’s [Constantine’s] pet, Christianity had been received into Rome, not Rome into Christianity! Roman culture was little altered by the exchange, and it is arguable that Christianity lost much of its distinctiveness. But in the Patrician exchange, Ireland, lacking the power and implacable traditions of Rome, had been received into Christianity, which transformed Ireland into Something New, something never seen before – a Christian culture, where slavery and human sacrifice became unthinkable, and warfare, though impossible for humans to eradicate, diminished markedly.”

“As these transformed warrior children of Patrick’s heart lay down the sword of battle, flung away the knives of sacrifice, and cast aside the chains of slavery, they very much remained Irishmen and Irishwomen. Indeed, the survival of an Irish psychological identity is one of the marvels of the Irish story...”

And so Patrick began the transformation of an entire nation, and nearly completed it within just the last 30 years of his lifetime, because he accepted the Irish as they were, and allowed Christ to speak to them in their own culture.

As the Roman Empire collapsed, the Irish were learning to read and write and were developing a hunger for learning that knew no bounds. Even as the great libraries of Europe were rapidly being lost to the ignorance of the Dark Ages the Irish were madly copying the literature of Europe – not only the Christian writings, but the classics and collected writings of an empire as well. By 150 to 200 years after Patrick had begun his mission, Ireland had become the center of European learning, and people traveled from all over the lands that had once been a part of the empire and from beyond to study at Ireland’s monastic schools and universities.

More importantly, Ireland began sending missionaries to the far corners of the British Isles and throughout the continent. Wherever these daring missionaries traveled they brought two things with them – the gospel and education. They started monasteries that eventually grew into universities and cities that continue to this day. They endured great hardship in the course of their journeying, and often they never returned home again to the Ireland they loved.

The flowering of the uniquely Celtic version of Christianity throughout the British Isles was eventually brought to an end by two forces. By the late 700’s the Vikings had discovered the Irish monasteries and schools and began repeatedly raiding and destroying them. At the same time, the Roman Church was busily engaged in

establishing more control over their wayward Celtic brethren – creating a more authoritarian and Romanized structure that eventually drove the Celtic Christian sensibilities out of the organized church. By the twelfth century, Celtic Christianity had nearly disappeared except for small pockets and subtle themes, the lasting influence of its advocates, and the stories and monuments of history. And with it went the spirit and vigor of the Irish mission. Soon after, Ireland began to lose its independence – first to the Vikings and Normans, and then to the English who imposed their own brand of Christianity on the Irish largely by force, and sowed the seeds of violence many generations in the future for Northern Ireland.

It would not be until the mid-1800's that the remaining echoes of that early Celtic Christianity would once again begin to capture the imaginations of new generations of Christians.

SECTION 2 - The Unique Aspects of Celtic Christianity

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Celtic Christianity is not some strange new cult or some form of Celtic mysticism. Instead, it is arguably the largest Christian tradition to ever exist that did not begin with a Romanized western worldview of Christianity. While the three major traditions of Christianity – Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and to a large extent even Orthodoxy, trace their heritage and development back to Roman culture and its influence, Celtic Christianity has a completely different starting point.

Although by now you may be impatient now to know exactly what *is* Celtic Christianity, a brief qualifier should be mentioned again...

Because Celtic Christianity is not “Roman” and “westernized” in its origins, it is hard to understand it by trying to simply *think* your way through it. Although it has a life of the mind, it is not an exclusively a rational construct. Celtic Christianity is largely intuitive in nature.

It is much the same as music – for example – which has a rhythm, a mathematical precision to the harmonics, and an emotional content... but none of these describe music. And more importantly, none of these describe the insight and understanding that we derive from music. Music expresses things in a way that can't be expressed in words alone. It's intuitive in nature and not exclusively cognitive.

Celtic Christianity is similar to music in its expression. If Roman Christianity were physics, then Celtic Christianity would be art. If Roman Christianity's great strength is rational thought, then Celtic Christianity's is directed emotion. If Roman Christianity gives us principle and structure, then Celtic Christianity also gives us gentleness and freedom to serve God and creative expression. You will find it easier to appreciate if you are willing to abandon yourself to the contemplation of the heart, the imagination, and the spirit, as well as the mind.

This is not to say that Celtic Christianity is some great overwhelming mystical experience, although it has a sense of the nearness of the spiritual frequently missing in westernized Christianity. It's a different emphasis on the very same gospel that Jesus brought. It brings into focus elements of the gospel that we are frequently missing in our world today.

As best as possible, we will attempt to convey in brief and inadequate form a few of the qualities that have made the Celtic Christian tradition so unique and beloved by so many. Because others have written so well on the subject, we will largely draw on their writings to describe each chosen theme. Let's begin~

The Presence of God

Celtic Christians never prayed for God to be present with them. In fact, such an idea never would have occurred to them because they saw God as always present. Instead, they prayed for God's presence and protection to be revealed to them. To the Celtic Christians, the spiritual world was not some far off realm, but something that co-existed side by side with the material world.

This manifested itself in many ways, but the two most often commented on in their writings and songs and poems were the presence of God in man and in creation.

Possibly the best-known piece of writing passed down to us from the golden age of Celtic Christianity is the hymn or invocation known as St. Patrick's Breastplate. Dating probably from the 8th century and written originally in old Irish with a Latin ending, it clearly expresses the Celtic understanding of the presence of God in everything.

From *The Celtic Way* by Ian Bradley ~

"There was nothing remotely unorthodox about the Celtic sense of God's presence in their lives and in the world about them. It sprang from a real understanding of the central Christian doctrine of Incarnation with its revelation of Immanuel, the God who is with us, and from a burning faith in the real presence of Jesus not just in the consecrated elements of the communion service but throughout his creation. This is well represented in the verse of St. Patrick's Breastplate, which is generally sung to a different tune from the rest:

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend or stranger.

“The celebration of the Christ that is within each of us... also brings us... to the intertwining of the Celtic knot. The Celts felt the presence of God almost physically woven around their lives. They were conscious of being encircled by him, upheld by him and encompassed by him. This almost tangible experience of Jesus as a companion next to you, a guest in your house, a physical presence in your life was perhaps the most striking way in which the Celts expressed their overwhelming sense of the divine presence. It also found expression at a less intimate and more cosmic level in a conviction that the presence of God was to be found throughout creation – in the physical elements of earth, rock and water, in plants, trees, and animals and in the wayward forces of wind and storm.”

From *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, by J. Philip Newell ~

“There is not in the Celtic way of seeing a great gap between heaven and earth. Rather, the two are seen as inseparably intertwined. Mary, for instance, loved with a homely tenderness of affection, is portrayed not as Queen of Heaven, remote from humanity, but as a barefooted country girl out among the cattle, in immediate contact with the concerns and delights of daily life. Peter is perceived not as an exalted ecclesiastic but as a simple fisherman, experienced in the ways of the sea, present to guide and to guard, and Christ, as King of the Elements, is not regarded as a distant regal figure but more in terms of the Celtic king, chief of the tribe, known to his people and close to them. The Christ who is above them in the brightness of the morning sun is the Christ who is beneath them in the dark fertility of earth. The Christ who is with his people in the quiet calm of the windless sea is with them too in the midst of the wild wintry storm. The Christ who is within, at the very centre of their soul, is the Christ who is to be looked for in friend and stranger, Christ at the heart of all life.”

[Again from Saint Patrick’s Breastplate ~]

I bind unto myself today
The virtues of the starlit heaven,
The glorious suns life-giving ray,
The whiteness of the moon at even,
The flashing of the lightning free,
The whirling wind’s tempestuous shocks,
The stable earth, the deep salt sea,
Around the old eternal rocks.

Again from *The Celtic Way* by Ian Bradley ~

“We are not in the world of pantheism [that God is everything] here but in the much more subtle and suggestive realm of panentheism – the sense that God is to be found both within creation and outside it. There is no blurring of distinction between Creator and created, no worship of nature for its own sake but rather a wonderful sense that the whole creation is a theophany – a marvelous revelation of

the goodness and wonder and creativity of God. Like Gerard Manley Hopkins, the Celts felt that ‘the whole world is charged with the grandeur of God’. They saw the presence of the Divine in the sun, the moon, and the stars and throughout the earth. In the words of Saunders Davies, a Welsh-speaking Anglican priest in Cardiff who has a particular interest in Celtic Christianity, ‘for the Celt creation is translucent; it lets through glimpses of the glory of God’.”

Again from *Listening for the Heartbeat of God*, by J. Philip Newell ~

“These words of looking to God for strength and therefore looking to the elements of creation... make a profounder and more vital connection between the spiritual and the material than what we are accustomed to finding in other hymns that merely touch upon the beauty of creation at a superficial level. They draw our attention not simply to the goodness of what has been created but to a perception that within creation there is something of the presence of the uncreated, that is, God. We need to ask what it is about an emphasis on the spiritual being within the material that has so often frightened Western traditions of spirituality, to the point that, although words like these are attributed to a saint of the Western Church, they are in fact omitted from versions of the hymn in many hymn-books and in others treated as merely optional.”

Once more from *The Celtic Way* by Ian Bradley ~

“The Celts intense awareness of the divine presence in all things... extended beyond the physical and material realm to embrace also the spirit world. Here again, there was an interweaving of pagan and Christian themes. The pre-Christian Celtic world was one of premonitions, dreams and imaginings where special honor was given to those who had a sixth sense or the second sight. There was a whole realm of hidden presences which could not be reached by ordinary perception and defied normal rational analysis. The... sense of presences experienced on high hills and in lonely places was very familiar to the pagan Celts. They felt the narrowness of the line that divides this world from the next. This intertwining of the natural and the supernatural, the material and the spiritual was carried over when they became Christians. They were, in the words of Alexander Carmichael... ‘unable and careless to know where the secular began and the religious ended’.”

“Some scholars believe that a similar process of incorporation [of pre-Christian pagan beliefs into Christianity] underlies the distinctive ringed shape of the Celtic Cross where the circle symbolizing the sun, and possibly also the earth, the objects of pagan worship and standing for creation, is bisected and pierced by the Christian cross of redemption.”

“This is, of course, a very biblical view. The Old Testament speaks again and again of a dynamic two-way relationship between God and his creation in which the trees of the field clap their hands, the mountains skip like rams and the little hills skip like sheep in praise of their creator. The psalms in particular, which were

especially dear to the heart of the Celts and figured very prominently in their worship, are full of a sense of God's continuing concern for and abiding presence in all his creatures, both animate and inanimate. Indeed, Robert Grant's well-known paraphrase of Psalm 104 comes very close to the spirit of [a Celtic poem quoted previously] when it speaks of a God 'whose robe is the light, whose canopy space'."

The Rhythm of Life

Two other elements of Celtic Christianity, and themes that are currently being reclaimed from the modernist (as opposed to post-modernist) Christian thinking of completion-ism [the idea that there is a point in this life where we sort of have it altogether spiritually and are always fulfilled and in control of our lives], are the twin concepts of Journeying (or Pilgrimage) and what I call the Rhythm of Life. We will look at journeying at the end of this section. For now let's look briefly at how the Celtic Christians incorporated the idea of change and seasons into their spiritual world~

From *The Celtic Way of Prayer* by Esther DeWaal ~

"Early Celtic Christianity was above all monastic. People learned their religious beliefs and practices from the monastic communities with the monastic ideal of continual prayer. The spirituality of ordinary lay people was a monastic spirituality; ordinary lay people expected to pray the daily offices, which means, of course, essentially to follow a liturgical life shaped by a regular, ordered rhythm – yearly, seasonally, daily. It reminds us of that sense of rhythm which today's world seems to be losing. Life today for many people is life under constant pressure, and even for those who are not in the business world there is still so often things needing to be done, and to be done to meet a deadline. Yet in monastic living there is a seasonal, yearly liturgical pattern that recognizes the importance both of regularity, and of the breaking of the regularity by celebration, by rest days, by festivals. Here is something that is natural, healing, and sanctifying. The chief moments of the day are marked through the seven offices: the quiet of the night, dawn, the beginning of work, noon, sunset, and at the end compline, the completion of the day. And then the yearly calendar recognizes the changing pattern of each year, marrying the winter and the spring seasons to the church's festivals. Today when I can go into a supermarket and buy any of the fruits of the earth at anytime of the year I need no longer be aware of the pattern of the earth bringing forth her fruits in due season. Living with electricity, I can deny the night and I can extend the day entirely to suit my own self, my needs, and my interests. I can forget the coming of the dark or the slow dawning of the light; the pattern of the rising and the setting of the sun, or the waxing and waning of the moon, are no longer really important."

With a people who lived so close to the land with its seasons and tides, days and nights, plantings and harvests, it's not surprising that the Celtic Christians were informed once again by the world around them. Unlike the concept of the Christian life sometimes heard in our day as a thing to be accomplished with the goal of

“arriving spiritually”, the Celtic Christians viewed the Christian life more like an ongoing pattern of seasons and changes. This allowed them the grace to live in the moment and the freedom to change course at any given moment. Rather than feeling called to some particular goal, they felt at liberty to view life as constant change and were less burdened by feelings of the need to “succeed” at the Christian life. Case in point, it was not unusual for them to spend years of productive service in a particular ministry and then abruptly retreat for years to reflect and meditate and walk with God... and then just as suddenly feel called to years of service once again.

From *Every Earthly Blessing* by Esther DeWaal ~

“...because of the way in which they saw their world they were ready to accept, enjoy, transform whatever lay at hand. The patterns of the day, of the year and of the whole of life itself, was lived out totally in the presence of God and the saints. Every moment of the day, every activity becomes a way to God.”

Prayer

Closely connected to the Celtic sense of the various seasons and rhythms of their world and their lives was the Celtic life of prayer. Prayer was intricately connected with every facet of life and not relegated to “spiritual issues”.

Once again from *Every Earthly Blessing* by Esther DeWaal ~

“A woman kneels on the earth floor in her small hut in the Outer Hebrides and lights her fire with this prayer:

I will kindle my fire this morning
In the presence of the holy angels of heaven.

“She started the day by splashing her face with three palmfuls of water in the name of the Trinity:

The palmful of God of Life
The palmful of the Christ of Love
The palmful of the Spirit of Peace
Triune of grace.

“Then as she makes her bed she had made this a prayerful invocation to the Trinity and a prayerful reflection on the span of life itself:

I make this bed
In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost,
In the name of the night we were conceived,
In the name of the night we were born,
In the name of the day we were baptized,
In the name of each night, each day,
Each angel that is in the heavens.”

And so it went. Every action of the day was another opportunity to meet with God in prayer, and to experience the presence of God in their lives.

Other Themes – Women’s Participation in the Church, Hospitality, Freedom of Thought, Art

In five hundred years of semi-autonomy the Celtic church honored the value of women whom it allowed to celebrate the mysteries openly and equally (much to the dismay of its Roman brethren), developed a high degree of learning and wisdom and art (which gave us *The Book of Kells*, beautiful metalworking, and the elaborately decorated high crosses), and dedicated itself to a sacrificial life committed to living out the gospel. The pagan Irish were a generous, open-minded and curious people and this carried over into a freedom of expression that allowed for exploration of the imagination, and promoted the idea of hospitality of the heart which enabled all kinds of people to meet and share their beliefs without fear.

Possibly the only tradition of the church after the days of the apostles to embrace feminism until the modern era, the Celtic tradition was never hung up on issues of gender roles in the church. Occasionally the monasteries were led by Abbesses, the most famous being Brigid who was highly regarded in the Celtic church.

Hospitality, both of emotions and material goods was important in Celtic Christianity. From Bede, the first historian of the newly emergent English people, came this description ~

“Many of the nobles of the English nation and lesser men also had set out thither, forsaking their native island either for the grace of sacred learning or a more austere life. And some of them indeed soon dedicated themselves faithfully to the monastic life, others rejoiced rather to give themselves to learning, going about from one master’s cell to another. All these the Irish willingly received, and saw to it to supply them with food day by day without cost, and books for their studies, and teaching, free of charge.”

Curiosity and freedom of expression was also a hallmark of the Celtic tradition. This was not limited to the creative expression alone, but applied to study and literature as well.

Once again from *How the Irish Saved Civilization* by Thomas Cahill ~

“Irish generosity extended not only to a variety of people but to a variety of ideas. As unconcerned about orthodoxy of thought as they were about uniformity of monastic practice, they brought into their libraries everything they could lay their hands on. They were resolved to shut out nothing. Not for them the scruples of Saint Jerome, who feared he might burn in hell for reading Cicero. Once they had learned to read the Gospels and the other books of the Holy Bible, the lives of the

martyrs and ascetics, and the sermons and commentaries of the fathers of the church, they began to devour all of the old Greek and Latin pagan literature that came their way. In their unrestrained catholicity, they shocked conventional churchmen, who had been trained to value Christian literature principally and give wide berth to the dubious morality of the pagan classics. A learned British ecclesiastic, Aldhelm of Malmesbury, who had himself been educated by the Irish (and so knew whereof he spoke), wrote to warn a young Saxon student against the “ancient fables” and other temptations of an Irish education: “What advantage does it bring to the sacrament of the orthodox faith to sweat over reading and studying the polluted lewdness of Proserpine, or Hermione, the wanton offspring of Menelaus and Helen, or the Lupercalia and the votaries of Priapus?” Aldhelm – you can almost hear the sniffy intake of breath – had learned his lessons well and could still, apparently, break out in a sweat when one of the racier classical tales danced through his monkish head.”

“It was not that the Irish were uncritical, just that they saw no value in self-imposed censorship. They could have said with Terence, “homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto” (“I am a human being, so nothing human is strange to me”). To John T. Mc Neill, that most balanced of all church historians, it was precisely “the breadth and richness of Irish monastic learning, derived from the classical authors” that was about to give Ireland its “unique role in the history of Western culture”.

As much as anything else, it is the art of the Celtic tradition that has preserved for us an understanding of who these people were. From poems to metalwork to songs to the elaborately decorated manuscripts and high crosses, Celtic Christianity burned with creative forces.

Inspired by their unique view of God’s presence in the world around them, their visual art formed a fantastical riot of motifs. From Celtic knotwork and Celtic crosses and scenes from scripture to images from nature and imagination, their creations are a mosaic of inventiveness and intricate design.

Their poems and stories ran the gamut from the profound to the commonplace, but never lacked for a certain magic and imagination that was largely lost to the western world until the writings of George MacDonald, one of the forerunners of the re-emergence of Celtic Christianity, in the late 1800’s. No less respected and widely read authors than G.K Chesterton, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and J.R.R. Tolkien have spoken of the profound effect MacDonald’s works had on their own spirituality and writing.

Journeying (Pilgrimage)

The idea of the Christian life as a journey was very dear to the Celtic Christians. Voyages of the soul, the heart, and the mind. Voyages through the world and beyond the world. The Celtic understanding of the word used to describe journeying – *peregrinatio* – is a word and concept found nowhere else in Christendom.

From *The Celtic Way of Prayer* by Esther DeWaal ~

“The word itself [peregrinatio] is almost untranslatable, but its essence is caught in the ninth-century story of three Irishmen drifting over the sea from Ireland for seven days in coracles [small Irish boats] without oars, coming ashore in Cornwall and then being brought to the court of King Alfred. When he asked them where they had come from and where they were going they answered that they “stole away because we wanted for the love of God to be on pilgrimage, we cared not where.” This wonderful response and this amazing undertaking comes out of the inspirational character of early Irish spirituality. It shows at once how misleading is that word “pilgrimage” as we use it and how very different indeed is the Celtic *peregrinatio* from the pilgrimages of the Middle Ages or the present day. There is no specific end or goal such as that of reaching a shrine or a holy place that allows the pilgrim at the end of the journey to return home with a sense of mission accomplished. *Peregrinatio* is not undertaken at the suggestion of some monastic abbot or superior but because of an inner prompting in those who set out, a passionate conviction that they must undertake what is essentially an inner journey. Ready to go wherever the Spirit might take them, seeing themselves as *hospites mundi*, “guests of the world,” what they are seeking is the place of their resurrection, the resurrected self, the true self in Christ, which is for all of us our true home.”

From *Drinking from the Sacred Well* by John Matthews ~

“We are all engaged on such a journey, however we choose to interpret it. It may be the journey from birth to death, from morning to evening, from war to peace; or it may be the journey that is our search for meaning, truth, or validity. It is this journey that permeates our whole life, and that often promotes within us a sense of longing, whether for the place we came from or the place to which we are headed.”

The Spiritual Legacy of the Past

In the same manner that the men and women of the Bible and the Christians down through the centuries have left their examples for our inspiration, so also, have the Celtic Christians. Time would fail to tell of the individual lives of Columcille of Iona, Brendan the Navigator, Aidan of Lindisfarne, Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, Columbanus, Brigid, David of Wales, and others. But this odd collection of saints and scholars from the periphery of the then-known world left us a treasure equally as great as the example of the lives they led. They also left us a new and refreshing way of looking at the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At most, we have taken but a brief glimpse at the Celtic Christian tradition. Hopefully the preceding mosaic of themes and influences in the Celtic way of understanding the world has given some insight into the spirit of Celtic Christianity and enriched the reader.

One more time from *Drinking from the Sacred Well* by John Matthews ~

“...the most wonderful and profound mystery that the Celts have to teach us is about our uniquely intimate relationship with the natural world. We are wonderful beings – beings of light – and we inhabit a remarkable universe, although nowadays we seldom recognize this. By cutting ourselves off from nature, by telling ourselves that we separate, unique, powerful in our own right, we are doing the equivalent of cutting off our limbs. None of us would call ourselves whole without hands or feet; yet we repeatedly sever our contact with the rest of creation, shutting ourselves up in... the artificiality of a world created in our own image.”

“The Celts were the opposite of this. They followed a path of total involvement with the world about them – not only in the physical world, but through their spirituality, which was itself an outward expression of inner things. Through identifying with the natural world they were able to place their personal experiences in context. We can do the same. The highly sensitized covering of the soul, which can react so strongly when it feels slighted or attacked in any way, reaches a new point of strength when it is no longer placed at the center of everything. Shifting the center to another place, we become new beings and are able to recognize our own inner journey in the context of a larger whole.”

SECTION 3 - A Brief History of Christianity and the Celts

The beginnings of Christianity in the British Isles⁴⁵⁰ can be traced reasonably well in scripture and through history.

In the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus, we have the record of a family of Britons who were captive in Rome for a period of time. A Celtic chieftain named Bran/Brennus⁴⁵¹ went as a hostage for his son Caradoc/Caractacus. Caractacus had three sons including Llyn/Linus, and two daughters including Gladys/Claudia. Claudia had married a Roman named Rufus Pudens Pudentinus (who was stationed for a time in Britain).

In 2 Timothy 4:21 we have the following individuals mentioned by name as companions of the Apostle Paul – Pudens, Linus, and Claudia - all individuals who were also named by Tacitus as members by birth or marriage of the same family of Britons.⁴⁵² Clearly these are one and the same family of people, and just as clearly they’ve become Christians under the ministry of Paul.

⁴⁵⁰ Tradition held for a long time that Augustine (not the well-known theologian Augustine of Hippo, but a different Augustine) brought Christianity to Britain in the 7th century. Today the evidence is clear and unequivocal that this is not the case. Specifically, Augustine of Canterbury brought Christianity only to those areas of England dominated by the descendants of the Germanic tribes that had invaded during the preceding two centuries.

⁴⁵¹ The Celtic version of the name is cited first followed by the Latin version of the name.

⁴⁵² For those not familiar with the history and the use of the various names for the people of the British Isles throughout history, the name Britons was applied to the particular group of Celts that inhabited the area of Britain that is roughly south of present day Scotland before

We know that these captured Britons were in free custody in Rome for 7 years beginning in 51 A.D. If they were then released from captivity in 58 A.D., their period of arrest overlaps that of the Apostle Paul, who was released from his first captivity in Rome the same year.⁴⁵³ We know that at least some of the Britons returned to their native country, and no doubt took their newfound beliefs with them.

There is additional evidence⁴⁵⁴ on how the early introduction took place, but whatever the case it is clear that Christianity was already well established in Britain in the 2nd century. We do not know exactly how or when Celtic Christianity began its unique development, but by the time of Pelagius⁴⁵⁵ sojourn in Rome, Celtic Christianity already stood in stark contrast to the development of Roman Christianity in several ways. Also, Pelagius' excommunication from Rome and return to Britain in 418 A.D. was just 14 years (approx.) prior to the start of Patrick's mission from Britain to Ireland. This close timing confirms that Celtic Christianity had already developed its unique strain by this time.⁴⁵⁶

This brings us to the year the year 432 A.D., a little over 40 years before the final collapse of the Roman Empire. The Pax Romana (peace of Rome) had ruled the civilized lands of the empire for a thousand years; while outside its boundaries was largely barbarism and ignorance. Yet, in just one more generation the empire would crumble into the dust and disappear forever from the face of western Europe. This same year Patrick returns to Ireland to begin his work of evangelization.

the invasion of the Germanic tribes – primarily the Angles and the Saxons. It is from the word Angle that our modern day term for this area – England – was derived. The Celts (the Britons) were gradually pushed back by the invading Germanic tribes into the areas we now call Wales and Cornwall, and this contributed to the distinct culture of those areas. Today, the term Briton has a much wider scope than the original definition – applying now to all descendants of any people living in the original Celtic lands south of Scotland – rather than as a demographic that defined the particular race and culture of the Celtic peoples who once occupied the region. The Celts of Eirann, or Ireland, have never been referred to historically as Britons.

⁴⁵³ The two years of imprisonment (Acts 28:30) are given various dates by scholars. The dates we have chosen (56-58 AD) are cited by some, while others choose later dates. We do not claim to have specific knowledge favoring any particular position. However, the synchronism of a simultaneous release of Paul and his British converts seems to argue in favor of the dates we have chosen.

⁴⁵⁴ There are additional historical arguments with a surprising amount of evidence that both Joseph of Arimathea and Aristobulus (Romans 16:10 – whom the Welsh triads appear to refer to as “Arwystli”) traveled to Britain ahead of the Roman empire and founded churches there. Also, there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that 2 John was written to the Claudia mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:21. The amount of detail is too lengthy to review here. For those who want to investigate further, “*The Origin and Early History of Christianity in Britain*” by Andrew Gray is a thorough and fascinating review of the evidence for these conclusions (although somewhat dated and prejudiced).

⁴⁵⁵ Pelagius was a British Christian of the early 5th century whose unabashed Celtic Christian beliefs brought him into conflict with Augustine. He was subsequently ex-communicated from the Roman Church.

⁴⁵⁶ There is a wealth of additional evidence on this point, but once again for brevity's sake we have limited the discussion to the essential information. Although, there are almost no books dealing directly with the subject, for those interested in pursuing the rough outlines of early Celtic Christian development we might suggest “*How the Irish Saved Civilization*” by Thomas Cahill, “*Celtic Christianity in Early Medieval Wales*” by Oliver Davies, and “*Listening for the Heartbeat of God*” by J Philip Newell in addition to the aforementioned book by Andrew Gray entitled “*The Origin and Early History of Christianity in Britain*.” “*Listening for the Heartbeat of God*” is also a good introduction to Celtic Christianity in general.

A paragraph from *How the Irish Saved Civilization* by Thomas Cahill bears repeating here, because it may best illustrate what Patrick accomplished, and how Patrick could achieve so much in so short a period of time ~

“This thirty year span of Patrick’s mission in the middle of the 5th century encompasses a period of change so rapid and extreme that Europe will never see its like again. By 461, the likely year of Patrick’s death, the Roman Empire is careening in chaos, barely fifteen years away from the death of the last western emperor. The accelerated change is, at this point, so dramatic we should not be surprised that the eyes of historians have been riveted on it or that they have failed to notice a transformation just as dramatic – and even more abrupt – taking place at the empire’s periphery. For as the Roman lands went from peace to chaos, the land of Ireland was rushing even more rapidly from chaos to peace.”

With Patrick’s mission to Ireland, Celtic Christianity took on a new force. Patrick knew, as those who had gone before in Britain knew, that if Christianity was to become a force in Ireland, it would have to be expressed in terms the people of the land could understand and appreciate without compromising the truth of biblical Christianity. The unique cultural character of the Christian message given by Patrick caught fire with the Irish Celts, and within two generations the entire island had converted to Christianity, had become literate, and had put an end to slavery and rampant war. 100 years after Patrick, Columcille was making converts throughout Scotland and northern England, and Columbanus and others were converting much of northern continental Europe to the gospel.

The inevitable conflict between the expanding Celtic missions in the north of Europe and Britain and the Roman Church to the south occurred in 597 A.D., when the Celtic mission sweeping into northern Anglo-Saxon England from the island monasteries at Iona on the west, and more particularly Lindisfarne on the east, collided with Augustine’s expanding Roman mission to the Saxon invaders from the south of England. The crisis came to a head at the Synod of Whitby in 664 A.D. when the delegation representing the Celtic views - in typically tolerant Celtic fashion - capitulated to the demands of the Roman party. The issues were relatively small and unimportant, but the compromise set the stage for the gradual and nearly total disappearance of the Celtic strain of Christianity over the next few centuries.

Though the next 200 years in many ways would see the greatest flowering of Celtic Christianity in art (such as the Book of Kells) and writing (including Celtic Christianity’s greatest theologian and philosopher – John Scotus Eriugena), the handwriting was clearly on the wall. By the 10th century the light of Celtic Christianity was nearly extinguished, although it continued to live on in isolated localities and in odd legacies until the beginning of its revival in the 19th century.

SECTION 4 - The Celtic Christian View on Church Authority

A qualifier is important here before we explore the subject of church authority. The Celtic Church had a very strong emphasis on church structure. Monasteries had defined rules, and there was a definite ecclesiastical structure. There was respect for leadership and for maintaining order in the functioning of the entire church.

Likewise, it would be a mistake to assume that there was a separate a Celtic Church. The Celtic Christians never saw themselves as a distinct church but always identified with the Church at Rome. They differed from the larger official body in many ways, but their tolerant nature toward divergent opinions lead them to embrace a church with which they often disagreed. The reality is, they may have been unique from the Roman Church, but in their minds they were part of the one catholic and universal church. (However, we take no particular exception to the term “Celtic Church” to identify the people who represented the distinct characteristics of the Celtic tradition, and in fact we are going to begin to use this term for the sake of convenience.)

However, this respect of authority was also combined with a strong emphasis on the individual's relationship to God. Anyone was free to choose what type of order or rule they would live under, and they were free to change at any time. Women were respected and occasionally held positions of importance in the local organization. There was no overall system of archbishops and districts. Celtic Christianity was primarily organic, not organizational.

There was also a respect for integrity and for dedication to the Christian life that outweighed the observance of formalities. A strong dislike of legalistic posing at the expense of real devotion often led to “respectful” disagreements when the Irish Celts began to come in direct contact with the Roman leadership, particularly as they expanded their missionary efforts into continental Europe.

In comparison to the Celtic missionaries, the continental leadership of the church was often very worldly, and it was ineffective in evangelization and in developing mature Christians. The Roman bishops usually confined themselves to major metropolitan areas, and they generally reflected a worldly and politicized imitation of Christianity. They resented the intrusion of the Celtic monks in the countryside where the monks set up their centers – far from the prying hands of the Roman leadership.

It's unfortunate that Roman Christianity did not appreciate what it could learn from Celtic Christianity. At this exact moment in history the Roman Church was embracing Augustine's influence and his development of a more refined theology. Augustine's strict view of church structure, and his emphasis on man's sinful nature (however beneficial it was to have this concept fully defined as a coherent teaching for the first time) was in direct contrast to Celtic Christianity's much more

positive view of the state of man and their concern with the practice of individual Christian freedom. Augustine's sway in the church eventually resulted in the excommunication of Pelagius⁴⁵⁷ - the only Celtic Christian of any standing ever to be accepted at Rome - and his return to Britain.

There is much to suggest that the Celtic Church, while respecting the leadership of the Roman Church much as Christ instructed his followers to follow the Jewish leadership because they "sit in Moses' seat", frequently felt compelled to follow their hearts and minds when their understanding of the gospel lead them to a practice of Christianity much more honest and devoted than that practiced by their Roman brethren.

Perhaps a poem from the general time period (the Celts – both before and after Christianity came to them – were great lovers of poetry) will drive this point home:

*"To go to Rome
Is little profit, endless pain;
The Master that you seek in Rome,
You find at home, or seek in vain."*

The master of the Celtic Christian world was not the pope in Rome. It was Christ.

⁴⁵⁷ Pelagius is often referred to as a heretic in the writings of the historical church. There is even a name for doctrinal views that are seen as reflecting those of Pelagius, called Pelagianism, of course. However, after his death almost all the opposition directed at Pelagius was based on the writings of Augustine – his bitter foe, and not on the writings of Pelagius himself. It is always a bad idea to use someone's adversary as the basis of opinion about them. A review of Pelagius writings reveals a kind and tolerant character and a reasoned approach to his subjects that is not in keeping with the wildly unscriptural heresy that Augustine frequently painted. It is not necessary that we agree with everything that Pelagius believed, but we need to see it in its correct light and accord Pelagius the type of fair hearing that everyone deserves, and that he was deprived of during his lifetime and afterwards.

Part 2 - The Third Church of Revelation and Celtic Christianity

The most common interpretation of the third church (Pergamos or Pergamon - both variations are correct) of the seven churches of Revelation chapters 2 and 3 begins with the time of the Nicean Council. Christianity was becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire all at once, and it was organizing on a grand scale. Gone was the original simplicity of church structure, and in its place was rising an increasingly centralized authority and leadership.

Into the debate over this drastic change stepped a humble Christian named Arius. Although much of the controversy surrounding Arius - past and present - deals with his opposition to a different view of Christ's nature, his primary objection was to the increasing institutionalism of the church. Arius could already foresee the damage that eventually resulted from this trend away from the apostolic gospel.

Even Rowan Williams the Archbishop of Canterbury in his book *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* - while disagreeing with the view of Arius on the nature of Christ - expresses a high regard for Arius and his fight to preserve a free and personal God from the encroachment of nominal institutional Christianity.

As important a figure as Arius was in the church at that time, his opposition was short lived. Although his viewpoint of Christology continued for two or three hundred years after he was discredited at the Council of Nicea, the Germanic nations that became the primary supporters for his view were never a force for the original apostolic Christianity. Arianism seems to have been merely a doctrinal tradition among these people, and for the most part their Christianity bore little resemblance to that of Arius.

Contrast this with the impact and the practices of Patrick and those who followed after him. Celtic Christianity had a tremendous influence on everything and everyone around it. It represents a movement that reflects the nature of the third church of Revelation, a movement whose characteristics fit the description of the Pergamon church very well.

Without taking anything away from Arius and his desperate rearguard action against an increasingly worldly church, if we are going to look anywhere for a leader and a church to match the description of Pergamos, we seem more likely to find it in the British Isles.

SECTION 1 – An Overview of the Description in Revelation 2:12-17

To identify the primary participants described in the message to Pergamon, we need to examine the nature of the message to determine what distinctive characteristics are ascribed to this church. Then we can see if the Celtic Church fits the requirements.

12 *“And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:*

13 *‘I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

14 *But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.*

15 *So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*

16 *Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*

17 *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.’ (New American Standard translation)*

Among the admonitions and encouragements to the 3rd church, we note that the following requirements must be fulfilled by the specific recipients of this message, namely:

- (1) they must “dwell where Satan’s throne is”,
- (2) “Antipas” (against the father) would be “killed among you, where Satan dwells”, but they would “not deny my faith”, and
- (3) they would have among them those who hold the teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.

Additionally, we can note that:

- (4) Jesus twice describes himself as the one with "the two edged sword" and "the sword of my mouth", and finally
- (5) at the close of this passage he promises the faithful the “hidden manna,” a “white stone,” and a “new name.”

From these descriptive points we can gain the following requirements for identification of this church:

- (1) They must “dwell where Satan’s throne is”, i.e., they must identify with the church at Rome.
- (2) “Antipas” must be “killed among you, where Satan’s dwells”. This means that whomever we identify as Antipas must be killed (excommunicated) among you (within the church), and possibly in Rome if we were to require a really exact definition on the expression “where Satan dwells”.
- (3) The teaching of Balaam and the teaching of the Nicolaitans. These both seem to be a reference to teaching for money or personal gain (rather than as a

consecrated servant of the Lord), and the Pergamon church is chided for being acquainted with, and tolerant of, this class of people (vss. 14-16).

(4) The emphasis on Jesus as the one with the sword (the truth) lays emphasis on the importance of the scriptures as both an identifying characteristic of this church (perhaps in a time of famine for the hearing of the Word of God - Revelation 6:5-6) and the remedy against their opponents.

(5) The promise of the “hidden manna” and the “white stone” along with the “new name which no one knows but he who receives it” would suggest that this church suffered under the development of powerful ecclesiastical authority... and that their future rewards would have personal qualities corresponding to their current trials.

SECTION 2 – A Summary of How the Celtic Church Fulfills the Passage

The Celtic Church seems uniquely qualified to fit the role described for the third church:

(1) The Celtic Church fulfills the element of “dwell(ing) where Satan’s throne is”, i.e., they identified with the Church in Rome.

(2) “Antipas” (meaning against the father) would be “killed among you, where Satan dwells”. This corresponds fully with the experiences of Pelagius, who was excommunicated (figuratively “killed”) in Rome (“where Satan dwells”) for his faithfulness while bearing witness to the gospel in the midst of adversity. Pelagius never backed down from his positions, and neither did the most of the believers of the Celtic Church who “did not deny My faith” even when beset with constant opposition and being thoroughly unappreciated and misrepresented by the wider Roman Church.

(3) The teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. The humble demeanor and self-sacrificing lives of the Celtic Christians were increasingly at odds with the worldliness of the Roman Church. The Celtic Church opposed the materialism and ambition of the leadership in the Roman Church and they never let such disappointments affect their own strain of spirituality. However, they never directly challenged the leadership of the church, and they ignored these corrupt practices in the wider Roman Church.

(4) The “double edged sword” – the word of God (Hebrews 4:12). Of all the church at that time, Celtic Christianity laid the most stress on both studying and on obeying the scriptures. They were fascinated with books (to this day, on a per capita basis, the Irish read more than any other nation on the earth), and of all literature they prized the scriptures the most. In a period of time when the organized church was laying increasing stress on forms and ceremonies and outward appearances, Celtic Christianity stressed study and personal holiness and service to others. Early on in the east (especially among the “desert fathers” and

some of the bishops and churches of Asia Minor) we find a comparable passion for following the scriptures, but this was already starting to fade by the time of Augustine and Pelagius.

(5) The promise of the “hidden manna” and the “white stone” on which the “new name which no one knows but he who receives it” is written seems especially appropriate for the Celtic Church. While in constant conflict with the Roman Church over its abuse of authority and resources and its overemphasis on doctrinal unity, the Celtic Church thrived on personal holiness. The feast of manna and the gift of a new and personal name are apt rewards for a church that loved Jesus on a very personal level.

(a) The hidden manna may represent a future feast of knowledge promised to the church during a time of famine for the hearing of God’s word in the wider Christian world. At the time of the Pergamon church the developing clergy class exercised control over doctrine. Under the Jewish Law, the hidden manna in the ark of the covenant was accessible by the priesthood, and in the future this will still be the case. Each member of the church (the royal priesthood) will have direct and personal access to the “hidden manna.”

(b) The white stone with the “new name which no one knows but he who receives it” also serves to illustrate the direct personal relationship of each member of the church with the Lord.

(6) Additionally, we might also be able to gather meaning from the historical background of the literal city of Pergamon. We know that the city was the capital of the Roman province of Asia until sometime in the second century A.D. Even afterwards it continued to be a regional center for the imperial cult worship (i.e., the worship of Caesar). The city was built on a hill with 4 terraces rising to the top where various temples worshipping a variety of pagan gods were located. The architecture of Pergamon was considered the most impressive of that era in all of Asia Minor.

From the description we get a picture of a city (Pergamon) that is the political and religious center of the entire region. This agrees well with an anti-typical fulfillment during a period of time when the western church, taken as a whole, is grasping for position and power. The time period stretches from sometime in the fourth century on to its culmination in 800 A.D. with the pope’s crowning of Charlemagne. The development of the clergy class during this period (as a position of authority with corresponding power and financial reward) is identified in the description of the third church, but it is also suggested in the political and religious position of the literal city of Pergamos during the era in which the book of Revelation was written.

SECTION 3 – The Angel (Messenger) to the Pergamon Church

The Greek word angelos (αγγελος) translated angel simply means "messenger". It can be an angel in the sense we normally think of the term, i.e., a spiritual being, but it can mean any messenger. For example, angelos is applied to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:10.

If the third church of Revelation (Pergamon) and the rest of the seven churches represent historical periods in the history of the church, then it seems reasonable that each of the seven churches of Revelation might not only represent an era in history, but each might also have a messenger (angelos) - a human messenger - sent to bring them the message... say Peter Waldo or Martin Luther as examples.

Who then would be the messenger (angel) to this church?

Although Celtic Christianity can boast a lengthy record of exemplary teachers and leaders, only two of them seem appropriate for the messenger – Pelagius and Patrick.

Pelagius merits consideration because of his challenge to the church at Rome, his suggested identification with “Antipas” in the Revelation passage, and the influence of his writings in successive centuries on both the Irish Church and on the whole of the Celtic Church.

Nevertheless, Patrick seems to merit the greater consideration, because without the conversion of Ireland, the Celtic Church would never have achieved the impact that it did. Though Celtic Christianity developed independent of Ireland, it would have existed only as a footnote in history and not as the powerful force that changed the face of Europe.

Additionally, inasmuch as Antipas seems to be described separately from the angel or messenger, it could be argued that by interpreting Pelagius as "Antipas" he is ruled out from identification as the "angel" or messenger to the third church.

We should take a moment to review the identification of Arius and his followers with the messenger to the 3rd church of Revelation. The identification of the Pergamon church with Arius has a certain amount of appeal in its interpretation. He was a defender of the word of God, he was “against the father” (Antipas), and he did champion personal conviction over church authority.

However, several other elements in the description of Pergamon do not seem to fit with Arius and his supporters:

(1) This church felt connected to the Roman Church in particular, i.e., it dwelled “where Satan’s throne is.”

(2) “Antipas” was killed (excommunicated) “where Satan dwells”, i.e., in Rome, whereas the home of Arius and places where he was excommunicated and exiled were all in Asia Minor. (We could use Rome in a very broad sense to include the entire empire centered in Rome, but even here we run into difficulties because Constantine had already shifted the center of the empire to the newly renamed Constantinople at this time.)

(3) The bulk of the admonition and warning to this church has to do with the development of the clergy and its abuse of authority. Though of greatest concern to Arius, the controversy surrounding him dealt mainly with the dispute over his understanding of the nature of Christ.

SECTION 4 – Summary of Evidence from the Passage and from History

There is significant reason to identify the third church of Revelation - the church of Pergamon - with Celtic Christianity:

- We’ve seen that the Celtic Church can trace its lineage in a direct line back to the Apostolic Church through the Apostle Paul and others.
- We’ve noted that the character of Celtic Christianity was opposed to the desire for position and power that increasingly characterized the Roman Church during that same period.
- We also noted that the Celtic leaders were zealous and self-sacrificing, as opposed to the often worldly clergy of the Roman Church... and this agrees with the reprimand to this church for having among them those who hold the teaching(s) of Balaam and the Nicolaitans.
- We’ve seen that Celtic Christianity remained within the Roman Church while still maintaining its distinct characteristics, as suggested in the Revelation passage – “you dwell where Satan’s throne is”.
- We’ve observed that Pelagius provided a vital counterbalance to the development of Roman doctrine and authority being championed by Augustine, but Pelagius (Anti-pas - against the father) was excommunicated from the church ("killed among you") and forced to leave Rome "where Satan dwells" and return to Britain.

In light of this historical record, there is credible reason to identify Patrick, Pelagius, and the Celtic Church in general with the 3rd Church of Revelation.

Although more speculative than the points already presented, there are also historical similarities to other time prophecies that seem to find parallels in the Celtic Church. These possibilities are considered in appendices A and B.

As previously noted, we realize this view differs from other interpretations that identify the messenger of this church as Arius. There are credible reasons to consider Arius and to begin the 3rd church with the Edict of Milan in 313 A.D.⁴⁵⁸ In deference to Arius, we simply wish to emphasize that Arius is noted mainly for his dispute on Christology. In the struggle against the development of a powerful clericalism that characterizes the message to the third church, Arius's influence opposing the growth of authority in the church leadership was not particularly effective or of significant consequence in his day.⁴⁵⁹

SECTION 5 – Churches, Angels, and Messages – What Have We Learned?

The content of the messages - while sent to seven literal churches in Asia - have general lessons that can be instructive the overall church in all times and places.

However, if the seven churches represent seven periods in the overall history of the church, then there is an additional layer of meaning to each message. While the lessons are generic to the church as a whole, the message to each church is especially targeted to that period of history. If we can determine which of the messages is important in our day, it will help us to realize the strengths and weaknesses characteristic of our present condition. It will help us to better determine God's will for us in our day (the seventh church).

Understanding what time periods these seven churches describe will also help us to better understand the message to each of the churches. If we know the historical background of each of these periods, it can give us valuable insight into the lessons for them and for the entire church.

What lessons can we gain from a better understanding of this third period of the church's history?

⁴⁵⁸ The message to Smyrna, the 2nd Church, is primarily one that warns of great persecution. As a result, there is a certain amount of logic to ending this church at a point in time at which the persecution ends. Regardless of all other aspects of the interpretation of this period, this is in all likelihood the correct end date for the second church. As a start date for the third church, 313 AD is not necessarily in conflict to an identification of the 3rd Church with Celtic Christianity. Our suggestion would be that the end date of the persecution is not the arbiter for identifying whom the 3rd Church primarily represents.

⁴⁵⁹ It would be incorrect to say that the increasing authority of the bishops was not an issue for Arius (who was not a bishop). It was an important issue to Arius, but one that came about as a result of the controversy over Christology, however. In the end the issue of clericalism was not the main point of contention. Nor did appealing to a higher authority in the person of the Roman emperor seem to pose an obstacle for Arius.

A basic and somewhat non-partisan overview of the dispute can be found in *Arius – Heresy and Tradition*, Rowan Williams, Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2001. There is an excellent bibliography in the back of the book for sources on Arius representing a wide range of views and areas of study.

Celtic Christianity's rich spiritual tradition is something that had been lost sight of for many centuries until recently during this closing period of the church's time on earth. Its recent revival has gained increasing momentum, as it has been more and more perceived as a healthy counterbalance to our age of skepticism and alienation (or of logic and reason at the expense of heart and creativity). The current movement has again suffered misunderstanding and conflict with the wider institutional church, as did its early advocates.

We would do well to learn from the lovely character of this church as well as its mistakes, and in view of the continuing beauty of the Celtic tradition in our day, it seems only appropriate that we should close with a selection from a poem by the founder of the modern day Iona Community:

“In the temple You threw out the money changers, Lord Christ:
down the steps and out of the door—
and into the vacant aisles came the children
shouting for joy and dancing around.
Too often we are the money changers:
giving short change in spiritual things
to many who seek the true coin:
making the Church an institute
when you want it to be a chaos of uncalculating love.
Drive out from our hearts
our calculated offerings,
our easy responses,
and let child-like faith
flood into us again.
Grant us such abandon, of Your grace alone,
that we too shall be made strong
to go outside the city wall
outside holiness
and die in the bloody mess of another Calvary
that the Church at home may live again.”⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁶⁰ Excerpted from the poem “A Chaos of Uncalculating Love”, from *The Whole Earth Shall Cry Glory*, George MacLeod, Wild Goose Publications / The Iona Community, 1985

Appendices

APPENDIX A – A Timetable of Pergamos(n), Ireland, and the Celtic Church

The subject of how time prophecy relates to the Pergamon church is more speculative in nature, so it is included in the appendices. However, the chronological parallels seem striking enough to warrant incorporating them (Appendix B). However, before we begin to examine this possibility a few preliminary points seem to be in order:

- If one chooses enough dates and tries enough applications, it is possible that one or more may fit the circumstances based solely on chance. However, most of the dates that follow were largely recognized to be critical dates before any calculations were attempted. There are perhaps a couple dozen dates that are considered critical to the Celtic Church and by extension to Ireland as its most enthusiastic proponent. The calculation followed the assembly of dates, and not the other way around.
- Some of the listed dates that follow have already been mentioned in some of the critical events and/or dates previous to now in (*Part 1 – Section 3 – A Brief History of Christianity and the Celts*). Some additional dates are added to those previous ones and further developed as we proceed.
- With regard to the exactness of the dates, most of them are not remotely questioned by anyone. Two dates are less precise... the date of the Apostle Paul's release from prison (58 A.D.) and the starting date of Patrick's mission to Ireland (432 A.D.).

In the former case (Paul's release from his two year house arrest) the dates most commonly range from 58 to 63 A.D. The later dates beyond 60 A.D. do not allow for his two year captivity to overlap with the captivity of the Celtic disciples mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:21 and described by the Roman historian Tacitus, and therefore cannot be correct. Whatever the case, the Britons were released in 58 A.D.

In the case of the suggested starting date of Patrick's mission to Ireland, this is variously given as 431, 432, or 433 A.D (with the latter two dates generally given priority). The midpoint of these three years (432 A.D.) has been arbitrarily assumed.

- There appears to be no direct mention of any prophetic dates in scripture in regard to Celtic Christianity. The examples that follow in Appendix B are a suggestion only, and should be considered in that light.
- A very minimal explanation of the basis for the time periods used in appendix B is included here. A certain familiarity with the scriptural origin and application of these periods is assumed.

A Chronological List of Dates Relating to Pergamon(s), Ireland, and Celtic Christianity:

- (1) **230 B.C.** – Defeat of the Celts (Gauls)⁴⁶¹ of Asia Minor by the city-state of Pergamon.
- (2) **58 A.D.** – Paul disciplines Celts sharing his arrest status. The Britons are released from arrest in 58 A.D.
- (3) **73 A.D.** – The closing period of the Jewish revolt. (The reason for the citation of multiple years will become apparent later.)
- (4) **325 A.D.** – The First Council of Nicea (Nicean Creed).
- (5) **418 A.D.** – The excommunication of Pelagius.
- (6) **433 A.D.** – The start of Patrick's mission to Ireland (variously given as 431-433 A.D.).
- (7) **597 A.D.** – The clash of the Roman and Celtic missions in northern England.
- (8) **654 A.D.** – Midpoint of the 7 year Muslim conquest of the Middle East.
- (9) **664 A.D.** – The Synod at Whitby.
- (10) **793 A.D.** – Beginning of the most severe period of Viking attacks on the Celtic monasteries (burning of the monastery at Lindisfarne).
- (11) **798 A.D.** – Beginning of events leading to the crowning of Charlemagne and the culmination of Papacy's rise to power.
- (12) **800 A.D.** – The crowning of Charlemagne by the pope.
- (13) **1014 A.D.** – Brian Boru unites Ireland and decisively defeats the Viking invaders.
- (14) **1857 A.D.** – The year Irish Republican Brotherhood (or the Fenians) was formed in New York. It spread to Ireland a year later in 1858.

21 The appellation Gauls is another name for the Celts. In fact, the Roman province of Gaul was so named because of the predominance of Celts in the province at the time of its conquest by the Romans. The area of Asia Minor known as Galatia (and for which Paul's letter to the Galatians is named) is derived from the word Gaul.

This area of Asia Minor (Galatia) was outside the general area of Celtic expansion in Europe. The Celts were originally invited to Asia Minor by a lord of Bythnia to fight against the Seleucids. By 270 B.C. they had permanently settled in an area of northern Phrygia thereafter named Galatia. Although they were cutoff from their European roots, these Galatians, as they came to be known, managed to retain their Celtic customs and language into early Christian times.

(14) **1916 /1923 A.D.** – The failed Easter Uprising of 1916 (almost inadvertently led to the establishment of the Irish Free State in Dec. 1922. The Irish rebels suspend offensive operations in late April of 1923, and Ireland is admitted to the League of Nations in September of that same year.

(15) **1924 A.D.** – England issues the Royal Decree that Ireland should be an independent nation in its own right.

APPENDIX B – Applications of Time to the Third (Pergamon) Church

Now that we have the necessary dates in hand, let us proceed to look briefly at some applications of biblical and prophetic time that result from these dates.

(1) The numerical significance of the name of the church.

While there seem to be no time periods directly stated in scripture for the Pergamon Church, it was possible there might be some significance to the numerical value of the word Pergamon in the original Greek.

It is surprisingly common to find numerical patterns in both Old and New Testament language that relate to the surrounding passage. In this regard, consider the case of a city other than Pergamos, i.e. the New Jerusalem. Here are the verses that describe its dimensions...

“And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and it’s gates and it’s wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, 12,000 stadia; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, 144 cubits, according to human measurement, which is also angelic measurement.” – Revelation 21:15-17 (New American Standard including the margin notes on the translation)

The city is described as a six-sided cube since *“it’s length and breadth and height are equal”*. Each edge is 12,000 furlongs, each side is 144,000,000 furlongs, and the total surface area of the cube is 864,000,000 furlongs.

Interestingly, if you sum the values of the Greek letters that make up the word Jerusalem in Greek (ιερουσαλημ), it equals... 864.⁴⁶² The value of the Hebrew letters for the word Jerusalem do not sum to 864. However, multiply the numerical value of the letters and you get 4,320,000,000, a decimal equivalent (432) or ½ of 864.⁴⁶³

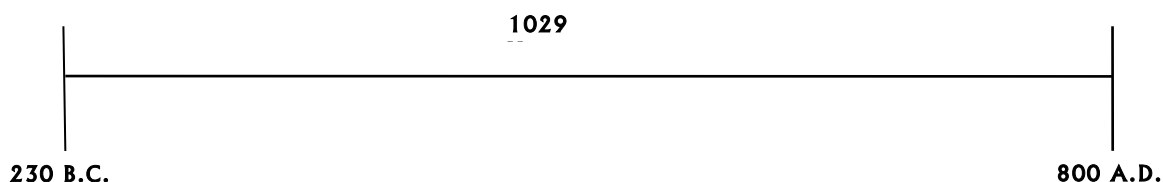
22 (10+5+100+70+400+200+1+30+8+40=864.)

23 (40 X 30 X 300 X 6 X 200 X 10 = 4,320,000,000)

Returning to Pergamos, does the numerical value (1029)⁴⁶⁴ of that church's name have any significance?

Looking again at our list of chronological events in Appendix A, notice that the very first item on the list is the defeat of the Celts of Asia Minor by the city-state of Pergamos in 230 B.C.⁴⁶⁵ What happens when we add 1029 (the numerical value of the name Pergamos) to this date?

1029 years from the defeat of the Gauls in 230 B.C. by Pergamon leads directly to the crowning of Charlemagne in 800 A.D.⁴⁶⁶ The crowning of Charlemagne by the Pope was the event which effectively demonstrated the failure of Celtic Christianity's challenge to papal authority and control.



Note the striking similarities of the events at the beginning and end of this period. In each case there is a political victory, and in each case the Celts are deprived of the city of Pergamos – in first case literally and in the second spiritually.

From 800 A.D. onward the Roman Church became the most powerful authority in Europe... thus signaling the full end of Pergamon or the third church of Revelation.

(2) The “Days of Daniel” and the Celtic church.

What about actual time prophecies? While none seem to mark the Celtic Church directly, the thought of a similar relationship to the time prophecies marking the rise and fall of the Roman Church has some appeal. The Celts took exception to the increasing centralization of authority that was characteristic of the third church of Revelation. Inasmuch as the message to Pergamon seems closely related with the rise of the Roman Church, it seems only fitting that there should be a strong connection between the fate of Celtic Christianity and that of Roman Christianity.

This connection to time prophecy and the rise of papacy is what we find when we apply the 1260 days (years) to prominent dates in the history of the Celtic Church. But, whereas in the case of the Roman Church the initial impetus to the rise to power of the Papacy in 539 A.D. ended in disastrous consequences 1260 years later in 1799 A.D., in the instance of the Celtic Church the decline of the Celtic Christian

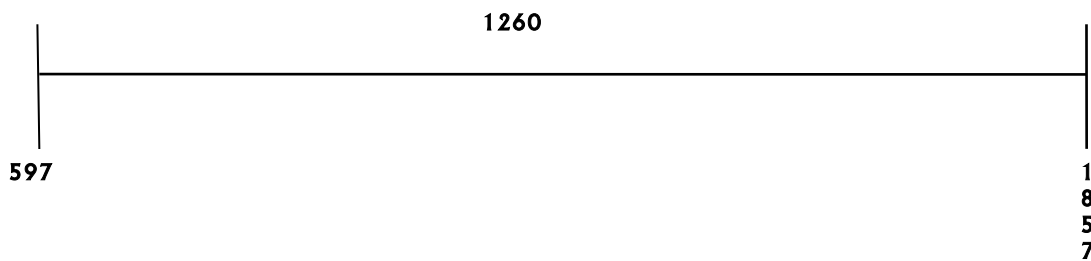
24 The exact values of the Greek letters of the name – Περγαμου – are as follows: 80+5+100+3+1+40+800 = 1,029.

25 Review footnote 21.

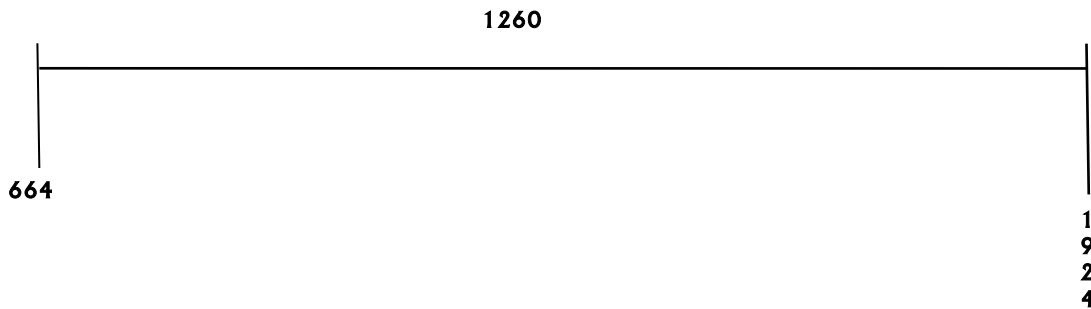
26 When crossing the B.C./A.D. dateline, 1 year must be added to the total to account for less than whole years at each end.

tradition leads to an opposite result result 1260 years later... the release of Ireland from English bondage.

The chart below begins with the clash in northern England between the Celtic and the Roman missions in 597 A.D. This may not seem like a big event at first glance, but it subsequently led to the Synod of Whitby, an event which initiated the slow absorption of the Celtic Church into the larger Roman Church. The date 597 was a critical turning point in the history of Celtic Christianity. A period of 1260 years later in 1857, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (or the Fenians) was formed in New York (and spread to Ireland a year later in 1858). Again this may not seem like a significant event, but this was the starting point for events that eventually led to the failed Easter Uprising of 1916, and then to nationhood 8 years later.



Extending the thought of the 1260 days or years, we find a second application extending from the Synod at Whitby in 664 A.D. to 1924 when England issued the Royal Decree that Ireland should be an independent nation in its own right. This was the final formality that ended 7 years of struggle and diplomacy beginning in 1916 and ending in 1923. On July 11 of 1924 the treaty was registered by the Irish Free State with the League of Nations.



These two separate periods of 1260 years, the first foreshadowing the second at both the beginning and the terminus points, gives us reason to think the prophetic shadowing of the Roman Church by the Celtic Church is intentional.

(3a) A "time" of 360 years – part one.

A period or "time" of 360 days is used in the calculation of the 1260 days or years of prophecy (compare Dan. 7:25, 12:6-7, and Rev. 12:14 with Rev. 11:2-3, 12:6, and 13:5).

This concept of a time or 360 year period may be applicable in at least one instance to the fourth church of Revelation (Thyatira). It is suggested in Revelation 2:21 where the verse says "and I gave her [a] time to repent; and she does not want to repent of her immorality." The word here for time is the Greek word *chronon* (*χρονον*) which is different from the Greek word translated time in Rev. 12:14, but it may convey a similar though here.

The period or "time" of opportunity to repent is followed by consequences (2:21-23). The period of consequences may be of equal length with the opportunity to repent comprising two consecutive 360 year periods.

A further suggestion that a period (a "time") is inferred in the description of Thyatira occurs a couple verses earlier in the passage in 2:19, which says, "I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your last deeds are greater than your first deeds."

This verse also seems to divide the fourth church into two parts with the second half receiving greater commendation. As the corrupt institutional church enters its period of tribulation, the true Christians are correspondingly energized (creating an element of the troubles coming upon the false church). Could the "time" allotted for the repentance of the institutional church at Rome in 2:21 be connected with the period of the "first deeds" in 2:19? Could a corresponding period of consequences upon the false church in 2:22-23 be connected with the "last deeds" in 2:19?

Yet, is the idea of a "time" of 360 years or any application of chronology even sustainable for the seven churches of Revelation?

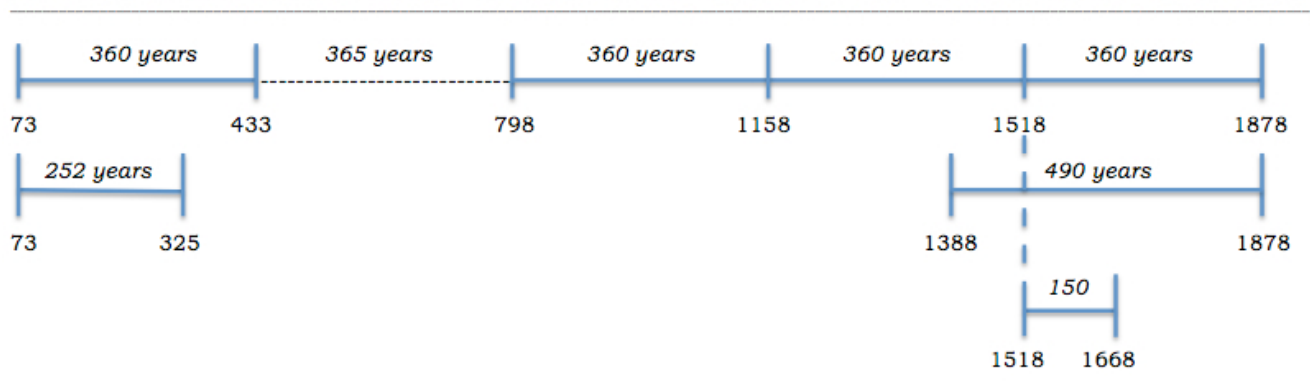
The idea of applying a prophetic length of time during the history of the seven churches is clearly evident elsewhere. In the second church (Smyrna) a period of 10 days equaling 10 years of persecution is described (Rev. 2:10), and during the period of the 5th church (under the description of the 5th trumpet) there is a period of 5 months or 150 years given to us (Rev. 9: 5 and 10).

If we were to assume that the third period of the church ends with events in 798 A.D. that lead to the crowning of Charlemagne (in 800 A.D.), then a "time" of 360 years from that point brings us to the date 1158 A.D. This brings us to a time of revival in the church in the form of Peter Waldo's ministry and the beginnings of the Waldensian Church, as well as other groups in opposition to the Roman Church.

The Waldensian Church practiced a Christian faith closer to the original apostolic form before the corruption of those original teachings by the Roman Church.

The consequence of this 360 year period at the beginning of the fourth church is to fix its start date at the same point that we ended the third church in our two previous applications. If correct, it further establishes a common boundary point between the third and fourth churches (Pergamon / Thyatira).

Not only does it create an end point for the third church of Revelation, but it also contributes to an interesting mosaic of events that help to identify the periods of the seven churches of Revelation:



Explanation of the Dates:

- 73 AD – The fall of Masada and end of the Jewish harvest period (forty years from 33 AD to 73 AD) / Smyrna begins
- 325 AD – Arius and Council of Nicea
- 433 AD – Patrick begins his ministry (circa 431-433) / Pergamos begins
- 798 AD – Beginning of the events that lead to the coronation of Charlemagne by the pope in 800 AD / Thyatira begins
- 1158 AD – Beginning of the Waldo’s ministry (shortly before 1160) – the “time to repent” is at an end
- 1388 AD – Publication of Wycliffe’s completed Bible
- 1518 AD – Luther at the Diet of Augsburg / Reformation advances / Sardis begins (start of 150 years – Rev. 9:5 and 10)
- 1668 AD – William Penn writes most important tracts – imprisoned for his beliefs / Philadelphia begins
- 1878 AD – Restoration of Israel begins / Laodicea begins 1874

(3b) A "time" of 360 years – part two.

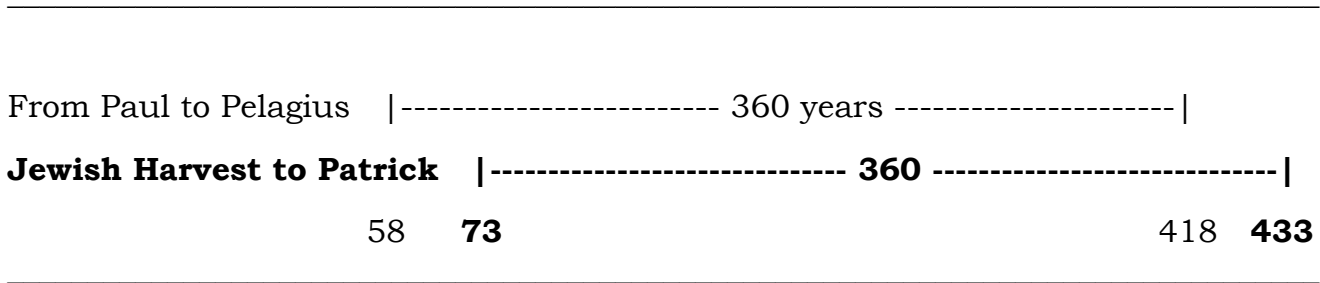
Does a period of 360 years occur anywhere (else) in relation to the third church?

It seems so. The closing year of the Jewish rebellion (73 A.D.) is 360 years prior to the beginning of Patrick's ministry to the Irish – a logical starting point for the Pergamos period of the church.

is 14 years after the Britons return home from Rome, and likewise the first year of Patrick's mission to the Irish (432/433 A.D.) is 14 years after Pelagius is excommunicated and sent back to Briton from Rome.

Secondarily, if we take as our starting point the release of the Britons (and Paul?) from arrest in 58 A.D. following his witness to them in prison, 360 years later brings us to the excommunication of Pelagius in 418 A.D. There are similarities between the start and end point of this secondary period. Both events take place in Rome, and both events involve the release of Britons returning to the British Isles. These similarities... the only two historical records of Celts leaving Rome and returning to Britain... and occurring exactly 360 years apart... seem striking and more than coincidental.

Although the events seem to bear no direct similarities, it does seem unusual to have two additional historical dates line up exactly 14 years after the previous set. The following chart illustrates these two offset periods of 360 years.



(4) The Selection of dates.

As noted previously, the dates used herein are not specially chosen for the applications for which they've been used. They are prominent dates that stand out in the history of the Celtic Church and Ireland.

The dates that did not seem to yield results are those dates incidental to the founding of important monasteries. Some of these monasteries were critical to the development and expansion of Celtic Christianity, particularly sites like Armagh,

Iona, Lindisfarne, and Bobbio. Though of critical importance, in the grand sweep of events they were still single monasteries and of comparatively lesser consequence.

The fact that an entire group of similar events and dates (the founding of the monasteries) can be collectively *excluded* from the list - when other important sets of dates seem *inclusive* so frequently - seems to support the relevance of the dates and events selected. The distinction between these two groups of dates seems obvious: one type finding numerous possible applications and the other finding none.

(5) Summary of the Prophetic Implications.

Taken as a whole, the weight of a number of secondary applications of time features to this church provides some complementary evidence to our previous interpretation of the Pergamon church and its relationship to the Celtic Christian church of the 5th through the 9th centuries.

(6) The End of Celtic Christianity

Celtic Christianity never completely disappeared in all its forms. However it was becoming largely marginalized by the end of the 9th century. As late as the 12th century there were still a few church leaders clinging to the Celtic practices and traditions in Scotland in the countryside and at the holy see at St Andrews, but these leaders were either being forced into the larger Latin church by church officials from Rome or deprived of position in the church. From that time forward this tradition continued only in the Scottish western isles, and then merely in terms of a cultural and religious tradition rather than a structured and organized movement.

The last major contribution of Celtic Christianity to the fabric of the church before modern times was the theology/philosophy of John Scotus Eriugena (mid 800's). He is considered to be the one great scholar produced by Celtic Christianity, and his *De Divisione Naturae* is considered by philosophers and theologians alike to be a significant work.

APPENDIX C – Incidental Notes

(1) Left unstated in our earlier discussion on chronological implications is a possible parallel between the end dates of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judea and the subjugation of the Celtic Church to the Roman Church. A split between religious factions seems to be a recurring theme in Ireland on both the religious and civil level. To this day division continues between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and between Protestant and Catholic.

(2) The emphasis on Jesus as having and putting to use a sword against his enemies in the passage on Pergamon (Rev. 2:12 and 16) is pre-figured in the Old Testament. Balaam - who prophesied against Israel for financial and political gain - is specifically noted as dying by the sword in Numbers 31:8.

(3) It is possible to translate both Nicolaitans and Balaam from the Revelation passage on Pergamon as meaning “to conquer the people”.

(4) The letter to the Galatian church - a region that even in the days of Paul still largely retained the characteristics of the inhabitants' original Celtic culture - is also written to a church divided within itself similar to the message to Pergamos. Also similar to the message to Pergamon, the letter (Gal. 2:4) speaks of "false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage."

Paul says, "you were running well: who hindered you from obeying the truth?" (Gal. 5:7). He also speaks of "those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh" (Gal. 6:12-13) and attempted to compel obedience to the Law.

And it was Peter, whom the Roman church claimed as their authority during the Pergamon period, who sided with those in the Galatian church who wanted to bring the Galatians into bondage to the Law (Gal. 2:11-13).

Even the fundamental doctrinal difference that Paul addresses in the letter - the difference between liberty through grace or bondage to the authority of the Law - pre-figures the dissimilarity between the freedom expressed within the Celtic Church and the authoritarianism of the Roman Church.

(5) Earlier we noted that the numerical value of the name Pergamos is 1029, the exact number of years from the defeat of the Galatian Celts at the hand of the literal Pergamos to the date of the crowning of Charlemagne.

There is an abstract yet interesting side note to this. Multiplying 3 X 7 (the 3rd of 7 churches, or 21) times 7 X 7 (7 total of 7 churches, or 49) yields the number 1029 - the same numerical value as the name Pergamos. However, because of the conjectural nature of this second derivation of the number 1029, we mention it only as a passing oddity.

APPENDIX D – Suggestions for Further Reading

For anyone who may want to read more about Celtic Christianity, here are some suggestions:

How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill ~ This is not a discussion of the Celtic Christian tradition per se, but a fascinating and extremely well written (although somewhat glossy) history of that period of time.

Listening for the Heartbeat of God by J. Philip Newell ~ Perhaps not as well written as Cahill's book, but a very accessible and comprehensive overview of Celtic Christianity and focusing on it's various incarnations throughout history.

The Celtic Way by Ian Bradley ~ Another good overview of the Celtic Christian spiritual life, focusing more on specific subjects.

The Celtic Way of Evangelism by George Hunter III ~ A discussion of what Celtic Christianity is, how they evangelized, and it's appropriateness and effectiveness in today's world.

Still further reading:

Borderlands by David Adams

The Celtic Way of Prayer by Esther DeWaal

Every Earthly Blessing by Esther DeWaal

The Origin and Early History of Christianity in Britain by Andrew Gray

The Book of Kells by Bernhard Meehan

George Macleod / Founder of the Iona Community by Ronald Ferguson

Symbolism of the Celtic Cross by Derek Bryce

Carmina Gadelica by Alexander Carmichael

In addition, the modern day Celtic Christian renaissance includes such artistic diversity as a large amount of fiction and poetry (including *The Whole Earth Shall Cry Glory* by George MacLeod, my personal favorite in the poetry area), various forms of visual art and graphics based on motifs from the Celtic Christian tradition, music (particularly a group named Iona), etc.

(From the margin of a ninth century manuscript copied by a Celtic scribe):

I and Pangur Ban my cat,
'Tis a like task we are at:
Hunting mice is his delight,
Hunting words I sit all night.

'Tis a merry thing to see
At our task how glad are we,
When at home we sit and find
Entertainment to our mind.

"Gainst the wall he sets his eye,
Full and fierce and sharp and sly;
"Gainst the wall of knowledge I
All my little wisdom try.

So in peace our task we ply,
Pangur Ban my cat and I;
In our minds we find our bliss,
I have mine and he has his.